



Islamabad POST

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UK won't be driven into the Gulf war, says PM Starmer

Detailed News On Page-01

Sindh youth to be fully empowered

Detailed News On Page-02



Aurangzeb says enough fuel stock till April

Detailed News On Page-07



Opening of Strait of Hormuz

Britain, Japan other allies deny support to Trump

UK won't be drawn into wider Iran war, opening Hormuz not a simple task, says Starmer; Trump also said that he could delay his summit with China's President Xi Jinping later this month as he pressed Beijing to help unblock the crucial waterway

DNA

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump has escalated his campaign to enlist international support in reopening the Strait of Hormuz, warning that the future of NATO could be at risk if European and Asian allies fail to assist. Many countries including Britain, Japan have refused to be part of Trump plan to get Strait of Hormuz free from Iranian control. "If there's no response or if it's a negative response, I think it will be very bad for the future of NATO," Trump declared in an interview with the Financial Times on Sunday. Trump also said that he could delay his summit with China's President Xi Jinping later this month as he pressed Beijing to help unblock the crucial waterway. In the same interview, he repeated an earlier appeal that countries dependent on Gulf oil should bear shared responsibility for ensuring the free flow of energy through the strategically vital waterway. "It's only appropriate that people who are the beneficiaries of the Strait will help to make sure that nothing bad happens there," he said. Trump's comments, made in an eight-minute phone call with the FT, came a day after he appealed to China, France, Japan, South Korea and the UK to join a "team effort" to

Continued on Page 06

Oil hovers around \$100, stocks mixed

Iran war moves into third week with both sides showing no sign of backing do

NEWS DESK

LONDON: Oil prices hovered around \$100 a barrel Monday and stocks fluctuated as the Iran war moved into a third week with both sides showing no sign of backing down and diplomats trying to ensure safe passage for tankers through the crucial Strait of Hormuz. Crude shot up in the opening minutes after the US president said at the weekend that forces struck military targets on Kharg Island, a scrubby stretch of land in the Gulf that handles almost all of Iran's oil exports. He also warned attacks could expand to energy infrastructure if Tehran interferes with transit through Hormuz, which has been effectively closed since the US-Israel operations began on February 28. Iran's Fars news agency reported soon after

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairs a high-level meeting to review fuel stock in the country. - DNA

IB tasked to monitor govt austerity plan

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has tasked the Intelligence Bureau (IB) with monitoring implementation of the national austerity plan across government institutions. As per a Cabinet Division notification issued on Monday, the IB will "conduct a comprehensive audit and validation exercise, including impact assessment, with respect to all fuel conservation and additional austerity measures". "The bureau would submit weekly reports to the Prime Minister as well as to the Committee for Monitoring and Implementation of Fuel Conservation and Additional Austerity Measures," it said. The premier had announced the wide-ranging austerity and

Continued on Page 06

FC to be deployed in Balochistan

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The federal and provincial governments have made a major decision to maintain law and order in Balochistan as they announced the phased deployment of the Federal Constabulary in the province. The decision was taken in a law and order meeting at the Chief Minister's Secretariat in Quetta, jointly chaired by Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti. Senior officials from both federal and provincial institutions attended, a CM's Secretariat press release said.

Continued on Page 06

Islamabad-Kabul tensions

Minister says Afghan Taliban trying to 'hide' Bajaur civilian strike

Responding to a statement by the Afghan Taliban government's deputy spokesperson, Tarar said Kabul had "knowingly targeted a civilian population" in Bajaur

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Information Minister Ataulah Tarar on Sunday said the Afghan Taliban government was deliberately targeting civilians in Pakistan's Bajaur district, saying the claim that Pakistan carried out indiscriminate strikes in Afghanistan was an attempt to hide its own horrific actions. Responding to a statement by the Afghan Taliban government's deputy spokesperson, Tarar said Kabul had "knowingly targeted a civilian population" in Bajaur. According to the Ministry of Information, four innocent civilians were martyred, and a five-year-old child was seriously injured in the attack. The minister said Pakistan's armed forces only conduct operations against terrorist hideouts inside Afghanistan and do not target civilian areas. He also rejected claims circulating on

Continued on Page 06

China ready to ease Pakistan-Afghan tensions

DNA

BEIJING: China stands ready to continue efforts to ease tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, said Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian. "The most urgent task is to avoid the expansion of the war and return the two countries to the negotiating table as soon as possible," Lin said. "China is willing to continue to make efforts to achieve reconciliation and ease relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan," he said, adding that Beijing has been mediating between both sides in recent days.

Araghchi X statement in Urdu

Iran indebted to Pak for full support

Araghchi expressed heartfelt gratitude to the government and people of Pakistan for strongly demonstrating solidarity and support with the people and government of Iran in the face of the ongoing tensions

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has thanked the government and people of Pakistan for expressing solidarity with Iran amid the ongoing aggression by the United States and the Israel. Taking to X, the Iranian foreign

minister posted a statement in Urdu language, saying that the Islamic Republic of Iran remained steadfast in defending its sovereignty and territorial integrity, placing complete trust in Allah Almighty. He said that during these "blessed, divine and spiritual days and moments," Iran stood firm with resilience and determination to safeguard its national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Araghchi expressed heartfelt gratitude to the government and people of Pakistan for strongly demonstrating solidarity and support with the people and government of Iran in the

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

At least 7 dead as roof collapses

STAFF REPORT

RAHIM YAR KHAN: At least seven women died and several others were injured on Monday when the roof of a shop collapsed in Rahim Yar Khan's Chak 123-P Tibba locality. A statement issued by the district administration said the incident occurred at 10:39am when beneficiaries of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) had gathered at the grocery store that housed a retailer for BISP payments. The statement confirmed that seven women lost their lives in the incident and several others had been injured. The death toll was also confirmed by Rescue 1122, which said 75 people had been injured in the incident.

Middle East crisis

Iran wants 'serious review' of Gulf ties, denies role in Saudi oil attacks

At UN, Iran says will not submit to 'lawless aggression' as war rages on

NEWS DESK

RIYADH: Iran's relations with Gulf states will require a "serious review" in light of the US-Israeli war on Iran, limiting the power of external actors so the region can become prosperous, Tehran's ambassador to Saudi Arabia told Reuters on Sunday. Asked if he was concerned that relations would be harmed by the war, Ambassador Alireza Enayati said: "It's a valid question, and the answer may be simple. We are neighbours and we cannot do without each other; we will need a serious review." "What the region has witnessed over the past five decades is the result of an exclusionary approach [within the region] and an excessive reliance on external powers," he said in a written response to questions, calling for deeper ties between the Gulf Cooperation Council's six members, along with Iraq and Iran.

Continued on Page 06

UAE, Saudi leaders discuss ME

NEWS DESK

RIYADH: Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman and UAE President Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan spoke by phone Monday, condemning continued Iranian attacks against Gulf states as a dangerous escalation threatening regional security, the Saudi Press Agency reported. The two leaders affirmed that GCC countries would spare no effort to defend their territories and mobilize all available capabilities to preserve regional stability. The call came as Iran's ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Alireza Enayati, sought to deflect blame from Tehran, claiming in an X post that

Continued on Page 06

Israel launches ground incursions in Lebanon

US Jets Strike Iranian Military Sites Near Chabahar Port in Latest Blow to IRGC Navy; Iran's FM Araghchi: 'No Reason' for Talks with US, Ready to Fight 'As Long as It Takes'

NEWS DESK

TEHRAN: The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have initiated limited and targeted ground operations in southern Lebanon, focusing on Hezbollah strongholds and infrastructure. This is part of an enhanced forward defense posture amid the broader regional conflict involving Iran. Reports indicate IDF troops from divisions like the 91st are conducting incursions to dismantle militant positions, push Hezbollah forces northward, and secure areas near the border to protect northern Israel. While described as "limited" in recent announcements, preparations suggest potential for significant expansion, including seizing territory south of the Litani River—potentially resembling operations in Gaza—with reinforcements and reserves mobilized in recent days. This escalation follows ongoing airstrikes and comes against the backdrop of the wider US-Israel-Iran war, where Hezbollah has been actively involved. In a related development, US fighter jets have struck military fa-

ilities on a mountain near Iran's Chabahar Free Trade Zone in southeastern Iran (Sistan and Baluchistan Province, close to the Pakistan border). Explosions were reported in the area, marking another phase of direct US involvement in strikes on Iranian targets. This occurs as the conflict—now in its third week—continues with bombardments across Iranian cities and counterattacks affecting Israel and Gulf shipping. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has stated that Tehran is "not interested" in talks with the US, rejecting negotiations or a ceasefire. He emphasized no reason to engage, citing past experiences where talks preceded attacks, and affirmed Iran's readiness to defend itself "as long as it takes." This pushes back against US President Donald Trump's claims that Iran seeks a deal to end the war, though Araghchi noted openness to discussions with other countries on allowing select oil tankers through the Strait of Hormuz. Meanwhile, President Trump is pressing NATO allies and China to assist in reopening the Strait of

Continued on Page 06

MARCH 2026

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Ph: 051-2261960, 051-8488394



50 power theft cases referred to police in DI Khan crackdown

DERA ISMAIL KHAN :As many as 50 cases of electricity theft have been referred to police during an ongoing crackdown launched by PESCO in the city. The action is being carried out on the directives of SE PESCO Dera Circle Engineer Hizbullah Mehsud. The operation is being led by XEN City Division Inmanullah Gandapur, along with SDO City-II Muhammad Ali Khan, Sami Ullah Marwat, and Line Superintendent Asif Bhutta, with support from a special combing team from the PESCO Peshawar Headquarters. The month-long combing operation is currently focused on the Muryali-II feeder under the PESCO City-II Sub-Division. During the drive, reports against 50 electricity thieves were sent to Cantt Police Station for legal action. So far, five FIRs have been registered, while work on the remaining references is underway and more cases are expected to be registered soon. The PESCO combing team has intensified operations in several areas including Tariqabad, Gilani Town, Madni Town, Basti Nad Ali Shah, and Basti Ustrana Shumali, where action against electricity theft is continuing at a fast pace.—APP

Inspiring youngsters keep Ramzan's spirit alive

PESHAWAR: A group of inspiring youngsters, gathered under the platform of TIFL Foundation, have kept the true spirit of Ramzan alive by organizing iftar dinners and distributing food packages among underprivileged families. Their initiative aims to spread compassion, unity and generosity during the holy month, ensuring that those in need can also observe Ramzan with dignity and comfort. The youngsters mostly students from Peshawar had formed TIFL Foundation a couple of years earlier as a novice attempt of gaining maximum spiritual benefits during the holy month of Ramadan. The initiative showed encouraging results of reaching out to thousands of deserving faithful by arranging iftar dinners and providing food packages to them. "The objective behind forming TIFL foundation was to do some practical work that reflect true spirit of Ramadan by extending helping hand to needy people in our society," observed Sanan Saleem, a founding member of TIFL Foundation. The foundation has very few members and all are in their teens.—APP

COURT NOTICE

In the Court of Syeda Hu-bahib Akhtar Civil Judge 1st Class Jhelum, suit for Possession through partition
Case title: Wajid Hussain etc. vs Muhammad Ibrahim etc. Against: 26- Naveed Hussain son of Muhammad Shafiq residing at Nikka Kalan 38-Sajid Hussain son of Muhammad Yousuf residing at Nawab Lok Dakhkhana Khas Chautala Tehsil and District Jhelum. (Currently Residence Abroad). As there is not possible to call the defendants through Summons in the instant suit so through proclamation in Newspaper, you are directed to appear in the court on 24.03.2026 at 09:00 AM, otherwise ex-parte proceedings will be initiated.

Governor Sindh calls for audit, youth opportunities

The governor assured that youth development and computer training would be strengthened while education-related initiatives would also be expanded

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Newly appointed Sindh Governor Nihal Hashmi on Sunday stressed the need for a comprehensive audit of the Governor House's past expenditures and budget allocations, stating that transparency and accountability would be ensured. Speaking at a press conference at the Governor House on the second day after taking oath, he said everyone would jointly review the audit and investigate any loopholes. "You can pick up the budget book and see how much money has been allocated to me and how much I spend," he remarked, welcoming criticism based on performance. The governor also emphasized that Pakistan comes first and praised the country's armed forces as one of its strongest institutions. Referring to damaged lawns and broken furniture at a youth computer skills facility at the Governor House, he noted that even the next two years' budget had not been left by the previous administration. Hashmi announced that the federal government would expand employment opportunities and improve education for young people



across Sindh. He said the Prime Minister's Youth Programme would soon be introduced in the province in cooperation with its Sindh coordinator Fahad Shafiq

to enhance training, education and job facilities for youth. The governor assured that youth development and computer training would be strengthened

while education-related initiatives would also be expanded. He said as governor his responsibility extended to "every individual and every child" in the province, es-



pecially in rural districts. Encouraging public accountability, Hashmi asked people to criticize him if he failed to perform but also highlight positive work done at the Governor House. He

said he would ensure that every project undertaken during his tenure was audited and hoped to leave the office in a better condition than he found it.

Kundi briefed on rehabilitation work of CRBC breach

PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi was briefed on Monday regarding the ongoing rehabilitation work at the breach site of the Chashma Right Bank Canal (CRBC) near Mochianwala in Tehsil Paharpur, District Dera Ismail Khan. During the briefing, General Manager North Wapda, Mujahid Tanveer, informed the Governor that the canal had developed a breach at RD 148+500 on March 4, causing damage to a portion of around 150 feet. He said the breach was likely caused by the formation of porcupine burrows on the canal bank, adding that although no loss of life was reported, water entered some nearby houses and damaged a few crops in surrounding areas. The Governor was informed that immediate steps were taken after the incident to control the water flow, including reducing discharge from the regulator at Chashma Barrage and operating escapes at Bilot and Pusha to manage the situation. The briefing further stated that dewatering of the site was completed on March 6 and rehabilitation work resumed after security clearance from the district administration. Heavy machinery, includ-

ing dumpers, loaders, bulldozers, excavators, rollers and tractors, has been deployed to expedite restoration work at the site. It was also shared that earth filling, spreading, watering and compaction work at the breached portion was progressing rapidly, while field density tests were conducted to ensure proper compaction and stability of the fill material. As of March 16 morning, around 90 percent of the physical progress has been achieved and the earthwork is expected to be completed by the evening. After completion of the earthwork, a geo-membrane will be installed on the slope of the newly filled material on March 17. The briefing added that the canal is expected to become operational again by March 18, restoring irrigation supply to the command areas dependent on the canal. Governor Faisal Karim Kundi appreciated the prompt response and professional efforts of the teams of Wapda working on the rehabilitation of the Chashma Right Bank Canal breach. He commended the engineers and field staff for ensuring swift restoration work despite operational and security challenges, and expressed hope that the canal would be fully functional soon to fa-

cilitate irrigation for farmers in the area. The Governor also emphasized the importance of taking preventive measures to avoid such incidents in the future and directed the authorities concerned to ensure continuous monitoring and timely maintenance of irrigation infrastructure. Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Monday held a meeting with Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO), Chief Executive Officer Akhtar Hameed Khan to discuss electricity-related issues, including load shedding and recovery in the province especially in southern districts. During the meeting, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) PESCO briefed the Governor on the current power situation and ongoing measures to improve electricity supply in the areas. He informed the Governor that the inauguration of the Bandkurai grid station would be held soon, which would help strengthen the electricity supply system in the area. He said that additional transformers would be installed soon after Eid to address power load and improve distribution. The CEO also said that some essential transformers were released on the spot to meet immediate requirements in different areas.—DNA

CM KP directs completion of ADP PC-1s by June

PESHAWAR: A meeting of the Planning and Development Department was held on Monday under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Sohail Afridi through video link. The Chief Minister directed that PC-1s of all schemes included in the upcoming Annual Development Programme 2025-26. It was informed that 67 percent of the released funds had been utilized so far while 218 high priority projects would be completed during the next fiscal year. Officials informed the meeting that the

federal government had not yet released funds during the current fiscal year for the Accelerated Development Programme of the merged districts. However the provincial government had released Rs 29.6 billion for the purpose. The meeting was told that in the next development programme 80 percent of the funds would be allocated for ongoing projects while 20 percent would be reserved for new projects. It was further informed that the next development programme would include the Rs 1000 billion Roshan Qabail package for merged districts. Proposals for the Health City project Ehsaas Jangal programme and the establishment of a Tribal Medical Col-

lege would also be part of the programme. The meeting was told that virtual classrooms bag free schools introduction of artificial intelligence curriculum in schools establishment of a Tribal University and an Integrated Development Package for Upper Chitral had also been included. The programme would further include expansion of the Panahgh network Zamung Kor network schools for special children a self employment scheme for persons with disabilities Khyber Safari Train divisional expansion of the BRT completion of Safe Cities projects and establishment of a Cyber Security Operation Centre as part of the upcoming Annual Development Programme.—DAN

Sindh CM okays Rs 50b Master Plan for Civil Hospital Karachi

KARACHI :Sindh Chief Minister (CM) Syed Murad Ali Shah, presiding over a high-level meeting, has in principle approved a comprehensive Rs100 billion master plan including a Rs 50 billion grant from the Sindh government to transform Civil Hospital Karachi (CHK), marking a major step in overhauling the provincial capital's healthcare infrastructure while work is set to begin immediately on the Abdul Sattar Edhi Medical Tower. The ambitious project, backed by a provincial government fund of Rs 50 billion, aims to double the hospital's footprint while preserving its historical legacy. The meeting, held at CM House, was attended by a diverse group of stakeholders, reflecting a collaborative approach between the government and civil society. Participants included Minister Health Dr Azra Fazal Pechuho, Chairman P&D Najam Shah, Secretary Finance Fayaz Jatoti, Secretary Health Tahir Sangi and Secretary to the CM Asif Jameel, MS Civil Hospital Dr Khalid Bukhari and Director Dr Dabeer. Prominent Philanthropists Faisal Edhi, Mushtaq Chhapra, Dr Saad Khalid Niaz, and Shahid Abdullah. The Chief Minister emphasised that the goal is to modernise the facility into a world-class healthcare hub. The expansion includes that the hospital, currently housing 2,142 beds, will add 500 new beds. The hospital's total area will expand considerably. Modern vertical towers will replace dilapidated structures and underutilised open spaces. These will house a dedicated medical tower and surgical Ward, a new OPD, Burns Ward, Jail Ward, modern mortuary and waste management systems, administrative blocks and specialised hostels for Nurses and Doctors. The CM Murad Shah made it clear that while the hospital moves forward, its past will not be forgotten. "I will completely restore the heritage building," he stated, ensuring that historical structures are protected amidst the new construction. To tackle the chronic congestion around the facility, the plan includes road widening. Both Yakob Khan Road and Bezanji Road, which border the hospital, will be widened to ensure smooth ambulance access and ease patient transport. "We want to modernise the Civil Hospital building while ensuring the heritage structures are protected, and the surrounding access roads are widened for the public's convenience," Murad Shah said. The ambitious project, funded by the provincial government, aims to double the hospital's footprint while preserving its historical legacy, the chief minister said. The chief minister emphasised that the goal is to modernise CHK into a world-class healthcare hub. The expansion includes: The hospital, which currently has 2,142 beds, will add 500 new beds. The hospital's total area will expand from 835,095 square metres to 1,709,259 square metres. Dilapidated structures and underutilised open spaces will be replaced with modern vertical towers.—APP



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Head Office
3rd Floor, Yasin Plaza, 74-West, Blue Area, Islamabad.
Tel: (+92 51) 2822471, 2274221, 2878029, 2272273, 2822711, 2874289 - Fax: (+92 51) 2825132, 2274227.
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CDA chief for state of the art bus terminal construction

He directed that relevant stakeholders be taken on board for the construction and operationalization of the project

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A meeting was held on Monday at CDA Headquarters regarding the construction of the National Bus Terminal in Sector I-11/4 of the Federal Capital, Islamabad, under the chairmanship of Chairman of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa. The meeting was attended by CDA Member Administration and Estate Talat Mehmood, Member Engineering Syed Nafasat Raza, Member Planning and

Design, Dr. Khalid Hafiz, Member Environment, Es-fandyar Baloch and other senior officers. Detailed discussions were held regarding the proposed National Bus Terminal project in Sector I-11/4. Briefing Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa regarding the construction of the National Bus Terminal project in Sector I-11/4, the relevant officers apprised that the National Bus Terminal project will be constructed on 31 acres of land in Sector I-11/4. The proposed site plan and traffic management

plan for the National Bus Terminal project were presented during the meeting. The meeting was informed that this bus terminal will have a capacity of over 100 bus bays and the terminal will include commercial areas, petrol pumps and bus parking. Similarly, service stations a taxi stand and a maintenance workshop will also be established in this project. During the briefing, the meeting was further informed that the National Bus Terminal will be connected to the 11th Avenue in the

future. Chairman CDA and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, directed the preparation of an excellent design for this project. He said that an open competition should be held among architects to further improve the design in this regard. He said that the process for procuring the services of consultant for this project should be expedited. Chairman CDA and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, said that the best financial and operational model should be developed for the construction

and operations of this bus terminal. He directed that relevant stakeholders be taken on board for the construction and operationalization of the project. Chairman CDA and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, said that the construction of the National Bus Terminal, Islamabad, will provide best travel facilities to the citizens. He further added that all these measures aim to ensure the provision of the best facilities to the citizens of the Federal Capital, Islamabad.

National Days and Armed Forces Days

MARCH

- March 01/Bosnia National Day
- March 03/Bulgaria National Day
- March 06/ Ghana Independence Day
- March 12/Mauritius National Day
- March 17/Ireland St. Patrick's Day
- March 20/Tunisia Independence Day
- March 21/Namibia National Day
- March 25/Greece National Day
- March 26/Bangladesh National Day
- March 27/Myanmar Armed Forces Day

Turkish Airlines.....8494949



Emergency

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



Enquiry

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



Hospitals

- CMH.....5611111
- MH.....5611116
- Cantt Hospital...9270907-11
- DHQ.....5556311-4
- RGH.....9290301-7
- Holy Family.....9290322-7
- PIMS.....9261170-79
- Polyclinic.....9218300-09
- Shifa International 4603666



Departments

- CDA.....9221334-43
- CDA.....9208301-04
- Met Office.....9250360-6
- RDA.....5555864
- TMA.....5770886
- Cantonment Board 9270151-3

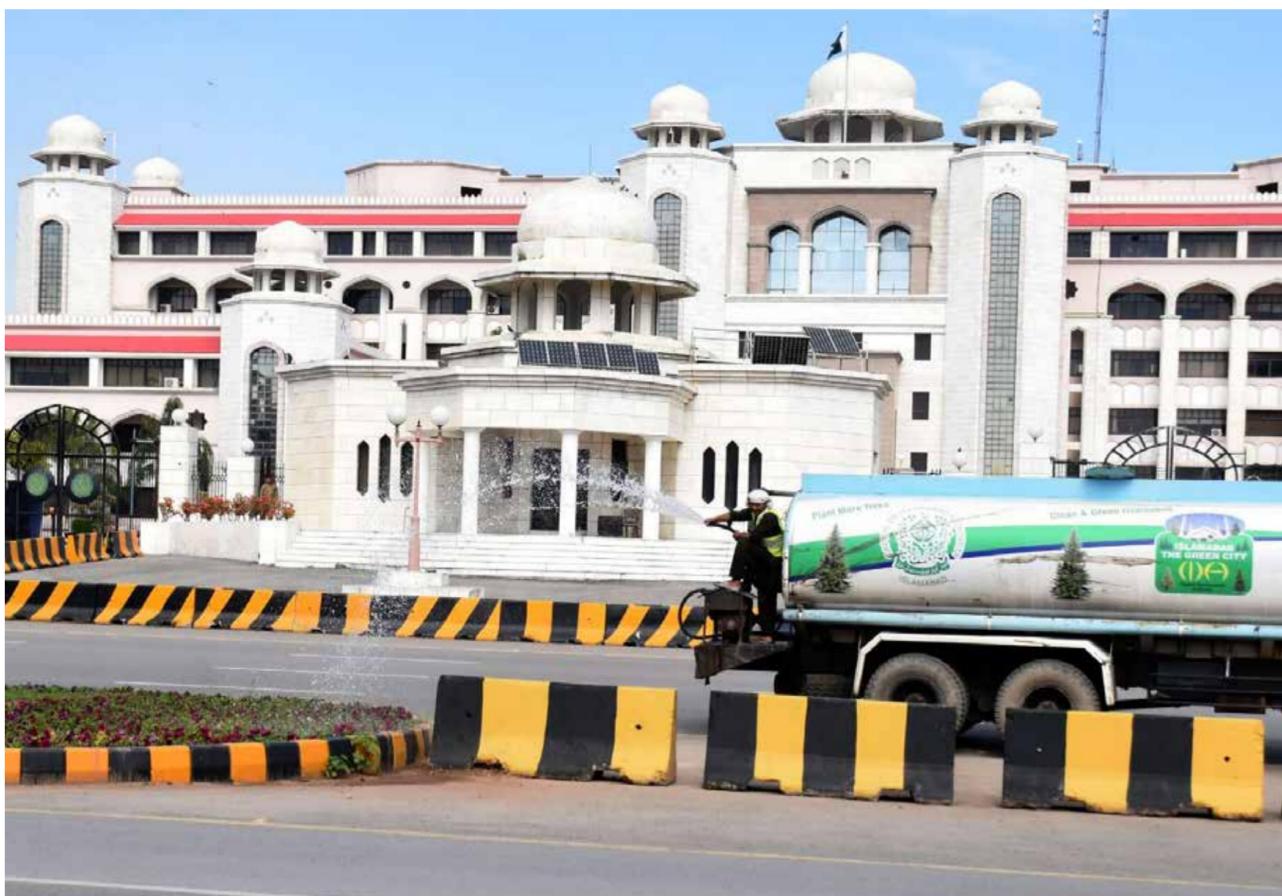


Islamabad Metropolitan

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

Water Tank

- Islamabad.....0321-5744480



ISLAMABAD: A CDA worker showering water on plants on a green belt at Constitution Avenue, in the Federal Capital.

Govt expands RDA scheme to foreign nationals

Highlighting the role of overseas Pakistanis in strengthening the national economy, Senator Aurangzeb said that according to the State Bank of Pakistan, the country achieved a historic milestone in fiscal year 2025 with record-breaking remittances exceeding \$38.3 billion, marking an impressive 26.6 percent increase compared to the previous year

DNA

ISLAMABAD: On the instruction of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, the Government of Pakistan has decided to expand the Roshan Digital Account (RDA) framework to allow foreign nationals, as well as foreign companies and institutional investors, to open Roshan Digital Accounts and invest in Government securities as well as Naya Pakistan Certificates that offer a very attractive rate of return. The announcement was made by Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb who said that this important step reflects the government's commitment to further integrate Pakistan with global financial markets and attract foreign investment through a secure and transparent digital banking platform. The Finance Minister noted that Pakistan's diaspora of around 11 million people represents one of the largest and most vibrant expatriate communities in the world. In every part of the globe, from the Middle East to Europe, from North America to the Far East, Pakistani professionals, entrepreneurs, workers and students are contributing to their host economies while

continuing to support their families and communities back home. He said that overseas Pakistanis are not only a source of economic strength for the country but also serve as ambassadors of Pakistan's culture, enterprise and values around the world. Highlighting the role of overseas Pakistanis in strengthening the national economy, Senator Aurangzeb said that according to the State Bank of Pakistan, the country achieved a historic milestone in fiscal year 2025 with record-breaking remittances exceeding \$38.3 billion, marking an impressive 26.6 percent increase compared to the previous year. He added that as Pakistan progresses through fiscal year 2026, remittances are projected to reach an unprecedented \$42 billion. This strong performance reflects the continued trust and confidence of the diaspora in Pakistan's economic prospects and their unwavering support in strengthening the country's foreign exchange reserves and overall economic growth. With this consistent performance, Pakistan now ranks fifth among the top remittance-receiving countries globally and second in South Asia. The Finance Minister emphasized that remittance inflows remain the single most critical factor in stabilizing Pakistan's external account, enabling

the country to maintain a sustainable balance of payments and build its foreign exchange reserves. He noted that the State Bank of Pakistan's reserves currently stand at around \$16.3 billion, while the country's total foreign exchange reserves amount to approximately \$21.6 billion. Recalling the launch of the Roshan Digital Account initiative, Senator Aurangzeb stated that in order to further connect non-resident Pakistanis (NRPs) with Pakistan's financial and banking system, the State Bank of Pakistan, in collaboration with commercial banks, introduced the Roshan Digital Account initiative on September 10, 2020. With the slogan "Door Reh Kar bhi Paas," the initiative was designed with the clear objective of associating millions of overseas Pakistanis with Pakistan's banking and investment ecosystem through a fully digital and seamless experience. He explained that the RDA serves as a flagship digital banking mechanism that allows non-resident Pakistanis to open bank accounts remotely, invest in government securities and Naya Pakistan Certificates, trade in the Pakistan Stock Exchange and mutual funds, and purchase property in Pakistan, in addition to accessing a wide range of digital banking services. The Finance Minister expressed satisfac-

tion over the remarkable progress of the initiative, stating that the RDA journey that began almost five and a half years ago has achieved significant milestones. As of the end of February 2026, more than 900,000 Roshan Digital Accounts have been opened, with total inflows exceeding \$12 billion. He congratulated the State Bank of Pakistan and the participating RDA member banks for their efforts in providing modern digital banking services to Pakistan's diaspora and for the initiative's fast-track growth. Senator Aurangzeb said that the decision to expand the RDA framework to include foreign nationals, companies and institutional investors would further enhance Pakistan's attractiveness as an investment destination and deepen the country's financial markets. Addressing the global investment community, the Finance Minister extended a clear invitation, stating that Pakistan is open for investment. He emphasized that the government's ongoing reforms, strengthened digital infrastructure and expanding financial access are aimed at creating a welcoming, transparent and secure environment for global capital. He invited investors from around the world to explore the opportunities Pakistan offers and to become partners in the country's economic future.

Charity spirit lights up markets as Eid nears

ISLAMABAD: As the crescent of Eid ul-Fitr draws closer in the final days of Ramadan, the markets of Islamabad are witnessing more than the usual festive rush. Across the capital's bustling bazaars and neighbourhood streets, preparations for Eid have blended with a visible surge of charity, as residents from different walks of life come together to ensure that the joy of the festival reaches the less fortunate. From the upscale sectors of F-6 and F-7 to the busy markets of G-9, I-10 and Aabpara, shoppers are filling carts not only with clothes and gifts for their families but also with flour, rice, sugar, dates and other essentials meant for distribution among the needy. The tradition of giving during Ramadan appears particularly vibrant this year as well, with many buyers deliberately purchasing extra goods to prepare ration packages and Eid gifts for low-income households in their surroundings. A graceful lady, Nazia Sultan, at G-11 Markaz, told APP that she had come to the market specifically to buy Eid clothes and shoes for her household staff and their families. "They are just like our family members while working in our home as helpers, including the cook, drivers and gardeners and it gives me happiness to share the joy of Eid with them," she said. At a clothing store in G-9, a housewife, Ayesha, sorted through stacks of ladies' outfits and embroidered dupattas before placing several aside for donation. She said many families in her social circle had begun com-

binning Eid gatherings with charity drives. "Instead of only exchanging gifts among ourselves, we now prepare ration kits or clothes for families who may otherwise struggle to celebrate Eid," she said. In the commercial hub of Aabpara, Fatima Rehman, a teacher at a private school in the capital, was guiding a group of students through a grocery shop, helping them select grocery items and small envelopes of eidi for children. "The students insisted on doing this," she told APP. "They want to make sure that families in nearby settlements can also celebrate Eid with dignity." The schoolchildren excitedly told APP that they are also planning to visit a centre run by Edhi Foundation on Eid day to share gifts and the joy of Eid with homeless children living there. Students from different universities in the capital are also taking part in charity drives. At Quaid-i-Azam University, volunteers from student societies have been collecting donations and assembling gift packages that include shoes, clothes and food items for orphanages and welfare centres. One student, Ahmed from G-13, said in an interview with APP that the effort had brought a new meaning to the season. "Instead of spending the whole time online, we decided to prepare Eid boxes for children who might otherwise feel forgotten," he said. The spirit of giving is not limited to the affluent. In markets near Rawalpindi Road and I-8, daily wage workers and small vendors are also contributing in their own ways. Noor

Bibi, who stitches clothes at home, told APP that she and her daughters had been preparing small handmade frocks for little girls to add to charity bundles. "We may not have much," she said with a smile, "but even a little gift can make a child happy on Eid." Shopkeepers say they also feel part of the effort. APP observed that several traders in Aabpara, G-9, the Sunday Bazaar and other markets in the capital are offering discounts to customers buying items for donation. "When someone tells us the goods are for the poor, we reduce the price," said Ahmed Ali, a grocery store owner in G-9. "Ramazan reminds us that helping others brings its own reward." Across the city, volunteers can be seen loading bags filled with Eid clothes, shoes and food items into cars and vans headed for orphanages, welfare homes and informal settlements. Social media posts under hashtags promoting charitable Eid campaigns have also encouraged residents to take part in collective drives. As evening falls and the Margalla Hills fade into dusk, Islamabad's markets continue to buzz with activity. Yet behind the glitter of new clothes and festive decorations lies a deeper message: the true beauty of Eid emerges not only from celebration but from the quiet determination of a community to ensure that no household is left without joy when the festival arrives.—DNA

QR code system introduced

He said passengers should always check the QR code before beginning their journey to confirm that the driver was verified by the authorities

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration has started a new registration process for bike ride and taxi drivers to improve travel safety. The district administration and police have launched a joint plan that requires drivers to register through a digital system and display a QR code on their vehicles. The system would allow passengers to check driver details by scanning the code before starting a ride. Under the new plan, the registration system would now operate through the Taxi Verification App managed by the police. Earlier, the process was handled through an application of the district administration, but officials have decided to transfer the system to the police platform to ensure better coordination and monitoring. According to the plan, drivers would be able to upload their personal and vehicle information through the Taxi Verification App. Passengers would also have access to the system to verify driver details before or during a ride. Once the registration process is completed, drivers will be required to display a QR code on their vehicle. This code must be visible so that passengers can scan it using their mobile phones. After scanning the code, passengers will be able to view the driver's details and confirm that the ride is registered in the official system. Authorities have also made it compulsory for drivers to record details of each ride. The information will include the passenger record and travel details. Officials said this measure will help maintain a record of journeys and support law enforcement if any issue is reported. Drivers can download the Taxi Verification App from the official link: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.ictpt.vts> Islamabad Deputy Commissioner, Irfan Memon said the step would help make travel safer for residents of the capital. He added that the system would allow passengers to check driver information before starting a ride. The deputy commissioner also urged residents not to travel with drivers who were not registered in the system. He said passengers should always check the QR code before beginning their journey to confirm that the driver was verified by the authorities.—APP

Dasu HPP distributes hygiene kits to school students

ISLAMABAD: The Dasu Hydropower Project (DHPP) has launched a campaign to distribute health and hygiene kits among students in schools located within the project area to promote personal hygiene and healthier daily practices among children. The initiative began with an inaugural ceremony held on March 12 at Government Centennial Model High School for Boys in Dasu, where hygiene kits were distributed to students, according to a Gwadar Pro's report on Monday. Under the program, kits containing essential hygiene items will be provided to boys and girls studying in selected schools across the DHPP area. The campaign aims to encourage students to adopt proper hygiene habits and maintain better personal health in their daily lives. The ceremony was attended by Director Social and Resettlement Shoaib ur Rehman Afridi and other relevant officials from local government, representatives from WAPDA, NESPAK and DHC. School teachers, health department officials and a large number of students also participated in the event. The initiative reflects the continuing commitment of DHPP to support the education sector and contribute to the well-being of local communities, particularly children living in the project area. DHPP, being constructed by China Gezhouba Group Company with support from the World Bank, is among Pakistan's largest hydropower initiatives. Located on the Indus River, the run-of-river project will ultimately generate 4,320 megawatts of electricity in two stages, according to WAPDA. The first stage, currently under construction, will produce 2,160 megawatts through six units of 360 megawatts each, with an estimated annual generation capacity of 12,222 gigawatt-hours.—APP

ANF arrests 11 suspects, seizes 167 kg of narcotics

RAWALPINDI: The Anti Narcotics Force (ANF) has arrested 11 suspects, including a woman, and seized more than 167 kilograms of narcotics worth over Rs 16.7 million during eight operations conducted in different cities across the country, an ANF spokesman said on Monday. He said the operations were carried out as part of the ANF's ongoing crackdown on drug trafficking at inter-provincial routes and urban locations. During a raid near a petrol pump on Dina GT Road, officials recovered 9.6 kg of hashish from two suspects who were taken into custody. In another operation near Johar Chowrangi in Karachi, ANF personnel seized 83 kg of hashish from a vehicle and arrested two individuals. Separately, near Hayatabad in Peshawar, authorities recovered 3 kg of heroin from a vehicle and detained two suspects. In Attock, near Sajawal Mor, 3.6 kg of hashish and 600 grams of opium were recovered from a motorcyclist who was subsequently arrested. In inter-provincial operations, ANF teams intercepted a vehicle near the Islamabad Toll Plaza and recovered 2.4 kg of hashish, arresting the accused on the spot. Another suspect was apprehended near the Haro Toll Plaza after 4.8 kg of hashish was recovered from a motorcycle. In a separate operation at the Islamabad Toll Plaza, officials confiscated 46.8 kg of hashish and 11 kg of opium from a vehicle and arrested the suspect. Meanwhile, near the Khanewal Toll Plaza in Multan, ANF personnel recovered 2.4 kg of hashish and 2 kg of opium from the possession of a woman, who was taken into custody. The spokesman said cases have been registered against the arrested suspects under the Control of Narcotic Substances Act 1997, and further investigations are underway.—APP

Briefs

Plan to use AI to develop improved crop varieties

ISLAMABAD: The government is planning an initiative to strengthen Pakistan's agricultural research by building reference genomes of indigenous crops and using artificial intelligence-based models to accelerate the development of improved varieties. The expected outcomes include stronger agricultural productivity, improved export competitiveness and better livelihoods for resource-poor farmers, particularly those living in marginal and climate-vulnerable regions. According to official documents available with Wealth Pakistan, a project titled "Building Reference Genomes and Leveraging AI-driven Models for Improvement of Indigenous Crops" has been proposed. The four-year project, scheduled from July 2026 to June 2030, will be implemented at the National Agricultural Research Centre (NARC) in Islamabad at an estimated cost of Rs786.816 million. The Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) will execute the initiative through the National Institute for Genomics and Advanced Biotechnology (NIGAB). The initiative is expected to significantly shorten the time required to develop new crop varieties while strengthening Pakistan's capacity in modern breeding and agricultural biotechnology, the document said. The initiative is expected to lead to the release of 10 elite crop varieties, including resistant-starch rice and wheat, sugarcane with at least 13.3 percent sugar recovery, and shattering-resistant canola. The project aims to use the existing state-of-the-art genomics, biotechnology, intelligent glasshouse and speed-breeding facilities at NIGAB to produce high-quality reference genome sequences for 62 indigenous crop varieties, covering 17 major crop species of Pakistan. —DNA

PAL postpones international writers' conference

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Academy of Letters (PAL) has postponed its international conference titled "Literature, World Peace, and the Environment" in view of the ongoing security situation in the region. The event was earlier scheduled to be held from April 3 to April 5, 2026, as part of the Academy's 50th anniversary celebrations. The conference was set to host writers and intellectuals from across Pakistan's four provinces, along with participants from Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan Distinguished international delegates from the United States, Brazil, Azerbaijan, New Zealand, Palestine, Algeria, Germany, Türkiye, Scotland, Colombia, the United Kingdom, and Vietnam were also expected to participate. Citing the prevailing regional conflict and related security concerns, the Pakistan Academy of Letters (PAL) has, after consultation, decided to postpone the international conference for the time being to ensure the safety of all delegates. The new date for the conference will be announced once conditions allow for a safe and peaceful environment. —APP

Sahoe, Iftar arrangements for worshippers

ISLAMABAD: Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan, Chairman Prime Minister's Youth Programme (PMYP), has continued special arrangements for daily sahoor and iftar for worshippers observing "itikaf" and members of the public at Jamia Masjid Darul Quran Wal Tartil during the holy month of Ramadan, aiming to facilitate devotees and strengthen the spirit of collective worship and service. The arrangements are being carried out regularly at the mosque located on Lytton Road in Mozang, Lahore, where a large number of worshippers gather for prayers and many spend the last ten days of Ramazan observing "itikaf", dedicating themselves to prayer, recitation of the Holy Quran and spiritual reflection. According to organisers, special arrangements have been made to provide freshly prepared meals for both sahoor and iftar to ensure convenience for worshippers and visitors attending the mosque. Volunteers and community members are assisting in the distribution of meals to facilitate devotees engaged in extended prayers. —APP

Motorway Police launch drive against encroachments

Registered FIRs against encroachers - Established a permanent anti-encroachment squad for monitoring and strict action The NHMP's zero-tolerance policy underscores its commitment to upholding road safety and discipline

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The National Highways and Motorway Police (NHMP) N-5 North Zone has launched a thorough anti-encroachment drive on GT Road, aiming to ensure smooth traffic flow and eliminate unauthorized activities near the highway. This initiative seeks to remove obstructions, promote safe driving, and enhance road safety. The NHMP's four-phase plan includes sensitizing stakeholders, serving legal notices, and holding consultative meetings. The drive covers key areas, including Peshawar, Nowshera, Kamra, Taxila, Tarnol, Rawat, Gujran Khan, Jhelum, Gujrat, Lala Musa, and Gujranwala. Collaborating with NHA,



local government, and TMAs, the NHMP has: Cleared illegal green belt areas of

petrol pumps and CNG stations - Registered FIRs against encroachers - Established a perma-



nent anti-encroachment squad for monitoring and strict action The NHMP's zero-tolerance pol-

icy underscores its commitment to upholding road safety and discipline.

Middle East conflict could disrupt remittances

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) has released a new policy brief highlighting the potential economic and labour market consequences of the ongoing Middle East conflict for Pakistan. The study, titled "The Middle East Conflict and Its Implications for Pakistani Migrant Workers," authored by Dr. Shujaat Farooq, Professor of Economics and Dean of Research at PIDE, warns that prolonged instability in the region could significantly disrupt overseas employment opportunities and remittance inflows that are vital to Pakistan's economy.

According to the policy brief, Pakistan's economic stability is closely tied to the Middle East labour market, which hosts approximately six million Pakistani workers and accounts for more than half of the country's total remittances. Each year, nearly 700,000 to 800,000 Pakistanis migrate to the region for employment. However, escalating geopolitical tensions could reduce labour outflows and trigger large-scale return migration, placing additional pressure on Pakistan's already strained domestic labour market.

The study estimates that if the conflict persists, around half a million new workers may not be able to migrate to the Middle East in 2026, while a similar number of existing migrants could be forced to return home. Such

a scenario would significantly impact labour markets, particularly in provinces like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab, where overseas migration traditionally absorbs a substantial share of new labour entrants.

Remittances, which currently contribute nearly 10 percent to Pakistan's GDP and have grown from about \$1 billion two decades ago to nearly \$40 billion today, could also face a decline of \$3-4 billion annually if the conflict continues. A reduction of this magnitude could put pressure on Pakistan's exchange rate, widen the current account deficit, and weaken the country's overall economic stability.

The policy brief also highlights the broader economic risks associated with prolonged conflict in the Middle East, including rising energy prices, disruptions in trade routes, and increased inflationary pressures. Approximately 11 percent of Pakistan's exports are destined for Middle Eastern markets, regional instability could further complicate Pakistan's external sector performance.

PIDE emphasizes that while overseas migration has historically provided relief to Pakistan's labour market by absorbing a significant portion of new workers entering the labour force, excessive reliance on a limited number of destination countries exposes the economy to external shocks. Over the past decade, nearly 90 percent of officially documented Pakistani migrant workers have been employed in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

countries, with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates serving as the primary destinations.

To mitigate potential risks, the study recommends immediate policy measures to support Pakistani workers in the Middle East and to prepare for possible return migration. These include strengthening diplomatic engagement with Gulf countries to safeguard workers' rights, establishing dedicated support portals for overseas Pakistanis, and developing comprehensive reintegration programs to assist returning migrants in finding employment or starting businesses.

In the longer term, PIDE underscores the importance of diversifying Pakistan's overseas labour destinations beyond the Middle East. Expanding migration opportunities in East Asia, Australia, and other emerging labour markets, alongside investing in globally competitive skills development programs, could help reduce the country's vulnerability to regional crises and ensure greater economic resilience.

The policy brief concludes that while Pakistan has made progress in stabilizing its economy under ongoing reforms, external shocks such as geopolitical conflicts can quickly undermine these gains. Proactive policy planning, labour market diversification, and stronger institutional support for migrant workers will therefore be essential to safeguard Pakistan's economic stability in the years ahead.

Sindh trains 21,500 teachers to improve early-grade learning

ISLAMABAD: The Sindh government has trained 21,500 teachers under its flagship education reform programme to enhance the quality of instruction at the primary school level. The initiative is part of the Sindh Early Learning Enhancement through Classroom Transformation (SELECT) project, a major education sector intervention designed to enhance foundational literacy and numeracy among primary school students. According to official documents available with Wealth Pakistan, the project carries a total cost of \$167.21 million and is scheduled to be completed in April 2026, although a request has already been made to extend it until April 2027. Under the programme, teachers have undergone several Continuous Professional Development (CPD) cycles, focusing on modern teaching methods, improved classroom engagement, and better learning outcomes for young students. Teacher training is a critical component of the project, as improving the quality of instruction at the early stage can significantly influence students' long-term academic performance. The initiative is being implemented in 12 districts of Sindh, covering schools in both rural and urban areas to ensure that children from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds bene-

fit from improved teaching practices. Along with teacher training, the project has also distributed 467,385 sets of teaching and learning materials (TLMs) among Grade 1-5 students and teachers to make classroom learning more interactive and effective. The SELECT programme has so far reached 10,993 schools and benefited around 741,591 students across the targeted districts, according to the project document.

In addition to teacher training and learning materials, the initiative also includes infrastructure improvements under which 295 primary schools are being upgraded to elementary and secondary levels. Construction work has already started in these schools, with a total of 190 facilities ready for handover by April 2026, while the remaining 105 schools are scheduled for completion by October 2026. The programme also includes baseline assessments through the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) to evaluate students' learning levels and monitor progress during the project period. The initiative is expected to play a significant role in strengthening primary education and reducing dropout rates in later stages of schooling as it moves. —APP

PM's plan to boost Gulf food exports wins business support

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's directive to formulate a comprehensive strategy for exporting surplus food to Gulf countries has drawn praise from senior business leaders, who described the move as timely amid regional supply disruptions and rising demand for reliable food sources in the Middle East.

Shahid Rasheed Butt, former president of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, welcomed the initiative, saying the prime minister had acted at an appropriate moment. He said ensuring food security for Gulf nations, with whom Pakistan shares longstanding diplomatic and economic ties, was both a strategic opportunity and a step that could deepen bilateral cooperation, global supply chains under pressure due to geopolitical tensions and cli-

mate-related disruptions, Pakistan's diverse agricultural base covering crops, rice, meat, poultry, dairy, and seafood positions the country to expand its role as a dependable food supplier to regional partners, he said. Shahid Rasheed Butt noted that proactive engagement at the highest level was essential to convert goodwill into concrete export orders before competing suppliers captured the market. He added that the PM's directive to task the Pakistan National Shipping Corporation with facilitating sea-route exports addresses a longstanding logistical gap that has previously limited large-scale food shipments to Gulf markets. He also termed the instruction to keep ambassadors and trade officers in Gulf states actively engaged an important step, noting that commercial relationships in those markets are often strengthened through sustained diplomatic and institutional support.

Pakistan already maintains a notable presence in Gulf food markets. Rice, meat, fruits, vegetables, and dairy products form the core of the country's food exports to the region. At Gulffood 2026 in Dubai in January, more than 150 Pakistani companies participated, nearly double the previous year, reflecting strong demand for Pakistani rice, pulses, dairy products, meat, and processed foods. Shahid Rasheed Butt said the prime minister's initiative builds on that growing commercial momentum by adding policy direction and institutional backing needed to accelerate exports. Pakistan's overall exports during July to January of fiscal year 2025-26 stood at 18.19 billion dollars, down 7.11 percent from the same period a year earlier, according to official trade data, highlighting the urgency of expanding into higher-value food segments and strengthening access to stable external markets.

Over 48,000 treated

ISLAMABAD: The China-aided Pak-China Friendship Hospital in Gwadar attended to 48,656 patients in the first two months of 2026, Gwadar Pro reported on Monday. According to the hospital administration, inpatients are provided with free medicines, diagnostic services, and meals. On average, between 1,100 and 1,200 patients visit the facility daily to receive treatment and avail free diagnostic services. As a major healthcare facility for residents along the coast of Balochistan, the Pak-China Friendship Hospital continues to serve and benefit the local population. —APP

HEC advises IT students to register for national skill competency test

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan has advised the students enrolled in 7th and 8th semesters of computing programmes to contact their university focal persons before the deadline of March 20, 2026 and register for the National Skill Competency Test (NSCT). The free-of-charge, computer-based NSCT - to be conducted simultaneously across Pakistan in early April - enables the IT students to be part of the national IT talent pool and have access to employment opportunities in the IT industry. High-achieving students will receive a joint certificate by HEC, Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB), and Pakistan Software Houses Association (P@SHA). These students will also be included in the national talent pool that is accessible to both local and international employers. In addition, the qualifying students will receive one academic credit from their respective institutions and gain prioritised access to internships, apprenticeships, and international certification pathways. It is pertinent to mention here that HEC announced the commencement of NSCT for IT graduates in January as a landmark initiative to align academic outcomes with the rapidly evolving demands of the global technology sector. The test has been designed in pursuance of the Prime Minister's directives and in close collaboration with the Ministry of Information Technology & Telecommunication (MoITT), and P@SHA. HEC has urged the higher education institutions to ensure participation of their students in view of its importance. The Commission has linked the results of this test to national benchmarking of universities in computing domain under which the universities will be categorised into performance tiers based on their students' success in the NSCT. —APP

Around US \$ 3b food commodities exported

On a Month-on-Month (MoM) basis, the food exports also decreased by 35 percent in February 2026 when compared to the exports of US\$ 624.445 million in January 2026, according to PBS data

ISLAMABAD: Food group exports reached US\$ 3.394 billion during the first eight months of the current financial year (2025-26), the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported. Food group exports showed a decline of 34.38 percent from US\$ 5.173 billion during the same month of last year (Jul-Feb 2024-25). The food commodities that contributed to positive growth in trade included fish and fish preparations, the exports of which grew by 9.70 percent, from US\$ 263.589 million to US\$ 289.162 million. The other food commodities that contributed to positive growth included fruits, the exports of which increased by 6.25 percent, from US\$ 237.130 million to US\$ 251.947 million whereas the exports of meat and meat preparations rose by 9.30 percent, from US\$ 338.645 million to US\$ 370.153 million. The food commodities that contributed to negative growth in trade included rice, the exports of which decreased by 39.91 percent, from US\$ 2483.362 million to US\$ 1492.228 million. The exports of vegetables dipped by 46.45 percent, from US\$ 227.224 million to US\$ 121.681 million; tobacco by 22.03 percent from US\$ 125.026 million to US\$ 97.484 million, spices by 1.61 percent from US\$ 62.235 million to US\$ 61.333 million, oil seeds, nuts, and kernels by 53.92 percent, from US\$ 339.214 million to US\$ 156.311 million. The export of sugar dipped by 100 percent from US\$ 406.999 million to zero export during the months under review while the exports of all other food items decreased by 19.65 percent, from US\$ 690.213 million to US\$ 554.584 million. Meanwhile, on a Year-on-Year (YoY) basis, the food group exports from the country witnessed a decrease of 27.54 percent during February 2026 as compared to the corresponding month of last year. The food exports in February 2026 were recorded as US\$ 405.891 million against the exports of US\$ 560.144 million in February 2025. On a Month-on-Month (MoM) basis, the food exports also decreased by 35 percent in February 2026 when compared to the exports of US\$ 624.445 million in January 2026, according to PBS data. —DNA

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Searching for a Ceasefire amid Escalation

DR. MUHAMMAD AKRAM ZAHEER

THE latest confrontation between the United States and Iran has pushed the Middle East once again to the edge of a wider regional crisis. What began as a series of targeted strikes has quickly evolved into a dangerous cycle of retaliation, diplomatic pressure, and global economic anxiety. As the conflict intensifies, calls for a ceasefire are growing louder, yet the prospects of an immediate halt to hostilities remain uncertain.

The present escalation traces back to late February when the United States, supported by Israel, launched coordinated airstrikes on Iranian military and nuclear-linked facilities. Washington described the strikes as a preventive action aimed at weakening Iran's military capabilities and curbing what it considers Tehran's expanding strategic reach in the region. Iran, however, viewed the attacks as a violation of its sovereignty and responded with missile and drone strikes targeting Israeli positions and American military installations in the wider Middle East. The situation has since evolved into a tense standoff marked by continuous exchanges of military pressure. One of the most significant recent developments was the American strike on Kharg Island, a vital hub for Iran's oil exports. The attack signalled a shift in the conflict's intensity, as it struck at the heart of Iran's economic lifeline. Iranian authorities condemned the strike and warned of a firm response, particularly against American assets in the Gulf region. The danger of further escalation lies in the geography of the conflict. Much of the tension now surrounds the strategic waterways of the Persian Gulf, especially the Strait of Hormuz. This narrow maritime corridor carries nearly one-fifth of the world's oil supply, making it one of the most sensitive chokepoints in global trade. Any disruption to shipping in this area has immediate consequences for international markets. Indeed, the economic effects of the conflict are already visible. Oil prices have surged amid fears that hostilities could interrupt supplies from the Gulf. Global shipping companies have begun rerouting vessels or reducing traffic in the region due to security concerns. For economies already grappling with inflation and energy volatility, the crisis threatens to add another layer of uncertainty.

Beyond economic concerns, the humanitarian and political consequences of the conflict are also mounting. Reports from Iran indicate significant casualties and damage to military installations and infrastructure. Although the full scale of the losses remains difficult to verify, the psychological and political impact inside Iran is evident. Iranian leaders have framed the confrontation as an act of aggression that demands resistance rather than compromise. Yet even as military rhetoric intensifies, diplomatic channels remain active. Several countries have stepped forward in an attempt to mediate a ceasefire. Oman, which has historically played a quiet but effective role in facilitating dialogue between Tehran and Washington, is once again engaged in behind-the-scenes diplomacy.

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Editor-in-Chief: Ansar Mahmood Bhatti
Deputy Editor: Abid Raza

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Phone: 051-8488394 / 051-2261960

Off: Awan Plaza, Block 18-A, G-8 Markaz Islamabad



Egypt and Turkey have also expressed their willingness to support efforts aimed at reducing tensions. Pakistan, too, has joined the chorus calling for restraint. Islamabad has urged both sides to avoid further escalation and resolve their differences through dialogue. Given Pakistan's close ties with the Muslim world as well as its working relationship with Washington, its appeal reflects broader concerns within the region about the risks of a prolonged conflict. However, the road to a ceasefire remains complicated. Iran has made it clear that it will not enter negotiations while military attacks continue. Iranian officials insist that the United States and Israel must first halt their strikes before any meaningful diplomatic process can begin. In their view, negotiations conducted under the shadow of ongoing bombardment would lack credibility.

The United States, on the other hand, maintains that its military operations are necessary to weaken Iran's strategic capabilities. American officials argue that without sustained pressure, Tehran may continue to expand its military influence across the region. From Washington's perspective, the strikes are intended not only as retaliation but also as a warning against further escalation. This divergence of positions explains why mediation efforts have so far struggled to produce tangible results. Both sides appear determined to secure a stronger bargaining position before entering serious negotiations. Such calculations, however, increase the risk of miscalculation, particularly in a region where multiple actors and alliances intersect. Another factor complicating the crisis is the broader regional environment. The Middle East has in recent years witnessed overlapping conflicts involving various state and non-state actors. In such a setting, a direct confrontation between the United States and Iran carries the potential to draw in additional parties. Groups aligned with Tehran in Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria could become involved, turning a bilateral conflict into a wider regional war. For this reason, international actors are pressing for de-escalation. The United Nations has repeatedly called for restraint and dialogue, warning that continued fighting could destabilise an already fragile region. China and several European states have also urged both sides to pursue diplomatic solutions rather than military escalation. The urgency of these appeals reflects a broader recognition that no clear military victory is likely in such a confrontation. While the United States possesses overwhelming military power, Iran has demonstrated its capacity for asymmetric responses that can prolong and complicate any conflict. Protracted hostilities would therefore carry heavy costs for both sides as well as for the wider region. Against this backdrop, the search for a ceasefire remains the most pressing objective. Diplomatic history suggests that even bitter adversaries can find a path to negotiation once the costs of confrontation become too high. The challenge lies in creating conditions where both sides can step back without appearing to concede defeat. For the moment, however, the Middle East remains on edge. Each new strike raises fears of retaliation, and each warning from military commanders adds to the sense of uncertainty. Markets fluctuate with every development, and regional governments watch anxiously as events unfold. The unfolding crisis serves as another reminder of the fragile balance that shapes Middle Eastern politics. Strategic rivalries, ideological divisions, and geopolitical competition often intersect in unpredictable ways. When global powers become directly involved, the stakes rise even further.

Iran's Asymmetric Trap for America

Qamar Bashir



The strategic significance of these attacks is enormous. The Strait of Hormuz remains the world's most critical energy chokepoint. Approximately 20 percent of global oil consumption—around 20 million barrels per day—passes through this narrow waterway. Even limited disruptions can send energy markets into turmoil. Already, insurance premiums for tankers operating in Gulf waters have surged, and several major shipping companies have begun rerouting vessels to avoid high-risk areas. Iran's strategy appears to be based on a simple but powerful calculation...

THE war involving Iran, Israel, and the United States has evolved into one of the most consequential geopolitical confrontations of the modern era. What began as a calculated military campaign by Israel and the United States against Iranian targets has expanded into a conflict whose consequences are spreading far beyond the battlefield. Energy infrastructure, routes, financial markets, and global political alliances are all now entangled in the crisis.

Far from slowing down, Iran has steadily widened the warfront. Instead of responding only with direct military retaliation against Israel or U.S. bases, Tehran has pursued a broader strategy aimed at increasing the global cost of the conflict. In recent weeks, multiple energy facilities and shipping routes across the Gulf region have been struck, signaling Iran's determination to ensure that the war's economic burden is shared by the entire international system.

Several major oil and energy installations across the Gulf have been affected. Tankers traveling near the Strait of Hormuz and surrounding Gulf waters have been hit or damaged, sending shockwaves through global energy markets. Energy depots and refinery infrastructure in regional states have also been targeted, including facilities near Oman's coastal industrial zones and oil storage depots linked to export terminals in the wider Gulf region. Reports from maritime security monitoring agencies suggest that several commercial tankers have been damaged or set ablaze since the escalation began, forcing shipping companies to reconsider routes and increase insurance premiums dramatically.

The strategic significance of these attacks is enormous. The Strait of Hormuz remains the world's most critical energy chokepoint. Approximately 20 percent of global oil consumption—around 20 million barrels per day—passes through this narrow waterway. Even limited disruptions can send energy markets into turmoil. Already, insurance premiums for tankers operating in Gulf waters have surged, and several major shipping companies have begun rerouting vessels to avoid high-risk areas. Iran's strategy appears to be based on a simple but powerful calculation: if the country cannot defeat the United States and Israel in conventional warfare, it can still make the war so economically costly that continuing it becomes politically unsustainable. By targeting energy infrastructure and maritime traffic, Iran is effectively expanding the battlefield from the Middle East to the global economy. The financial consequences are already significant. Since the escalation began, global stock markets have experienced sharp volatility. Analysts estimate that more than one trillion dollars in market value has been wiped out across major global exchanges,

reflecting investor fears of a prolonged conflict that could destabilize energy supplies and disrupt trade routes. Rising oil prices have already begun feeding inflation pressures across many economies. The economic impact extends far beyond financial markets. Higher oil prices translate directly into increased transportation costs, higher food prices, and inflation across developing economies. Countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Indonesia—whose economies depend heavily on imported fuel—are particularly vulnerable. Even European economies, still recovering from earlier energy shocks, face renewed financial strain if energy markets remain unstable. What makes this conflict particularly striking is the contrast in military resources between the opposing sides. The United States alone spends more on defense than any country in history. Its annual military budget now exceeds \$850 billion, larger than the combined defense spending of the next several countries. When the military budgets of NATO allies and Israel are included, the Western alliance commands a defense expenditure approaching \$1 trillion annually. Israel itself spends roughly \$24–25 billion each year on defense, maintaining one of the most technologically advanced militaries in the Middle East. Its arsenal includes advanced fighter jets, missile defense systems such as Iron Dome and Arrow, and a sophisticated intelligence network. In comparison, Iran's military budget is dramatically smaller. Estimates place Iran's annual defense spending between \$20 billion and \$30 billion, a fraction of what the United States spends alone. Yet despite this enormous disparity, Iran has managed to create a formidable deterrence capability by focusing on asymmetric warfare. Over the past four decades, Iran has invested heavily in missile technology, drone development, cyber warfare, naval mines, and fast attack boats designed specifically for Gulf waters. Rather than attempting to build aircraft carriers or large conventional fleets, Iran developed tools that exploit geography and economic vulnerabilities. This approach has proven particularly effective in the narrow waterways of the Gulf. Iran's arsenal includes thousands of ballistic and cruise missiles, as well as large numbers of armed drones capable of striking targets across the region. Combined with naval tactics involving swarms of fast boats and remotely controlled vessels, these capabilities make it extremely difficult to secure commercial shipping routes during wartime. Military experts have long warned that escorting every tanker through the Strait of Hormuz would be an almost impossible task. Thousands of vessels pass through the corridor annually. Protecting them from drones, missiles, and naval mines across hundreds of miles of sea lanes would require enormous naval re-

sources even for the United States Navy. Another striking development in the conflict has been the political messaging emerging from Washington. During a speech delivered at a midterm election rally, the President of the United States declared that the United States had already won the war. According to the speech, Iranian military assets—including radar systems, aircraft, ships, and missile infrastructure—had been destroyed, and the conflict had effectively been decided. However, events on the ground appear to contradict that narrative. Iranian missile and drone strikes continue across the region, and attacks on energy infrastructure and shipping routes have not subsided. Instead of ending, the conflict appears to be expanding. For many observers, the declaration of victory may represent an attempt to create a political exit from a war whose strategic objectives have become increasingly unclear. Wars often begin with precise goals, but as they evolve, controlling the escalation becomes more difficult. In this case, the timeline of the war may no longer be determined solely by Washington or Tel Aviv. Iran's strategy appears aimed at prolonging the conflict until economic pressure and political realities force its adversaries to reconsider their position.

At the diplomatic level, Iranian leaders have outlined several conditions they consider necessary for peace. These include recognition of Iran's right to pursue peaceful nuclear research, the withdrawal of certain foreign military forces from the region, and compensation for damages caused during the conflict. Whether these demands will form the basis of negotiations remains uncertain. The broader lesson emerging from this confrontation is profound. Military superiority alone does not guarantee strategic control. Economic leverage, asymmetric warfare, geographic advantages, and political endurance can fundamentally reshape the dynamics of modern conflict. The war that began with the expectation of overwhelming military dominance is now evolving into a contest of endurance and economic pressure. Global markets, energy supplies, and political alliances are all being tested. If the current trajectory continues, the decisive question may no longer be whether the United States can win the war militarily, but whether it can find a way to end it without triggering even greater global instability. And in a remarkable reversal of expectations, the timing and terms of peace may ultimately be shaped not by the world's most powerful military alliance—but by the resilience and strategic calculations of the nation it set out to defeat.

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

If I Were the Dust of Madinah

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



At times the Prophet would smile, and that smile would illuminate the gathering like moonlight. Embody the beauty that Jami described in his poems. At times he would speak with gentleness, guiding humanity away from darkness toward light. And I, a tiny particle of dust upon the ground, would listen in silent gratitude, knowing that even angels...

THERE are moments when imagination becomes an act of devotion, when the heart travels across centuries and finds itself resting upon the sacred soil of Madinah. In such moments I do not see myself as a traveler, a scholar, or a writer. I imagine myself as something far humbler—an unnoticed particle of dust lying quietly upon the blessed path where the beloved Messenger of Allah, Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), once walked. If I were that dust, I would not possess a voice, yet my silence would carry a story greater than words. My existence would be small and weightless, yet my fortune would be immeasurable. For what greater honour could there be than to rest upon the road of Madinah and wait with trembling anticipation for the moment when the footsteps of the Messenger pass over me? Every morning in Madinah would be a dawn of longing. I would lie quietly upon the earth, feeling the gentle wind move across the streets. Around me the city would awaken—its people preparing for prayer, its hearts beating with love for the one whose presence had transformed a desert town into the centre of light. But my gaze, if dust could possess such a gaze, would remain fixed upon one hope; that the blessed feet of the Messenger would pass along this path. Then, at last, the moment would arrive. The beloved Prophet (Peace be upon him) would emerge with the grace that history struggles to describe. His presence would carry both majesty and humility, light and tenderness. When his blessed foot would touch the ground, I myself, an insignificant grain of dust—would feel a joy that the heavens themselves might envy. I would cling to the sole of his sandal, trembling with gratitude, whispering silently to myself: "O my Almighty Allah, among all the particles of this vast earth, You chose me for this honour."

If dust could weep, I would weep in that moment. This is the emotion that resonates in the verses of the great lovers of the Prophet (Peace be upon him), much like the Sufi saint and poet Pir Mehr Ali Shah conveyed in a Punjabi poem that moves every devotee to tears. Similarly, Qudratullah Shahab, the renowned bureaucrat and devoted admirer of the Holy Prophet, upon arriving in Madinah, humbly poured the dust of its streets into his eyes as an act of deep devotion. How fortunate that dust would be which the wind might lift gently and place upon the blessed garment of the Prophet (Peace be upon him). How lucky that dust which might remain beneath his feet as he walked to the mosque, to the homes of the poor, or through the streets where children gathered with smiles. Sometimes I imagine that the breeze of Madinah would carry me from the road to the threshold of the Prophet's mosque. There I would rest quietly while the Companions gathered around him with love and reverence. Their hearts would overflow with devotion as they listened to his words—words that transformed hearts of stone into hearts of mercy. At times the Prophet would smile, and that smile would illuminate the gathering like moonlight. Embody the beauty that Jami described in his poems. At times he would speak with gentleness, guiding humanity away from darkness toward light. And I, a tiny particle of dust upon the ground, would listen in silent gratitude, knowing that even angels in the heavens longed for the blessings that filled that gathering. The lovers of the Prophet in every age have tried to capture this feeling. In the heartfelt recitations of naats that echo through gatherings today, including those rendered with deep emotion by Abbar-ul-Haq, one hears the same longing; the longing to belong to the Prophet, to be near him, to be counted among those

fortunate souls who walked in his presence. Yet the greatest pride of that dust would not merely be touching his footsteps. It would be witnessing the humility and compassion that flowed from his noble character. The Messenger of Allah did not walk the earth like a king surrounded by pride. He walked like a servant of Allah, greeting the poor, comforting the weak, and forgiving those who wronged him. Even the dust beneath his feet would feel that mercy. And when the sacred night of Isra and Mi'raj arrived, I imagine myself resting quietly in Madinah while the heavens prepared for a moment unlike any other in history. That night the beloved Messenger was invited beyond the realms of earth, ascending through the heavens in a journey granted to no other human being. The angels welcomed him, the prophets greeted him, and he was honoured with a nearness to the Divine presence that words cannot fully describe. Yet after witnessing the splendour of the heavens, he returned again to the earth—to guide humanity, to pray for his Ummah, and to continue walking upon the humble soil of Madinah. And perhaps, by the mercy of Allah, he would once again walk upon the very dust that I imagined myself to be. If I were that dust, I would not wish to rise higher than his footsteps. My pride would lie in remaining beneath them forever. For to be dust in Madinah beneath the feet of the beloved Prophet (Peace be upon him) would be a station greater than any throne of the world. Such is the strange mystery of love: that the lover does not seek elevation but humility. The lover seeks not to rise above others but to fall into the dust of devotion. And if Allah were to grant even a fragment of that honour, then a particle of dust would become richer than kings—because it had once rested beneath the footsteps of Muhammad, the beloved Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him).

Briefs

Britain, Japan
other allies
deny support
to Trump

FROM PAGE 01
open up the chokepoint through which a fifth of the world's oil passes. The appeals come more than two weeks after the US and Israel launched airstrikes at Iran, as the war effectively restricted shipping through the Strait, a chokepoint through which roughly a fifth of the world's oil passes. The blockade has already contributed to a sharp surge in international oil prices, which reached \$106 a barrel by Sunday — a 45 per cent increase since the start of the conflict. Gasoline prices in the United States have also jumped, reaching a national average of \$3.68 per gallon, according to AAA, an increase of nearly 24 per cent in a fortnight. The New York Times noted that the Trump administration appears to have misjudged the economic fallout.

Oil hovers
around
\$100...

FROM PAGE 01
that no oil infrastructure was damaged in strikes. Trump urged other countries to send warships to keep the waterway open but offered no specifics or commitments from the US side, saying he hoped China, France, Japan, South Korea and the UK would take part. He later wrote Saturday in a Truth Social post: "The Countries of the World that receive Oil through the Hormuz Strait must take care of that passage, and we will help — A LOT! This should have always been a team effort, and now it will be."

Israel
launches
ground...

FROM PAGE 01
Hormuz, which has faced disruptions from Iranian actions. He warned NATO of a "very bad" future if allies fail to help secure the waterway (vital for global oil flows) and suggested China—reliant on the strait for much of its oil imports—should contribute warships or forces. Trump indicated he might delay a planned summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping if Beijing does not respond positively. He has called on multiple nations (including France, Japan, South Korea, and Britain) to deploy assets for escort missions or to keep the strait open amid rising tensions and economic impacts like soaring oil prices.

Iran wants
'serious
review'...

FROM PAGE 01
Gulf Arab states have faced more than 2,000 missile and drone attacks since the outbreak of the war on February 28, with targets including US diplomatic missions and military bases but also critical Gulf oil infrastructure, ports, airports, and hotels. The United Arab Emirates, which normalised relations with Iran's arch-foe Israel in 2020, has faced the brunt of the attacks. But all Gulf Arab states have been impacted, and all have condemned Iran.

UAE, Saudi
leaders
discuss ME

FROM PAGE 01
"the enemy" — a reference to the US and Israel — was deploying drones disguised as Iranian-made Shahed drones under the name "Lucas drone." Enayati insisted Iran was only targeting US and Israeli interests in the region, denying responsibility for attacks on Gulf states. His post drew widespread skepticism, with critics pointing out that Iran's military leadership had openly threatened Gulf countries, and that even strikes aimed at US military assets endangered nearby civilian areas. Regional authorities say thousands of Iranian missiles and drones have been launched toward the Gulf since the conflict began in late February, hitting airports, ports, energy infrastructure and civilian areas across the region.

Japanese Para athletes end Milan
Cortina Games with 4 medals

"I thought if I had to lose to someone, I'd want it to be Takeshi," he said of Suzuki. "In that sense, this was the best loss I could hope for"

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO: Japanese alpine skier Takeshi Suzuki won bronze in the men's slalom the final day of competition at the Milan Cortina Paralympic Games, bringing Japan's medal haul to four. The medal is the

first in 12 years for the 37-year-old Suzuki, who has previously won three including a gold in the men's slalom sitting in Sochi in 2014. A delighted Suzuki said he was "glad" to have won a medal after two unsuccessful games. "The first thing that crossed my mind was my wife's face and those of my son and daughter, and everyone who has supported me." Suzuki clinched bronze as athletes powered through snowfall and fog at the Tofane Alpine Skiing Center, a rarity for the Paralympic events at Cortina d'Ampezzo. Suzuki said the poor visibility proved a blessing, as it allowed him to produce riskier



skiing. Suzuki's Japanese alpine skiing stablemate, seven-time Paralympian Taiki Morii, also competed, finishing fourth. It marked the first time since the 2002 Salt Lake City Games that the 45-year-old Morii, who has won seven medals, failed to reach the podium. But the veteran skier took the result positively. "I thought if I had to lose to someone, I'd want it to be Takeshi," he said of Suzuki. "In that sense, this was the best loss I could hope for." Ahead of the Milan Cortina Games, Morii had begun to talk of the current season as his last purely as an athlete, as he looks

to begin training the next generation alongside competing. In cross-country skiing in Teseo, Japan's Taiki Kawayoke ended sixth in the men's 20-kilometer interval start free standing, while compatriot Yoshihiro Nitta, competing in an eighth consecutive winter Paralympics, came 20th. Kawayoke, the gold medal winner in the men's long distance standing classic at Beijing in 2022, struggled to find his winning form in Milan Cortina, and goes home empty-handed. With Suzuki's bronze, Japan's medal total ended at four. In 2022 Beijing Games, Japan won seven medals, including four gold. — APP

Panasonic's Let's note
laptop to mark 30 years
in June since debut

OSAKA: Panasonic Connect Co.'s "Let's note" compact laptop will mark its 30th anniversary in June, supported by Japanese business users who value its durable and lightweight design, the subsidiary of electronics giant Panasonic Holdings Corp. said. While many major Japanese electronics makers withdrew from the personal computer business after they lost market share to foreign makers, the Let's note, featuring a distinctive "bonnet-style" display lid, has survived by focusing on corporate demand. Reflecting on its three decades on the market, Shintaro Tanaka, a manager long involved in the product's development, said the key features were "being lightweight, durable and having a long battery life on a single charge." The first model, the "AL-N1," was launched in 1996, when portable computers were rare, by Panasonic Holdings, then named Matsushita Electric Industrial Co. As telecommunications technologies progressed and use of portable PCs rose, the 2002 "CF-R1" model, weighing less than 1 kilogram, became a hit. With PCs typically reliant on operating systems supplied by Microsoft Corp. and central processing units from Intel Corp., manufacturers have struggled to differentiate their products, but Panasonic narrowed its focus on domestic corporate customers

seeking lightweight and durable products. One of Panasonic's rival Japanese manufacturers, Sony Group Corp., spun off its "VAIO" PC business in 2014 when the company was named Sony Corp. while another maker, Toshiba Corp., separated out its "dynabook" brand in 2018. Although Let's note models are priced higher than those of competitors, Panasonic Connect emphasizes that total operational costs are cheaper, citing the models' durability. The maker's "26-direction drop test" involves dropping a laptop from a height of 76 centimeters, roughly the height of a standard desk, and confirming that it does not break no matter which of its 26 points, including six faces, eight corners and 12 edges, hits the ground first. The display lid, first adopted for the CF-R1 model, was inspired by a car hood to ensure strength, as the maker took a different approach to rivals that favored flat and slim designs. "Despite being described as awkward, we have sophisticated the design over the years while maintaining its functionality," said senior manager Takashi Tsukahara. The Let's note laptop's assembly has been entirely handled by a factory in Kobe in Hyogo Prefecture, western Japan, and the production, including of related models, topped 10 million units in 2023. — APP

Syrian
security forces
arrest 12 ISIS
members in
eastern Syria

DEIR EZZOR: Syrian security forces have arrested 12 members of the ISIS group during a security operation in eastern Syria, the Interior Ministry said. The ministry said in a statement on its Telegram channel that the Internal Security Forces, working in coordination with the General Intelligence Directorate, carried out a targeted operation in the Abu Kamal and al-Bsyrah areas following extensive intelligence gathering and surveillance. According to the statement, seven individuals were arrested in Abu Kamal and five in al-Bsyrah. The arrests followed close monitoring of the movements of individuals suspected of activities threatening security and stability in the region. The ministry said investigations with the detainees are ongoing in accordance with legal procedures before judicial action is taken against those found responsible. — APP

Canadian singer
Bryan Adams to
perform at Dougga

TUNIS: Canadian singer Bryan Adams will perform on May 2, 2026, at the Ancient Theater of Dougga, as part of the Dougga International Festival, which will celebrate its 50th edition this year, the Canadian Embassy in Tunisia announced. According to the announcement, this marks the artist's first participation in the festival, held each summer at the archaeological site of Dougga. The event is part of initiatives to "strengthen cultural exchanges between Canada and Tunisia." The concert is part of Adams' international tour, which includes dates in America, Africa, and Europe, according to his official website. He will present his Bare Bones Tour, an acoustic format featuring stripped-down performances of his hits, mainly on guitar, accompanied by pianist Gary Breit. The programme will include iconic songs such as "Summer of '69," "Heaven," and "Everything I Do I Do It for You." With a career spanning nearly four decades, Bryan Adams has released multiple albums and sold over 100 million records worldwide. Tickets for the concert are priced at 190 dinars. A UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1997, Dougga covers about 75 hectares and is one of the best-preserved archaeological sites in North Africa. Originally known as Thugga, it was the capital of a Libyan-Punic state before the Roman annexation of Numidia. The city thrived under Roman and Byzantine rule before declining during the Islamic period. The visible ruins today reflect over seventeen centuries of history and the blending of several cultures—Numidian, Punic, Hellenistic, and Roman. Considered the best-preserved Roman-African city in North Africa, Dougga retains the main components of an ancient city, including the monumental centre (capitol, forum, and market), entertainment buildings such as the theater, and public baths.

Minister
says Afghan
Taliban..

FROM PAGE 01
Taliban-linked platforms, saying Pakistan does not rely on AI-generated images or videos. Tarar added that "false narratives" promoted through official Taliban channels were exposing the Afghan government domestically and internationally. Four civilians, all brothers, were martyred and a child injured after artillery and mortar fire from Afghan Taliban regime struck a house in Bajaur district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar said on Sunday. "Today at around 1530 hours, the Afghan Taliban regime deliberately targeted civilian population through artillery and mortar fire from across the border in Tabesta Letai, Salazarai area of Bajaur," he wrote in a post on X.

Iran
indebted
to Pak for...

FROM PAGE 01
face of the ongoing tensions. He added that the unity and support extended by Pakistan reflected strong backing for Iran against the aggression carried out by the United States and Israel. The statement comes amid escalating tensions in the Middle East after the US and Israel launched attacks on Iran on February 28, with Tehran retaliating by targeting US bases across the Gulf region, including Saudi Arabia, with missiles and drones. Speaking on the Senate floor earlier this month, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister said that Pakistan offered to facilitate talks between Tehran and Washington to end violence, expressing support for Iran's right to harness nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

IB tasked
to monitor
govt...

FROM PAGE 01
savings plan amid rising fuel costs triggered by the ongoing US-Israel-Iran conflict in the Middle East. Addressing the nation on March 9, PM Shehbaz said that the government had taken difficult economic and administrative decisions to manage the situation and reduce the impact of the energy crisis. He then announced that both the federal and provincial governments would adopt austerity and simplicity to reduce expenditures and conserve energy during the challenging economic situation.

FC to be
deployed in
Balochistan

FROM PAGE 01
It was decided to start phase-wise deployment of the Federal Constabulary in the province. Initially, two wings will be stationed in the province, with around 3,000 personnel eventually deployed in sensitive areas to reinforce security. Last year, the Federal Constabulary, formerly known as the Frontier Constabulary, underwent a structural transformation under the Frontier Constabulary (Re-organisation) Ordinance, 2025. The force continues to operate under the federal government while providing security and administrative support across Pakistan as needed. Provinces that utilise the force determine its operational powers, while overall command and oversight remain with the federal authorities.

Fifth member of Iran
women's soccer team
withdraws asylum claim

AFC Women's Asian Cup: Several Iran Women's National Football Team players withdraw asylum claims in Australia, leaving two behind as squad heads to Kuala Lumpur awaiting travel plans

SYDNEY/KUALA LUMPUR: A fifth member of the Iranian women's soccer team has withdrawn her claim for asylum in Australia, Australian media reported on Monday, and will be rejoining the rest of the squad in Malaysia. The latest withdrawal leaves only two people of the original six players and one support staff member who sought asylum in Australia last week fearing possible persecution if they returned home. Concerns over their safety came after the players failed to sing the national anthem at a women's Asian Cup match earlier this month. The five who withdrew their claims are expected to join the rest of the team in Kuala Lumpur where the squad has been staying since departing from Sydney last week. Australian Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs Matt Thistlethwaite told Sky News the government respected the decision of those who chose to return to Iran while continuing to provide support to the two members still in Australia. "This is a very complex situation," Thistlethwaite said. The team is seeking to travel to another country from Malaysia as it cannot immediately return to Tehran due to the war in the Middle East, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) said on Monday. The Iranian Football Association said the team was expected to leave Malaysia for Tehran soon "to once again be embraced by their families and homeland." AFC's General Secretary Windsor John however told reporters in Kuala Lumpur the team would seek alternative destinations as they are unable to return to Iran immediately. "They are just waiting for the flight connections. When they are going... where to, they have to tell us," he said. — Agencies

Spain v Argentina 'Finalissima' match in
Qatar canceled amid conflict

DOHA: The 'Finalissima' match between Spain and Argentina that was scheduled to be held in Qatar has been canceled due to the conflict in the Middle East while the South American side rejected multiple alternatives, UEFA said on Sunday. The US-Israeli strikes on Iran have affected countries throughout the Gulf, disrupting travel in some of the world's busiest transit hubs and forcing several sporting events to be canceled due to safety concerns. The contest between European champions Spain and Copa America winners Argentina was scheduled for March 27 at Doha's Lusail Stadium, where fans would have had the opportunity to watch Lionel Messi go head-to-head with Lamine Yamal. UEFA said they held discussions with the organizing authorities in Qatar and concluded that the match could not take place due to the "current political situation" in the region. "It is a source of great disappointment to UEFA and the organizers that circumstances and timing have denied the teams of the chance to compete for this prestigious prize in Qatar," UEFA said in a statement. Qatar's Local Organizing Committee said airspace disruption and travel restrictions led to the cancellation of its Qatar Football Festival, where the host country, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Serbia were also set to play friendly games this month. The Football Association of Serbia later announced they would play away in Spain on March 27 and host Saudi Arabia four days later. The Finalissima's cancellation was not just about Qatar's security concerns, however, with UEFA saying they explored other feasible alternatives, but they proved to be "unacceptable" to the Argentinian Football Association (AFA). UEFA first offered to stage the match at the Santiago Bernabeu in Madrid with a 50:50 split of supporters in the stadium. A second option was to stage the Finalissima over two legs — at the Bernabeu on March 27 and the second leg in Buenos Aires during an international window before the next Euros and Copa America in 2028.



However, the AFA rejected both options. UEFA said Argentina made a counter offer to play the game after the World Cup but Spain had no available dates. "Ultimately, UEFA sought a commitment from Argentina that, if a neutral venue in Europe could be found, the game could go ahead on 27 March... or on the alternative date of 30 March. This proposal was also rejected," UEFA added. The Spanish football federation (RFEF) said they had offered Argentina "all possible options" in collaboration with UEFA to ensure the match went ahead, adding that they had the organizational capacity to stage the clash on short notice. "From the very outset, the Federation has expressed its absolute commitment to ensuring this match goes ahead, as it believes it brings prestige and international reputation at a crucial time in a World Cup year," the RFEF said. "Furthermore, it has worked tirelessly to achieve this. Spain was prepared to play, as has always been stated." The 2026 World Cup in the United States, Mexico and Canada kicks off on June 11. The 2022 edition of the Finalissima was held at Wembley Stadium in London where Argentina beat Italy 3-0. — APP

Sinner tops Medvedev to win first Indian Wells title

Indian Wells Masters: Jannik Sinner beats Daniil Medvedev in thrilling final, winning 7-6, 7-6 to claim first title at the prestigious tournament

INDIAN WELLS: World number two Jannik Sinner surged home to beat Daniil Medvedev 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (7/4) on Sunday to capture his first Indian Wells ATP Masters 1000 crown. Four-time Grand Slam champion Sinner won his first title of 2026, rallying from 0-4 down in the second-set tiebreaker to seal the win against a resurgent Medvedev, winner of the title in Dubai last month who was riding a nine-match ATP winning streak. That included an upset semi-final triumph over Carlos Alcaraz that ended the top-ranked Spaniard's 16-match winning streak to start the season. But Sinner, who didn't drop a set in the tournament, proved just that bit better in a match where both sets went to the tiebreakers without a break of serve. "I kept believing and kept pushing," Sinner said of his closing burst. "I went for my shots a little more. A third set, we would have started even, so I tried my best to close it out and I am very happy. "It was an incredible ending," added Sinner, who said he wasn't troubled by the hot afternoon temperatures thanks to the lack of humidity and some extra days of pre-tournament preparation. Sinner didn't face a break point in the one-hour 55-minute contest, winning 43 of the 47 points on which he put his first serve in play. Medvedev saved the only two break

points he faced in the seventh game of the opening set, but Sinner's tiebreaker prowess proved too much. Medvedev was up 5-4 in the first-set tiebreaker when he let a ball sail by him and it landed in. He'd go on to save one set point, but Sinner gave himself another with a blistering forehand that the Russian couldn't handle and pocketed the set with a thundering service winner.

Medvedev looked on track to level the match when he raced to a 4-0 lead in the second-set decider — aided by Sinner's second double-fault of the match. But Sinner roared home to join Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer as the only players to win all six of the ATP's hardcourt Masters 1000 tournaments. "It feels amazing, great achievement," said Sinner, who was already turning his gaze

to the Miami Open, the second leg of the "Sunshine Double" where men's first-round play begins on Wednesday. "I have couple of days to relax (but) there is not so much time in between here and Miami... we try to play the best tennis possible there, too."

Medvedev said the outcome was "bittersweet" after a semi-final victory over Alcaraz — who beat him in the Indian Wells finals in 2023 and 2024 — that felt like winning the tournament. "But that's not the reality," he said. "There is a final to play. I had my opportunity, small opportunity in the first set. A bit bigger opportunity in the tiebreak in the second. "But at the same time, I was hanging by not big margins in the whole set. "It's a bittersweet feeling where it feels good to do what I did this week. But of course I wanted to try to push him even more. He was serving phenomenal. (It) was super tough to be on the return position today." While Medvedev missed a chance to become just the second player to beat both Alcaraz and Sinner in the same tournament, the former world number one underscored his return to form after a disappointing 2025 campaign and will return to the top 10 on Monday. "It's great to see Daniil back playing this level," Sinner said. "I do believe that tennis needs him." — Agencies



Briefs

PGMEA issues special circular for membership renewal

SIALKOT: The Pakistan Gloves Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PGMEA) on Monday issued a special circular to its members regarding the renewal of membership for the year 2026-2027. According to the announcement, the process for submitting the annual membership fee began in February 2026 and will continue until March 31, 2026. Members have been requested to deposit their dues at the PGMEA office in Sialkot. The membership fee was Rs.4,000 for Associate Class and Rs.5,000 for Corporate Class. Members were also required to submit supporting documents, including a copy of the previous year's income tax return and a copy of the sales tax registration certificate. —APP

Gold price decreases by Rs 1,800 per tola

ISLAMABAD: The price of 24 karat per tola gold decreased by Rs 1,800 and was sold at Rs 522,762 on Monday compared to its sale at Rs 524,562 on the previous trading day. All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association reported. The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs 1,543 to Rs 448,184 from Rs 449,727, whereas the price of 10 grams of 22 karat gold went down by Rs 1,414 to Rs 410,850 from Rs 412,264. The rates of per tola silver decreased by Rs 100 to Rs 8,441 from Rs 8,541, whereas that of ten grams silver declined by Rs 86 to Rs 7,236 from Rs 7,322. The price of gold in the international market decreased by \$18 to \$5,000 from \$5,018, while that of silver declined by \$1.00 to \$79.57, the Association reported. —APP

Rupee gains 01 paisa against US Dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Monday appreciated by 01 paisa against the US Dollar in interbank trading and closed at Rs 279.30 compared to the previous day's closing at Rs 279.31. According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs 279.00 and Rs 280.35, respectively. The price of the Euro against the Rupee decreased by Rs 0.86 to close at Rs 319.54 from the previous day's close of Rs 320.46, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese Yen remained stagnant and closed at Rs 1.75, whereas the exchange rate of the British Pound witnessed a decline of Rs 1.33 and closed at Rs 370.00 compared to the previous day's Rs 371.33. The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham remained unchanged and closed at Rs 76.03 and the Saudi Riyal lost 01 paisa to close at Rs 74.42. —APP

Azerbaijan, Belgium explore energy coop

BAKU, March 16 (AZERTAC/APP): Parviz Shahbazov, Azerbaijan's Minister of Energy, met with a delegation from Belgium, led by former Prime Minister Yves Letermé, with representatives of W Kracht, a company specializing in the development of onshore wind energy projects in the country, also in attendance. The meeting focused on cooperation in the implementation and export of renewable energy projects in Azerbaijan. Minister Parviz Shahbazov noted that Azerbaijan plays an important role in promoting stability and constructive cooperation in the region. In this context, the country's energy policy, particularly the development of renewable energy sources and the creation of energy corridors, has attracted the attention of international partners. —APP

Cabinet body briefed on comfortable fuel stocks, supply chain

Speaking during the meeting, the Finance Minister emphasized that the government remains fully focused on ensuring uninterrupted availability of petroleum products across the country

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Committee to Monitor Petrol Prices met again today at the Finance Division under the chairmanship of the Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, as part of the Committee's ongoing daily review of developments in the energy sector in light of evolving regional conditions. The meeting was attended by Federal Minister for Petroleum Mr. Ali Pervaiz Malik, Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Mr. Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry, the Governor State Bank of Pakistan, and federal secretaries and senior officials from the concerned ministries, divisions and regulatory authorities. The Committee undertook a comprehensive review of petroleum product stock positions across the country and was briefed in detail on the current national inventory of crude oil and refined petroleum products, ongoing import arrangements, and supply chain logistics. The Committee was informed that the country remains adequately positioned in terms of fuel availability, with March requirements fully secured. It was further noted that, based on current cargo planning and supply arrangements, coverage is available up to mid-April and efforts are underway to extend coverage further towards the end of April. Overall stock levels and scheduled imports indicate that the country maintains comfortable inventories of crude oil and key petroleum products for March, with sufficient



planning in place to ensure continued availability during April. The meeting also reviewed procurement patterns and maritime logistics in the context of ongoing regional developments. In this regard, the Committee emphasized the importance of further diversifying sources of supply to enhance resilience of the national energy supply chain. The meeting was informed that procurement strategies are already moving towards greater diversification, with efforts underway to broaden sourcing from the international market and reduce reliance on any single corridor, thereby strengthening Pakistan's overall energy security. Speaking during the meet-

ing, the Finance Minister emphasized that the government remains fully focused on ensuring uninterrupted availability of petroleum products across the country. He noted that the current stock position and supply outlook remain stable and that, based on the reports presented, there is no basis for panic buying or unnecessary stockpiling of fuel. The meeting directed the relevant authorities, in coordination with OGRA and the provincial governments, to closely monitor stock levels and market activity to check any incidence of hoarding. It was emphasized that any attempts to create artificial shortages or disrupt normal supply

would be dealt with strictly in accordance with the law. Reaffirming the government's commitment to maintaining stability in the energy market, the Finance Minister directed all concerned ministries, regulators, and agencies to maintain close coordination and continue rigorous monitoring of stock levels and supply flows so that the fuel supply chain remains smooth and public confidence is maintained through timely and accurate information. The Committee will continue to meet on a daily basis to review petroleum stocks, import flows, market conditions and supply chain developments to ensure uninterrupted availability of fuel across the country.

NGC achieves milestones in transmission, grid system upgradation

LAHORE: National Grid Company of Pakistan (NGC) has achieved two significant milestones aimed at strengthening the country's power transmission network and improving system reliability in Lahore and Hyderabad. The up-gradation work of 220kV Transmission Line Sheikhupura-Bund Road Lahore CCT (I & II) has been successfully completed from Tower No. 01 to Tower No. 55, during approved shutdown period from 03 January to 14 March 2026. The transmission line has been energized on load on an interim basis, marking an important milestone in the project's progress. Under the project scope, a total of 84 new towers is being installed along a 28 km transmission line with Twin Bundle Rail conductor configuration. So far, 83 foundations and 70 tower erections have been completed. 18 km of conductor stringing, dismantling of 53 old towers and removal of 18 km of old conductor have also been carried out. During a recent site visit, DMD (AD&M) Engr. Rasheed A. Bhutto reviewed the ongoing activities and appreciated the progress of the project. NGC has also energized a new 220/132 kV, 250 MVA Autotransformer at 220kV Grid Station Tando Mohammad Khan Road, Hyderabad, making another step forward in strengthening the national transmission infrastructure. The autotransformer has been installed by NGC's Project Delivery South Formation under World Bank-funded National Transmission Modernization Project (NTMP-I). The addition of this autotransformer will enhance transformation capacity, improve system reliability and ensure a more stable voltage profile for consumers of Hyderabad Electric Supply Company (HESCO). Managing Director NGC, Engr. Altaf Hussain Malik, appreciating the efforts of project teams, stated that timely completion of these works will strengthen the national transmission network and support reliable power supply to consumers. —DNA

War risk, freight surge endanger trade outlook for Pakistan :Atif

KARACHI: Mr. Atif Ikram Sheikh, President FPCCI, has stressed that escalating military tensions in the Middle East and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz have triggered alarm across Pakistan's trade and industry landscape - with business leaders warning that soaring freight costs and delayed shipments could derail country's economy. Mr. Atif Ikram Sheikh highlighted that following the outbreak of the Iran conflict in late February 2026, global shipping markets have been thrown into turmoil. With commercial vessel traffic through the strategic waterway grinding to a halt and shipping lines have imposed crippling war-risk surcharges - raising fears of a balance of payments crisis for Pakistan. The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) has called for immediate government intervention to protect the nation's trade and industrial sectors. FPCCI Chief explained that the geopolitical instability in the Gulf poses a threat to the country's export competitiveness - with approximately 80 per cent of Pakistan's crude oil imports and

a quarter of our liquefied natural gas (LNG) transiting through the Strait of Hormuz - and, any prolonged disruption will inevitably bleed into our foreign exchange reserves and trigger severe inflationary pressures. Mr. Atif Ikram Sheikh highlighted that the financial toll on logistics has been immediate and staggering. Container freight rates on major routes have skyrocketed. Furthermore, shipping lines have introduced emergency war-risk surcharges ranging from \$1,500 to \$3,500 per standard container (TEU). President FPCCI has cautioned that these logistical bottlenecks could spell disaster for the nation's premier export sectors as transit times to our key markets in the European Union and the United States are expected to increase by 15 to 20 days due to vessels rerouting. If these supply chain disruptions persist, the value-added textile sector alone could witness a 10 to 20 per cent drop in exports this month - and, we cannot afford to have our trade deficit widen under the current IMF program, he

added. Mr. Atif Ikram Sheikh elaborated that the crisis is already reverberating through the domestic economy as transshipment rollovers and severe delays have been reported at Karachi's port terminals because global shipping giants have suspended bookings for Pakistan for Gulf-bound cargo. Mr. Saqib Fayyaz Magoon, SVP FPCCI, said that compounding the crisis for local manufacturers is the recent Rs 55 per liter spike in domestic diesel prices - which has pushed inland transportation costs up by an estimated 15 to 25 per cent. Industry representatives argue that standard 30-day fixed inland freight contracts are no longer viable; leaving exporters highly-vulnerable to weekly fuel price shocks. The FPCCI leadership has urged the government to formulate an emergency contingency plan, including the exploration of B2B barter trade mechanisms with regional partners and securing alternative fuel supply chains - to insulate the domestic market from the worst of the global economic fallout. —DNA

Frenchman jailed in Azerbaijan for 10 years for 'spying'

In October, Aliyev said that "past misunderstandings between the two countries have been resolved" after meeting Macron in Copenhagen

BAKU: Azerbaijan on Monday sentenced a Frenchman to 10 years in prison in an espionage case launched during a period of diplomatic tensions between Paris and Baku that have now eased. Martin Ryan was arrested in December 2023 and went on trial in January last year, when relations between Azerbaijan and France had deteriorated to new lows over Paris's support for Armenia, Baku's longtime rival. The court found him guilty of spying against Azerbaijan and sentenced him to 10 years, an AFP reporter in the courtroom said. Prosecutors had sought an 11-year prison sentence, accusing Ryan of cooperating with employees of France's security services allegedly operating from the French embassy in Baku. They said he gathered information about Azerbaijan's relations with Turkey, Iran and Pakistan, as well as about companies linked to Russia and China. Ryan was tried alongside Azerbaijani citizen Azad Mamedli, who was convicted of high treason and sentenced to 12 years behind bars. Authorities said Ryan recruited Mamedli and arranged for him to meet French intelligence agents, who allegedly tasked him with recruiting Azerbaijanis and Russians at a Moscow university where he studied. In his final statement to the court, Ryan denied spying and said he had acted unknowingly. "I consider myself guilty only in that I should not have established contacts with some embassy employees, or that I should have shared information about them with the appropriate authorities," Ryan told the court. "I did not spy. I am not a spy, and during the court case I tried to prove this." "Misunderstandings resolved" Ryan's lawyer has said his client also holds British nationality. Paris has rejected the accusations against him and called for Ryan's immediate release, insisting he is not linked to French intelligence and arguing he has been caught in the crossfire of diplomatic tensions. Relations between France and Azerbaijan have shown signs of improvement since last autumn, months after Baku accused Paris of backing Armenia during the protracted conflict between the Caucasus neighbours. Paris meanwhile alleged Azerbaijan was stirring unrest in France's overseas territories and dependencies. Earlier this month, French President Emmanuel Macron and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev spoke by phone and discussed revitalising bilateral relations and prospects for cooperation, according to Aliyev's office. A French diplomatic source told AFP last month: "For a little over a year now, we have resumed more active contacts (with Baku) in order to put the relationship back on a better track regarding the various disagreements we had - and still have. "We want to carry forward a process of normalisation with Azerbaijan," the source said, adding: "Among the disagreements between our two countries is the fate of Martin Ryan." In October, Aliyev said that "past misunderstandings between the two countries have been resolved" after meeting Macron in Copenhagen. —APP

Kazakhstan ranks as second-largest investor in Eurasian region

ASTANA: Kazakhstan is the second-largest investor in the Eurasian region, Trendzaz reports. This was stated by Alexander Zaboiev, Head of the Centre for Integration Studies at the Eurasian Development Bank (EDB), during an online presentation of the analytical report titled "Investment Dynamics in the Eurasian Region - Results and Trends." According to him, Kazakhstan is the second-largest investor in the region, where for many years the country had been the leader in terms of attracting investments from countries across the Eurasian region. "Over the past two years, due to the dynamic growth of investment in Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan has slightly overtaken Kazakhstan in terms of the volume of investments attracted to its economy. However, Kazakhstan remains both the largest investor in the region and one of the key recipients of investment," he explained. He noted that a significant share of investments made by Kazakh companies is concentrated in the construction sector. These are mainly projects implemented in Central Asia. "In addition, there are a considerable number of projects in the transport and logistics sector. It is also important to note that Kazakhstan is currently pursuing a very active policy aimed at expanding its transport and logistics capabilities. For this reason, it is acquiring assets in several other countries of the Eurasian region, which allows it to build convenient logistics routes to global markets. As an example, the purchase of a stake in Georgian port infrastructure can be mentioned," Alexander Zaboiev added. Traditionally, the resource sector has dominated in terms of attracted investment. This is linked to oil and gas projects on the Caspian shelf. Earlier, it was reported that U.S. investor is set to inject \$1.1B into Karaganda region mining projects. —APP

Iranian protesters fled 'hell' at home, watch war from exile

SULAIMANIYAH: Iranian activist Farhad Sheikhli fights back tears as he recalls the crack of gunfire and his fellow protesters falling under a hail of bullets. Now, having fled to Iraq, he watches from afar as American and Israeli strikes pound his country. "I literally saw hell," said the 34-year-old Iranian Kurd in Sulaimaniyah, Iraqi Kurdistan's second city, as he showed AFP photos he took during recent anti-government protests of bodies lying on the bloodied ground. But his biggest worry today is for the safety of his family back home. With the Internet under a blackout in Iran, Sheikhli said he relies on a friend who only occasionally manages to get online. "He calls my father and tells me how they are. That is the only way I get news of them," he said. Returning to Iran is no longer an option, according to Sheikhli, whose only remaining dream is to travel to Germany to finish his studies in law. As the war enters its third week, Sheikhli said people are now more cautious and struggling with worsening living conditions. "They are also still mourning the heavy price they have already paid" during the recent protests, he said, referring to the government crackdown that rights groups say killed thousands. He said he can't lose hope that "one day a social revolution will allow me to go back, but for now the risk is too great." After the crackdown in January, Sheikhli fled to the autonomous Kurdistan region in Iraq, fearing arrest and torture back home, where the mustached, bespectacled man had been no stranger to anti-government protests. In 2022, he joined the vast crowds that poured onto the streets to denounce the death in detention of young Mahsa Amini after she was arrested for wearing her hijab improperly. Back then, he was jailed three times and subjected to torture that left him with hearing loss. Even so, he once again joined the anti-government protests in December and January. "The crackdown on the people, the slaughter, it was massive. I saw it myself," he said. Arresto Pasbar was also taking part in the 2022 protests when shotgun pellets peppered his body, leaving him blind in his left eye. "I have undergone five surgeries," Pasbar, 38, told AFP in Sulaimaniyah. Fearing for his life, he fled Iran for Turkey. —APP

APNS commends current, old dues' recovery



KARACHI: The Executive Committee of the APNS at its meeting held on Monday adopted the Annual Report for the year 2025-26 as well as the annual Accounts for the year 2025. The Executive Committee appreciated the Secretariat's efforts in recovering current and old dues. The members of the Executive Committee considered the

state of print media and freedom of press in the country. The meeting was attended by the following, Senator Sarmad Ali, President, Mr. Shahab Zuberi, Vice President, Mr. Muhammad Athar Kazi, Secretary General, Mr. Bilal Farooqui (Aghaz), Ms. Fauzia Shaheen (Dastak) Mr. Najamuddin Sheikh (Deyanat), Mr. Muhammad Younus Mehar (Halchal), Kazi Asad Abid (Ibrat), Syed Akbar Tahir (Jasarat), Mr. Javed Mehr Shamsi (Kaleem), Mr. Aamir Malik (Mashriq Quetta), Mr. Tahir Qureshi (Naey Ufaq) Ms. Zahida Abbasi (Nau Sijj), Mr.

Mubashir Mir (Pakistan), Mr. Humayun Gulzar (Sayadat). Following attended the meeting on Zoom, Mr. Mohsin Bilal, Joint Secretary, Mr. Naveed Kashif, Finance Secretary, Mr. Mohsin Seyal (Aftab), Mr. Waseem Ahmed (Awam Quetta), Mr. Anwar Mahmood Bhatti (Centre Line), Mr. Naveed Chaudhry (City 42), Mr. Bilal Mahmood (Nawa-i-Waqt), Mr. Adnan Faisal (Jiddat), Mr. Imtihan Shahid (Khabrain), Mr. S.M. Munir Jilani (Paigham), Mr. Faisal Zahid Malik (Pakistan Observer), Mr. Muhammad Awais Khushnood (Sahafat), Mr. Irfan Athar (Tjarat),

Briefs

Man murders his wife, five children

DNA

MANDI BAHAUDDIN: Sargodha police on Monday said they arrested two individuals, including a man who allegedly murdered his wife and five children for so-called 'honour' before attempting to take his own life. The tragic incident was reported from Chak 25 South area of Punjab's Sargodha district. Sargodha District Police Officer (DPO) Muhammad Sohaib Ashraf confirmed to Dawn that the primary suspect, as well as another man nominated in the case, was in their custody. The DPO added that the primary suspect, who was the slain woman's husband, was in a stable condition. A first information report (FIR) was registered at Bhagatwala Police Station on the complaint of the woman's brother in the early hours of Monday. It invoked sections 302 (Punishment of qatl-i-amd), 311 (Ta'zir after waiver or compounding of right of qisas in qatl-i-amd) and 322 (Punishment for qatl-bis-sabab) of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC). The deceased were identified as the suspect's wife, his daughter aged 15-16 years, three sons aged 5-6 years, 9-10 years, 12-13 years, and a few-month-old son, according to the FIR.

10 head in hospital fire in India

NEWS DESK

NEW DELHI: A fire at a government-run hospital in eastern India killed at least 10 critically ill patients who were admitted in the trauma care unit, officials said on Monday. Building fires are common in India due to a lack of firefighting equipment and a routine disregard for safety regulations. The fire broke out early on Monday on the first floor of the SCB Medical College and Hospital in Odisha state's Cuttack city, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi told reporters. "A short circuit caused the fire in the trauma ICU ward where patients were being treated," he said, adding that 23 patients were present on the floor at the time of the incident. Ten people died following the blaze, while the remaining patients were moved to other wards, he added. At least 11 staff members suffered burn injuries as they tried to rescue the patients. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the incident "deeply painful" in a post on social media and offered his condolences to the families of the victims. He also announced compensation of \$2,160 to affected families.

Inquiry against Motorway police officials initiated

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The National Highway and Motorway Police (NHMP) has initiated a fact-finding inquiry against its officials for allegedly showing leniency to a well-known television anchorperson, Mansoor Ali Khan, after he was intercepted for over-speeding on the motorway. According to official sources, the incident occurred on February 28 when a motorway patrol team was conducting speed-checking near Chakri Interchange 310 at around 5:30pm. During the operation, officials detected a vehicle travelling at 166 kilometres per hour, well above the prescribed speed limit. The patrol team, comprising Inspector Police Waseem Murtaza and Sub-Inspector Saadat Hassan, signalled the vehicle to stop. However, the driver allegedly did not stop at that point and continued driving.

US, China seek to wrap Paris talks on managed trade

Beijing, Washington discuss establishment of new formal mechanisms to help manage trade and investment

NEWS DESK

BEIJING: Top US and Chinese economic officials were due to conclude talks in Paris on Monday, with potential areas of agreement in agriculture, critical minerals and managed trade that could be taken up by US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing, sources familiar with the discussions said. The sources told Reuters that the "remarkably stable" talks led by US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng would set in motion possible "deliverables" for Trump's expected trip to China at the end of March to meet with Xi. But the leaders would have the final say, they added. Trump, however, told the Financial Times in an interview published on Sunday that he could also delay his summit with Xi later this month as he presses Beijing to help unblock the crucial Strait of Hormuz closed by Iran. "We may delay," he said of the trip. The US and Chinese delegations met for more than six hours on Sunday at the Par-

is headquarters of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, a club of mostly wealthy democracies that does not count China as a member. In the talks, the Chinese side showed openness to potential additional purchases of US agricultural goods including poultry, beef and non-soybean row crops, one of the sources said. China was still committed to buying 25 million metric tons of American soybeans for each of the next three years under the Trump-Xi October 2025 trade truce, the source added. Spokespersons for the US Treasury and the U.S. Trade Representative's office declined to characterise the talks, while Chinese officials left on Sunday without speaking to reporters. In a statement on Monday, China's commerce ministry rebuked the United States over a trade investigation into forced labour, urging Washington to "correct its wrongdoings", and citing representations made to the United States. "Meaningful" progress in Sino-US economic cooperation could restore confidence to an increasingly fragile global economy, the

official Xinhua news agency said in a commentary on Sunday. The Paris talks follow several meetings to ease tension last year between Bessent, He, US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer and Chinese chief trade negotiator Li Chenggang. The two sides discussed the establishment of new formal mechanisms to help manage trade and investment between the world's two largest economies that may be considered by Trump and Xi in Beijing, the sources said. Technical talks on the proposed US-China "Board of Trade" and "Board of Investment" were expected on Monday. One of the sources said that the Board of Trade was the more developed of the two proposals, and would be aimed at finding products and sectors where the U.S. and China could grow trade in a balanced way without compromising each other's national security or critical supply chains. The Board of Investment would not set broad investment policies but would address "discrete investment issues" that may arise between the countries, the source said. The sources also said US officials discussed the flow of Chinese-pro-

duced critical minerals to US companies and raised concerns about the US aerospace industry's lack of access to yttrium from China, which is used in jet engine turbines, among other applications. One of the sources said the two sides "found some ways to loosen up" more challenging areas in critical minerals, but did not provide specifics. Before the talks, Greer had told CNBC on Friday that the US wanted "to make sure that we continue to get the rare earths we need for our manufacturing base, that they keep buying the kinds of things they should be buying from us, and that the leaders have a chance to get together and make sure that the relationship is going the way we want it to go." Greer and Bessent also emphasised in the talks the US desire for China to increase purchases of Boeing B.A.N jetliners and US coal, oil and natural gas, which could be further discussed on Monday, the sources said. But with little time to prepare and Washington's attention focused on the US-Israeli war on Iran, prospects for such major trade breakthroughs were limited, in Paris or at the Beijing summit, trade analysts said.

Pakistan extends condolences to Ethiopia

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Monday extended its deepest condolences to the government and people of Ethiopia over the devastating floods and landslides that struck the country. "Our thoughts and prayers are with the affected communities, and we commend the efforts of the Ethiopian authorities who are working tirelessly to assist those in need," Foreign Office spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said in a statement on Monday. He reaffirmed Pakistan's support for the people of Ethiopia and expressed the country's readiness to extend assistance in any way possible. According to an official statement issued by the Ethiopian government, the landslide occurred in Laka Kebele, Gacha Baba Woreda, claiming the lives of several people who were present in the area at the time of the disaster. The country has also declared a three-day national mourning period following a landslide in the Gamo Zone of the South Ethiopia Regional State. - APP

Terror attack on police post foiled

PESHAWAR: A terrorist attack on a police post in the jurisdiction of Nasir Bagh Police Station here on Monday was foiled after security personnel responded promptly. According to police, terrorists attempted to target the Sakhi Pul police post taking the cover of darkness. However, the personnel deployed at the post retaliated immediately and effectively, forcing the attackers to flee the scene. No casualties were reported. Following the attack, security forces cordoned off the area and launched a large-scale search operation to trace the fleeing suspects. Police across the city have been put on high alert, and security has been further tightened to prevent any untoward incident. Police authorities said all available resources were being utilized to maintain law and order and bring the attackers to justice. - APP



ISLAMABAD: Khazar Farhadov, Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Pakistan presenting a souvenir to Federal Information Minister Attaullah Tarar. - DNA

Pakistan's LNG supplies to run out after April 14

The global price hike also led to the federal government raising petrol and diesel prices by Rs55 per litre as surging international prices, fuelled by the US-Israel war with Iran, put pressure on domestic energy costs

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Liquefied natural gas (LNG) will no longer be available in Pakistan after April 14 due to supply disruptions linked to tensions in the Middle East, a Senate panel was told on Monday. The meeting of Senate Standing Committee on Petroleum, chaired by Senator Manzoor Ahmed, was informed that LNG imports from Qatar had been completely suspended since March 2, raising concerns about gas availability for the power sector in the coming weeks. The Middle East conflict threatens LNG shipments from Qatar, the world's second-largest LNG exporter after the United States, which supplies the bulk of Pakistan's imported LNG used to power electricity plants during peak demand. Shipping through the narrow waterway has nearly come to a halt since the start of the US-Israeli war on Iran. The disruption has blocked the export of around

one-fifth of the world's oil supply and liquefied natural gas, pushing global oil prices to levels not seen since 2022. The global price hike also led to the federal government raising petrol and diesel prices by Rs55 per litre as surging international prices, fuelled by the US-Israel war with Iran, put pressure on domestic energy costs. During today's briefing, the Ministry of Petroleum officials said Pakistan had two LNG supply agreements with Qatar, but shipments had been affected amid the ongoing regional conflict. Out of eight cargoes scheduled for March, only two arrived, while six cargoes expected in April are unlikely to reach the country. As a result, officials warned that LNG would not be available in the country after April 14, adding that gas demand in the power sector would not be fully met in April. They said alternative sources would be used to bridge the shortfall, including the possibility of purchasing LNG from Azerbaijan, although spot purchases could cost around \$24 per unit compared with \$9 under Qatari contract, potentially leading to more expensive electricity generation. The committee was also told that Sui Southern Gas Company had reduced gas supply by 50% to one fertiliser plant, while gas supply to the power sector had fallen from 300 mcmcf to 130 mcmcf. Officials assured the committee that domestic consumers would continue to receive a gas supply.

Chaudhry Sugar Mills case

NAB challenges LHC order on Maryam Nawaz inquiry

Bureau says inquiry found no evidence of corruption against Punjab CM Maryam Nawaz

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has challenged the Lahore High Court's (LHC) decision related to Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz in the Chaudhry Sugar Mills case before the Federal Constitutional Court. The case pertains to alleged money laundering and income beyond means via "dubious" business transactions of the Chaudhry Sugar Mills, of which Maryam was a major shareholder. The LHC, in November 2019, released Maryam in the sugar mills case on bail, subject to surrendering her passport to the court. Later, an LHC full bench, in October 2022, returned her passport after the NAB said it did not require the travel document anymore. In its petition, the NAB argued that the high court interfered in the authority of the NAB chairman by questioning the decision to close the inquiry against CM Maryam. The bureau requested the constitutional court to declare the high court's February 4, 2026, order null and void, maintaining that the accountability watchdog had the legal authority to withdraw proceedings before filing a reference. According to the petition, the Chaudhry Sug-

ar Mills case was of a private nature and did not involve any loss to the national exchequer. NAB further stated that no evidence of corruption or corrupt practices against Maryam surfaced during the investigation. The bureau also argued that the Lahore High Court wrongly interpreted Section 31B(1) of the NAB amendments. It maintained that the NAB chairman has complete legal authority to terminate any proceedings before a reference is filed. NAB contended that the high court violated the law by making the closure of the inquiry conditional upon approval from the accountability court. According to the petition, the court attempted to alter the law by adding words not present in the legislation, arguing that imposing a requirement of judicial approval was equivalent to amending a law passed by parliament. It stated that if parliament had intended such approval to be mandatory, it would have explicitly written it into the law. The petition recalled that CM Maryam had been accused of money laundering and suspicious transactions in the Chaudhry Sugar Mills inquiry. However, NAB later closed the case after concluding the investigation and declaring it a private matter. Following the closure of the inquiry, Maryam approached the LHC seeking the return of her Rs70 million surety bonds.



ADB gives 'final chance' to \$360m Economic Corridor project

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has granted a final one-month extension for the disbursement of a \$360 million loan for the embattled Central Asia Regional Economic Corridor (CAREC) Trans-China-III project, which has already been delayed by around a year due to issues with the National Highway Authority (NHA). "The ADB approves an extension of bid validity from March 6, 2026, to April 5, 2026 (for a period of 30 days). This shall be the last and final extension of bid validity. The NHA is requested to ensure that the contract award is completed within this extended period, as no further extension is envisaged by the ADB," the bank said in a recent letter. "Within the same period, the NHA is also requested to provide any new and material information justifying the delay for ADB's review. In the absence of such information, or if the contract is not awarded within the extended bid validity period, the matter may need to be assessed as a potential non-compliance case, which could affect the financing of the contract and any subsequent procurement actions related to this package," the ADB said. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court has dismissed a petition by the Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) challenging the bidding process under which a joint venture of three firms - NXCC, Dynamic Constructor and Rustam Associates - was declared successful bidder. The SC, while disposing of the PPRA petition, endorsed the Islamabad High Court's findings regarding the procurement process conducted by the NHA for the N-55 project. Loan disbursement deadline extended till April 5 It held that the verification of bids submitted by the three-firm joint venture and its credentials had been properly undertaken by the NHA and that no further verification was required. Earlier, the IHC had rejected PPRA's petition against the Rs172 billion CAREC Tranche-III award to the joint venture. In its verdict, the court warned that the regulator's recent decisions "may also lead to the refusal of the finance facility agreed by the ADB," and declared the petitions infructuous.



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