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US President Trump banks upon Japan PM in today meet

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Envoy says Hormuz Strait open for Pak

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Because of Eidul Fitr

Pak temporarily pauses Operation Ghazab lil-Haq

In case of any cross-border attack, military operation will immediately resume with renewed intensity, warns info minister

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Wednesday announced a temporary pause in the ongoing Operation Ghazab lil-Haq against terrorists and their support infrastructure in Afghanistan in view of the upcoming Islamic festival of Eid ul Fitr. In a X post, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar said that upon Islamabad's own initiative as well as on the request from the brotherly Islamic countries, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkiye, the government has decided to announce a temporary pause in the ongoing military operation against the terrorists. "The pause shall be applicable from midnight 18/19 March 2026 to midnight 23/24 March 2026," he added. The information minister said that Islamabad offers this gesture in good faith and in keeping with the Islamic norms. Tarar, however, warned that in case of any cross-border attack, drone attack or any terrorist incident inside Pakistan, the military operation will immediately resume with renewed intensity. The security forces launched Operation Ghazab lil-Haq (Righteous Fury) last month after the Taliban regime's unprovoked actions along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Sharing brief summary of losses by Fitna Al Khawarij and the Afghan Taliban regime, the information minister said that 707 terrorists have been killed and 938 injured so far. He said that Afghan Taliban regime's 255 posts have been destroyed and 44 captured. The minister added that 237 tanks, armoured vehicles and artillery guns have been destroyed, and that 81 terrorist and support infrastructure sites across Afghanistan were effectively targeted by air.

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Taliban regime hiding militants in govt buildings

Lt Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry says India-supplied drones used by Afghan regime against Pakistan

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Director General (DG) Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said that Afghan Taliban regime is sheltering militants in state infrastructure, saying that Pakistan was fighting a war against terrorism imposed on it. "The Afghan Taliban regime has hidden terrorists in government buildings," he said while speaking on Geo News programme Capital Talk. The ISPR chief said that the Afghan Taliban regime has maintained links with terrorist groups, including a son of Osama bin Laden. "The Afghan Taliban regime is a terrorist organisation that has taken control of the country, and this is what

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Strait of Hormuz open for Pak ships

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Iranian Consul General Akbar Eisa Zadeh has stated that the Strait of Hormuz is open for Pakistani vessels. He told media that ships carrying crude oil or gas can pass through the Strait of Hormuz after coordinating with the Government of Iran. He added that vessels from Pakistan, along with several other countries, are allowed to transit through the Strait. The Iranian Consul General further stated that the Strait of Hormuz is closed only to the United States, Israel, and their allies. He emphasized that, except for countries involved in aggression, the Strait remains open for international trade. It is worth noting that a Pakistani tanker has recently become the latest vessel to pass through the Strait of Hormuz, while staying close to Iran's coastline. According to the American publication Bloomberg, the Pakistani-flagged ship "Karaachi" passed through a narrow channel between Iran's Larak and Qeshm islands on Sunday, then proceeded along the coast toward the Gulf of Oman. The vessel, en route to Pakistan, is carrying over 80 million liters of oil.



RIYADH: Pakistan Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar arrives in Riyadh to attend regional moot. - DNA

Shuttle diplomacy

Shehbaz discusses Iran war with Kuwait, Oman leadership

The Prime Minister, once again, condemned in the strongest terms, the attacks on Kuwait and expressed condolences over the loss of precious lives, while praying for early recovery of the injured

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif held a telephone conversation with His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al Khaled Al Hamad Al Mubarak Al Sabah, Crown Prince of Kuwait, earlier. During their warm and cordial conversation with His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al Khaled Al Hamad Al Mubarak Al Sabah, Crown Prince of Kuwait, earlier. During their warm and cordial conversation on the auspicious occasion of Eid ul Fitr, conveying their best wishes for peace, prosperity, and well-being to the people of Pakistan, Kuwait, as well as the entire Muslim Ummah. The Prime Minister also conveyed his warm and respectful regards to the Amir of Kuwait, His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah. The Prime Minister, once again, condemned in the strongest terms, the attacks on Kuwait and expressed condolences over the loss of precious lives, while praying for early recovery of the injured. He expressed Pakistan's solidarity with, and support to the brotherly people of Kuwait.

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DPM /FM Ishaq Dar to visit KSA

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: At the invitation of the Foreign Minister of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister, Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, will undertake a visit to Riyadh from March 18-19 to attend a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the regional countries. "During the meeting, the DPM/FM will express complete support for the territorial integrity, sovereignty, and political independence of all brotherly countries in the region, and call for an end to all attacks on their territory," the Foreign Office Spokesperson, Wednesday, said in a press release. The DPM/FM will reiterate Pakistan's call for a swift end to the ongoing conflict and urge the need for return to dialogue and diplomacy.

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Briefs

Pak extends airspace ban for India flights

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) has issued a fresh Notice to Airmen (Notam), stating that the country's airspace will remain closed to Indian-registered aircraft until April 24. Pakistan has kept its airspace shut to Indian flights since April 23, 2025, a move that has resulted in losses amounting to billions of rupees for Indian airlines. Pakistan closed its airspace for Indian airlines in a tit-for-tat move after New Delhi suspended the critical Indus Water Treaty amid heightened bilateral tensions following the deadly Pahalgam attack in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK).

Eid in Saudi Arabia on Friday

DNA

RIYADH: "The Supreme Court has decided that tomorrow, Thursday, is the completion of the 30th day of the month of Ramazan, and that Friday is the day of the Blessed Eidul Fitr," the Saudi Press Agency reported. Across the Muslim world, Ramazan festivities this year were overshadowed by the ongoing war in the Middle East, triggered by the US and Israel's attack on Iran. The Gulf region has been pummeled with repeated strikes by Iran in a retaliatory blitz, with airports, residential areas, energy installations and military bases targeted with ballistic missiles and drones. Last week, the Pakistan Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (Suparco) forecast that Eidul Fitr was expected to fall on March 21 as the chances of sighting the Shawwal moon on March 19 were low.

FO rejects India's 'unwarranted' statement

In a statement issued on Wednesday, FO spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said, "Pakistan rejects the baseless, misleading, and unwarranted statement issued by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs on Pakistan's ongoing action against terrorist infrastructure in Afghanistan"

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office (FO) on Wednesday rejected the "baseless, misleading, and unwarranted statement" issued by India's Ministry of External Affairs on Pakistan's action against terrorist infrastructure in Afghanistan. The development after targeted overnight airstrikes were carried out in Kabul and Nangarhar amid Operation Ghazab lil-Haq. A day earlier, Pakistan maintained that it had targeted 'Camp Phoenix' - a former US military base currently being used by Afghan Taliban forces - even as Afghanistan claimed a drug rehabilitation centre had been bombed instead. Subsequently, India's Ministry of External Affairs had condemned Pakistan's action, calling it a "direct threat" to regional peace and stability. In a statement issued on Wednesday,

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Pakistan says ready to mediate regional tensions

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Information Minister Attaullah Tarar has said that Pakistan is ready to play its role in de-escalating the tensions in the Middle East as the US-Israel war on Iran intensified. Iran targeted Tel Aviv with missiles carrying cluster warheads in retaliation for Israel's assassination of its security chief, Ali Larjani, and Basij Commander Gholamreza Soleimani. Iran's Supreme National Security Council, which Larjani led as secretary,

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New medical board examines Imran Khan



STAFF REPORT

RAWALPINDI: The medical check-up of PTI founder Imran Khan has been completed by a newly formed board comprising five doctors and staffers at Adiala jail following instructions from the Islamabad High Court (IHC). The jailed PTI founder has been diagnosed with central retinal vein occlusion (CRVO), a serious eye condition, according to a report submitted to the Supreme Court by his lawyer and the court's amicus curiae, Salman Safdar. The condition occurs when the main vein draining blood from the retina becomes blocked and is often associated with cardiovascular risk factors such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes and heart disease. Sources said on Wednesday

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Russia slams US-Israeli 'murder' of Iran's leaders

With Larjani no more, Iran loses legacy of strategic leadership in its national security, diplomacy; Larjani's influence had shaped Tehran's statecraft for decades, making his loss a heavy blow to Iranian nation



close adviser to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei until the supreme leader died in an airstrike last month. He was martyred at the age of 67, Iranian media said on Tuesday. Israel's Defence Minister, Israel Katz, said earlier on Tuesday that he had been assassinated in an Israeli strike. The scion of a leading clerical family with brothers who rose to high positions after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Larjani was seen as canny and pragmatic but always fiercely determined to uphold Iran's theocratic system of government. A Revolutionary Guards commander during the Iran-Iraq war, he became head of Iran's national broadcaster before

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NEWS DESK

MOSCOW: Veteran Iranian politician Ali Larjani was one of the most powerful figures in the Islamic Republic, an architect of its security policy, and a

US intel chief says Iranian govt intact

DNA

WASHINGTON: US intel chief says Iran made no effort to rebuild nuclear enrichment capability as NATO allies work on ways to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, while Iran confirms the Israeli killing of its intelligence minister and issues fresh evacuation threats to civilians near oil facilities in Gulf countries. In testimony to the Senate Intelligence Committee, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard stated that Iran has made no attempt to restart or rebuild its uranium enrichment program since US and Israeli strikes last year obliterated key nuclear facilities during Operation Midnight Hammer. Gabbard's assessment, which appears to contradict earlier

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NA Speaker vows to fortify Pakistan-China ties

Both sides discussed ways to further strengthen Pakistan-China relations and enhance bilateral cooperation across multiple sectors.

LAHORE: Punjab Assembly (PA) Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan held a meeting with the newly-appointed Chinese Consul General Sun Yan at the Assembly Chamber, here on Wednesday.

Both sides discussed ways to further strengthen Pakistan-China relations and enhance bilateral cooperation across multiple sectors. The speaker congratulated the Consul General on assuming his new responsibilities and extended his best wishes.

During the meeting, detailed discussions were held on the progress of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor projects and prospects for collaboration in emerging sectors.

Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan said that Pakistan-China

friendship was an enduring bond rooted in mutual trust, respect and shared interests, adding that China had always stood by Pakistan in challenging times. He emphasized that exchange of parliamentary delegations would further deepen bilateral ties, noting that China had consistently remained a sincere and reliable partner in Pakistan's development journey.

He added that under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, new dimensions were being added to Pak-China economic relations, while Punjab, under Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, was progressing steadily on the path of development and prosperity.

Highlighting the importance of CPEC, the Speaker termed it a cornerstone of Pakistan's sustainable

development and a key driver of economic growth for both countries, enhancing Pakistan's strategic importance at regional and global levels. He also appreciated cooperation in the education sector, noting that people-to-people contacts between Pakistan and China were continuously strengthening.

Consul General Sun Yan thanked the Speaker and reaffirmed China's commitment to further expanding bilateral relations, particularly through enhanced cooperation in trade and education.

Member Punjab Assembly Rana Arshad, Secretary General Punjab Assembly Chaudhry Aamir Habib, Principal Secretary Imad Hussain Bhalli and Director Media Rao Majid Ali were also present on the occasion.—DNA



FAISALABAD: A large number of people arrive at the railway station to leave for their home town to celebrate Eidul Fitr with their loved ones.

KP announces work from home on Fridays

DNA

PESHAWAR: The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has announced a temporary policy introducing work from home on Fridays for all government offices, along with spring holidays for educational institutions starting March 24. According to an official notification issued by the Establishment and Administration Department on Tuesday, the decision has been taken on the directives of the Chief Minister to promote fuel conservation and reduce administrative expenses. The policy will initially remain in effect for two months, or until conditions improve. Under this initiative, all provincial government offices will observe 100% remote work on Fridays, aiming to minimize employee commuting and cut down the consumption of petrol and diesel.

In addition, the government has directed that spring break will begin on March 24 in all public and private educational institutions across the province. Due to the combination of weekend holidays (Friday to Sunday), academic activities are expected to be suspended for up to four consecutive days. However, the notification clarifies that board and university examinations will continue as per their scheduled timetable and will not be affected by these holidays.

Efforts afoot to improve Charsadda edu institutions

PESHAWAR: Provincial Minister for Elementary and Secondary Education, Arshad Ayub Khan has said that all necessary measures would be taken to improve education sector and provide basic facilities in District Charsadda. He expressed these views while chairing an online meeting regarding educational activities in District Charsadda, here on Tuesday.

Provincial Minister Fazal Shakor Khan, Members of Provincial Assembly from District Charsadda including Arif Ahmadzai, Arshad Khan Umarzai, Iftikharullah Khan and Khalid Khan, Secretary Elementary and Secondary Education Muhammad Khalid, Special Secretary Education Iftikhar Ali Khan, Chief Planning Officer Zainullah and Dis-

trict Education Officers participated in the online meeting. During the meeting, matters related to resolving issues in educational institutions of District Charsadda were reviewed including development projects in the education department, construction of additional classrooms in schools, provision of furniture, transition of schools to solar energy and necessary upgradation.

Addressing the meeting, the Provincial Education Minister directed district education officers of Charsadda to ensure steps for provision of quality education. He said that district officers should focus on students' education and improved results, present detailed reports in the next meeting regarding school rehabilitation, repairs, construction of addi-

tional classrooms, furniture and enrollment campaigns at the district level.

He further stated that to maintain international standards in educational projects in the province, procurement through SIDD (Standardized Infrastructure Development Board) is mandatory and future tendering will be conducted transparently through e-procurement systems.

He also said that overcrowded institutions would be identified and 25 more middle schools would be established in District Charsadda. He directed district officers to work in coordination with elected representatives and take necessary steps to resolve issues faced by the education sector.—APP

Top bidders of choice numbers plates disqualified

PESHAWAR: The Excise and Taxation Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has taken major action in the auction of premium vehicle registration numbers (special number plates), disqualifying several top bidders and ordering confiscation of their bid security deposits (CDRs). According to the department on Wednesday, the public auction was held on February 14 at Qayyum Sports Complex in Peshawar, where participants placed exceptionally high bids. However, many top bidders failed to deposit the required payment within the stipulated time, resulting in their disqualification. As per the official notification, the first-position bidders have been declared ineligible and their security deposits have been forfeited. Authorities stated that this step was taken to ensure transparency and safeguard government revenue. The disputed numbers are now being offered to second-highest bidders at their quoted prices. The department warned that if second-position bidders also fail to make full payment within the given deadline, similar action will be taken against them. In such cases, the opportunity will pass to third-position bidders and if they also fail, the numbers will be re-auctioned. Documents reveal that several highly attractive and premium numbers faced this issue, causing temporary revenue loss to the government. Key examples include DAWAR-1 for which, the highest bid was PKR 175 million, now forfeited. It is being offered to the second bidder for PKR 170 million. WAZIRISTAN-1, initially bid at PKR 40.6 million, now offered to the second bidder for PKR 40.5 million. Similarly, premium numbers such as Bajaur-1, Mehsud-1 and Pashun-1 have also been transferred to second bidders after the first bidders failed to meet payment obligations. The Excise Department has instructed second-highest bidders to deposit the full amount within three working days. Failure to comply will result in confiscation of their security deposits and transfer of the numbers to the next eligible bidders.—APP

From Peshawari chappal to Kashmiris bangles Eid shopping craze peaks ahead of Chand Raat

PESHAWAR: As holy Ramadan comes close to an end, Peshawar begins to glow quite literally as strings of lights flicker above shopfronts, narrow lanes hum with chatter, and the city's historic charm transform into a living tapestry of colour, tradition, and anticipation ahead of Chand Raat. In the heart of Qissa Khwani bazaar and crowded Meena bazaar besides jampacked Saddar bazaar, the story is the same as it has been for generations, attracting shoppers of all ages completing shopping Families weave through the bustling crowds, children clutching shopping bags while parents negotiate prices with practiced ease. Every purchase, no matter how small, carries a sense of ritual amid happiness. From the sturdy elegance of Peshawari chappals to the delicate shimmer of bangles, Eid shopping here is more than a seasonal errand rather it is a shared cultural experience. Across Jahangirpura, Meena Bazaar, University Road, and Saddar Bazaar, the crowds swell after iftar. The air carries a mix of laughter, bargaining voices, and the aroma of street food.

Shops remain open late into the night, welcoming a steady stream of customers determined to complete their Eid preparations. For 12-year-old Malaika Khan, the experience of shopping is magical. Standing beside her father, her eyes move quickly from one stall to another, dazzled by rows of glittering bangles. "Shopping for bangles and henna tattoos always doubles the joy of Eid," she says, her excitement barely contained. "I will come back on Chand Raat for decoration of ands by henna expert." Her words echo what many feel this is not just shopping rather it is a moment of belonging and enduring traditions. Men gather around footwear stalls at Jhangirpura and Qissa Khwani where the iconic Peshawari chappal remains a staple. At a small shop in Qissa Khwani Bazaar, shopkeeper Umar Ali arranges rows of handcrafted pairs being sold like a hot cake. "We have introduced softer leather and updated designs this year," he says. "But the essence is the same as people still want tradition." For customers like Meena Gul, that tradi-

tion is non-negotiable. "My Eid feels incomplete without Peshawari chappal," she says. "It's comfortable and part of who we are." Nearby, women crowd jewelry stalls, drawn to the sparkle of Kashmiri bangles and the intricate designs of artificial ornaments. The rhythmic clinking of glass bangles creates a soundtrack unique to this time of year. Henna stalls arguably the heart of Chand Raat are already busy. Artists sit patiently, sketching floral patterns and intricate motifs onto eager hands. Young girls compare designs while others opt for trendy henna tattoos, blending tradition with modern flair. As Chand Raat nears, these stalls will become the epicenter of celebration—places where friendships are renewed, laughter flows freely, and the night stretches longer than usual. For many, applying henna is not just adornment; it is a memory in the making. However, beneath the festive glow, a quieter concern lingers. Many shoppers speak of rising prices of readymade clothes, shoes, and cosmetics that strain household budgets.—APP

Call for energy emergency to protect KP industry

PESHAWAR: Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) urged the government to impose "Energy Emergency" amid escalating Middle East crises, stating that the conflict poses an existential threat to Pakistan's fragile economic recovery and the export-oriented industrial base of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. President SCCI, Junaid Altaf, senior vice president Muhammad Nadeem and vice president Sabir Ahmad Bangash along with executive committee in a joint statement here on Wednesday asserted that the compounding burden of regionally uncompetitive petroleum prices and a restrictive monetary regime is pushing the domestic cost of doing business toward a breaking point. Senior office bearers highlighted a widening disparity between Pakistan and its regional trade competitors, noting that while neighboring economies maintain accommodative, single-digit interest rates, Pakistani industries are being stifled by a 10.5 per cent policy rate. The high cost of borrowing, coupled with the recent exorbitant Rs.55 per litre hike in petroleum prices, has effectively crippled the capital investment and stalled industrial modernization across the province, said Junaid Altaf, president of the chamber. The repeated increases in petroleum levies are inflating the cost of captive power generation, leaving exporters with severely eroded margins in an increasingly unforgiving global market, he observed. The SCCI chief while talking about the vulnerabilities in the national energy supply chain expressed serious concerns over Pakistan's heavy reliance on Gulf energy imports, specifically crude oil and Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar. President Junaid Altaf warned that any further maritime disruption would trigger a catastrophic cost-of-living crisis and jeopardize the manufacturing sector's energy security. Critically, the SCCI chief pointed out to the skyrocketing freight costs, which, according to him, have spiked by 300 per cent due to "war-risk" insurance classifications, and noted that the rerouting of shipments is adding up to 20 days to transit times for exports destined for the EU, UK, and US markets. President Junaid Altaf stressed that the direct linkage of Port Qasim and Karachi Port to Gulf shipping lanes leaves domestic supply chains highly exposed to regional volatility. To mitigate these risks, he added the SCCI joined the national call for a robust framework to enhance Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR). Junaid argued that the current 28-day buffer is insufficient for a prolonged regional conflict, advocating instead for a resilient target of 60 to 90 days of consumption.—DNA

CDA orgianze Talent Hunt Ramdan Cup for sports promotion

ISLAMABAD: Capital Development Authority (CDA)'s Talent Hunt Ramdan Cup 2026, organized for the promotion of sports and especially cricket in the Federal Capital, Islamabad, has successfully concluded. The final matches of the male and female categories of the CDA Talent Hunt Ramdan Cup 2026 and the closing ceremony were held at the National Cricket Ground F-7 Islamabad. According to details, in the male category, the G-10 Junoon Cricket Club won the final match, while the F-8 JJ Cricket Team emerged as the runners-up. In the women's event, the F-6 Mavericks won the title by 6 wickets, with the F-10 United Cricket Team finishing as the runners-up. In the male category, Muneeb Maqbool was declared Player of the Tournament, while in the female category, Fajar Naveed was named Player of the Tournament. Chief Guest at the closing ceremony was the Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, who distributed prizes among the players who demonstrated outstanding performance. A total of 10 teams participated in the male category, which included the top eight clubs from the Federal Capital, Islamabad. Two team's, Chairman CDA XI and

Minister XI, were selected by the CDA through open trials from across Pakistan. Meanwhile, in the women's category, 6 teams participated in the tournament, selected after trials of talented female players from all over Pakistan. In the male category, the Best Bowler award went to Osama Afridi, the Best Batsman award was given to Zeeshan Farid, and the Best Wicketkeeper award was claimed by Fahad Saleem. Similarly, in the women's event, Maham Anis performed best among the batters. In the bowling department, Noor-ul-Ain was declared the Best Bowler, while Mahwish was awarded the Best Wicketkeeper. Cash prizes totaling over 2 million rupees were distributed among the players. The winning women's team was awarded 6 lakh rupees and the runners-up received 3 lakh rupees. The winning men's team received a prize of 3 lakh rupees, and the runners-up were awarded 1.5 lakh rupees. In the with the direction of Chairman CDA and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, the prize money for the women's event was increased from 3 lakh to 6 lakh rupees. Chairman CDA said that, on the instructions of Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, the CDA played its full role in making this tournament a success. CDA and Chief Commissioner Islamabad,

Muhammad Ali Randhawa, said that more grounds for sports would be established for women. He said that 8 more grounds would be built in the Federal Capital, Islamabad, on the pattern of F-7. He said that sports facilities would be further improved and made excellent for the citizens. Chairman CDA and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, said that the CDA's Sports and Culture Directorate, including the field staff and umpires who worked day and night to make this tournament a success, deserve congratulations. He said that he is especially grateful to senior journalists Hamid Mir, Talat Hussain and the Executive Director of Capital Hospital, who are present here. Chairman CDA said that these senior gentlemen always provide excellent guidance regarding the promotion of cricket in the Federal Capital, Islamabad. Chairman CDA and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, said that the aim of this tournament was to conduct a best talent hunt for our national women's cricket team. He said that net practice for women is being formally initiated. Senior journalist Hamid Mir said that for the first time in the history of the Federal Capital, Islamabad, the CDA successfully organized a tournament for women.—DNA

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

MARCH

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

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& Rescue Services.4451122
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RDA.....5555864
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Cantonment Board 9270151-3



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Potohar Town.....9209224
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ISLAMABAD: An attractive view of clouds hovering over the skies of Federal Capital.

Summit suggests steps to boosts investment climate

ICCI President said that recommendations would be presented to the govt to position Pakistan as regional business hub

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Investment Potential Summit concluded in the federal capital with a strong consensus among business leaders and investment experts that Pakistan holds robust economic fundamentals and vast untapped potential capable of driving sustainable growth and attracting both local and foreign investment.

The summit, hosted by President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) Sardar Tahir Mehmood, brought together prominent figures from the business community to deliberate on strategies aimed at enhancing investment and economic development. Key speakers included Advisor to the Prime Minister on Tourism Sardar Yasir Ilyas Khan, Chairman Faisal Town Group Chaudhry Abdul Majeed, ICCI

President Sardar Tahir Mehmood, and Director Faisal Town Group Zohair Majeed.

Participants noted that the summit's recommendations will be formally presented to the government for consideration, with the aim of shaping future economic policy and investment strategies.

Speakers emphasized that Pakistan's strategic geographic location, large domestic market, youthful population, and abundant natural resources provide a strong foundation for economic expansion. They identified key sectors such as real estate, tourism, hospitality, construction, information technology, agriculture, energy, and manufacturing as high-potential areas that could significantly accelerate economic growth if supported by progressive policies and a stable business environment.

The summit highlighted that Pakistan is

well-positioned to emerge as a regional economic hub, provided structural reforms are implemented and investor confidence is strengthened through consistent and transparent economic policies. To achieve these objectives, the summit proposed a comprehensive set of recommendations, including ensuring policy consistency and macroeconomic stability, improving ease of doing business through regulatory reforms and digitalization, and introducing investor-friendly tax policies and incentives. Other key proposals included accelerating infrastructure development in transport, logistics, and energy; promoting special economic zones and industrial clusters; strengthening public-private partnerships; enhancing export promotion initiatives; and expanding digital infrastructure to support the growing IT sector. The participants also stressed the importance

of developing tourism infrastructure, encouraging sustainable urban development, improving access to finance for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and startups, and strengthening vocational training programs to equip youth with market-relevant skills.

Furthermore, the summit underscored the need for transparent and efficient regulatory frameworks to build investor trust and called for promoting Pakistan's positive investment image globally through economic diplomacy and international investment forums.

Participants expressed confidence that implementing these recommendations would create a more business-friendly environment, stimulate economic activity, boost investor confidence, and position Pakistan as a competitive destination for global investment, while ensuring inclusive and sustainable economic development.

Police urge use of 'Safe Tourism' app

MURREE: The Murree Police have issued a travel advisory for Eid-ul-Fitr and finalised security and traffic arrangements in anticipation of a heavy influx of tourists to the hill station.

District Police Officer (DPO) Murree, Dr Muhammad Raza Tanveer, in a video message on Wednesday, urged visitors to use the 'Safe Tourism Murree' mobile application to ensure a smooth and secure journey.

He said an estimated 400,000 to 500,000 tourists were expected to visit Murree, popularly known as the 'Queen of Hills', during the holidays. Citing last year's figures, he said 28,688 vehicles entered Murree on the first day of Eid-ul-Fitr 2025, followed by 51,380, 57,855 and 35,119 on the second, third and fourth days, respectively, bringing hundreds of thousands of tourists to the district. The DPO said the court-prescribed daily capacity stood at 8,000 vehicles but could surge to around 12,000 during peak occasions, and a comprehensive traffic management plan had been devised to handle the expected rush.

He urged tourists to download the 'Safe Tourism Murree' app from the Google Play Store before departure to the hill station, saying it provided one-touch access to emergency services, including the Police, Rescue 1122, Traffic Police and the Motorway Police. Dr Raza Tanveer said the application also featured a Virtual Women Police Station for female travellers, direct WhatsApp connectivity with the DPO for emergencies, and real-time information on hotels, tourist spots and police stations, along with weather updates through an integrated AI chatbot.

Referring to the Pakistan Meteorological Department's forecast of rain and thunderstorms in Murree and adjoining areas during the Eid holidays, the DPO urged tourists to check weather updates regularly, drive carefully in rain and fog, and strictly follow traffic rules.

"Ensuring a safe and friendly environment for tourists is our top priority," he said, adding that the 'Safe Tourism' app marked a significant step towards modernising tourist facilitation and safety. —APP

FGEHA summoned over delay in Green Enclave-1 Project

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Ombudsman has taken a notice of the non-implementation of its earlier findings regarding the long-delayed Green Enclave-1 housing project and has summoned a senior officer of BS-19 from the Federal Government Employees Housing Authority (FGEHA) to appear in person at the next hearing scheduled for March 30, 2026.

The officer is required to explain the failure to comply with the Ombudsman's decision issued on December 17, 2025, which had called for immediate steps to address the prolonged delay in the project's development.

The case stems from a complaint filed in November 2025 by Chaudhry

Amjad and several other allottees, representing approximately 3,282 individuals awaiting possession and development of their plots since the project's launch in 2009. The complainants highlighted that despite making full payments, including additional land charges, no substantial development work has taken place at the site.

In its earlier ruling, the Ombudsman had directed the FGEHA to submit a compliance report along with a clear and time-bound development schedule within 60 days. However, the scheduling of a fresh hearing indicates that the authority has either failed to submit a satisfactory report or has not demonstrated tangible progress on the ground.

Sources suggest that the FGEHA has yet to finalize a viable roadmap for the completion of the project, further deepening uncertainty among the allottees.

Expressing his frustration, Muhammad Anwar described the project as a "distant dream" that remains unrealized despite the passage of 17 years. Allottees urged the government to intervene decisively and consider alternative arrangements for the execution of the project. They have specifically called for the project to be handed over to the Defence Housing Authority (DHA), arguing that such a move could expedite development if the FGEHA continues to fall short of its commitments. —APP

Call for Int'l Inquiry into crimes against humanity in IIOJK

Concluding his address, Wani said, "The mass graves and blinded children demand that witnesses act now—or stand condemned by their own inaction

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of the Kashmir Institute of International Relations, Altaf Hussain Wani, has called for the establishment of an International Commission of Inquiry to investigate crimes against humanity in Indian-occupied Kashmir (IOJK). He made these assertions while addressing the 61st session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) during the Item 4 General Debate, where he represented the World Muslim Congress, received a press release here on Wednesday. Referring to the genesis of the Kashmir dispute, Wani said it was deeply unfortunate that binding United Nations resolutions recognizing Kashmir as a disputed territory have been ignored for more than seven decades. "The right to the final disposition of Kashmir has been taken away from Kashmiris by force," he said, adding that what he

described as a systematic machinery of terror continues to operate with metronomic precision. Highlighting what he termed systematic repression, Wani stated that enforced disappearances have resulted in thousands of "half-widows." He further pointed to the existence of mass graves across the valley, containing the tortured and unidentified bodies of innocent Kashmiris, as evidence of state repression. He also alleged that pellet shotguns have been deliberately used against children, with hundreds reportedly blinded—an act he said reflects the callousness of the occupying forces. "These are not aberrations but calculated instruments of state policy," he asserted. Discussing the economic impact of the conflict, Wani claimed that Kashmir's natural resources—including rivers, minerals, and forests—are being exploited to benefit the occupying power while imposing

engineered poverty on the local population. He described this as a colonial-style model of resource extraction. Calling Kashmir an internationally recognized dispute, he emphasized that "sovereignty confers no license for genocide." Wani also criticized what he described as the silence of powerful states, saying they often prioritize economic interests over human rights. "Their inaction forges chains of complicity. The impunity granted today becomes tomorrow's template for atrocities," he said. He added that the people of Kashmir have resisted for decades, refusing to surrender their identity or dignity. "They demand only the right to determine their own destiny," he remarked. Concluding his address, Wani said, "The mass graves and blinded children demand that witnesses act now—or stand condemned by their own inaction. —DNA

When cash stops: New evidence from BISP shows no backlash against women after exit

ISLAMABAD: A new study by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) provides important and reassuring evidence on what happens when women stop receiving cash transfers under Pakistan's flagship social protection program, the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP). Contrary to widespread concerns, the research finds no evidence of backlash, loss of empowerment, or deterioration in household well-being after women exit the program. The study, titled "When Cash Stops: What Happens When Women Suddenly Stop Receiving Cash Transfers?" and authored by Dr. Nasir Iqbal, Amen Jalal, Mahreen Mahmud, and Kate Vyborny, addresses a critical gap in global policy research: while much is known about the benefits of entering cash transfer programs, very little is understood about what happens when payments stop. The research leverages a unique policy moment—BISP's nation-wide recertification based on an updated Proxy Means Test (PMT). In 2022, many previously eligible households became ineligible overnight, creating a natural comparison between women who continued receiving transfers and those who lost eligibility despite prior participation. Focusing on households near the eligibility cutoff in Layyah district, the study employs a rigorous regression discontinuity design combined with panel data to isolate the causal effects of program exit. One year after exiting BISP, the study finds no increase in intimate partner violence, no deterioration in marital relationships or mental health, no decline in women's decision-making power or mobility, no reduction in women's economic participation, and no negative effects on children's schooling or labour. The results are precise enough to rule out even modest negative impacts on key indicators of women's empowerment. Cash transfers to women are widely recognized for improving agency, bargaining power, and welfare, but policymakers have long worried that these gains might reverse once transfers stop, potentially triggering household conflict or social backlash. This study challenges that assumption, suggesting that empowerment gains may persist beyond the life of the transfer, possibly due to learning and habit formation within households, lasting recognition of women's financial role, and adjustment through other income sources. Importantly, even though BISP payments were often the only income directly controlled by women, they constituted a relatively small share of total household expenditure, allowing households to adjust without destabilizing gender dynamics. For policymakers in Pakistan and beyond, the results carry significant weight. Recertification and graduation processes can proceed without fear of immediate gender backlash, costly protective interventions for exiting beneficiaries may not be necessary on gender grounds alone, and program design can focus more confidently on targeting efficiency. —DNA

CCP okays Cyan, DH merger into Dawood Lawrencepur

ISLAMABAD: The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) on Wednesday approved a merger as part of a corporate restructuring within the Dawood Group, following a review under the Competition Act, 2010. The transaction involves the amalgamation of Cyan Limited and DH Partners Limited into Dawood Lawrencepur Limited (DLL), according to CCP press release issued here. The approved transaction relates to a Scheme of Amalgamation dated 16 December 2025, under which Cyan Limited and DH Partners Limited will be merged into Dawood Lawrencepur Limited. As part of the arrangement, all assets, liabilities, and obligations of the merging entities will be consolidated into DLL, with shares of Dawood Lawrencepur Limited to be issued to the shareholders of Cyan Limited and DH Partners Limited. Dawood Lawrencepur Limited is a public listed company and a subsidiary of Dawood Corporation (Private) Limited, primarily engaged in managing investments in subsidiaries and associated companies involved in renewable energy solutions, including wind and solar energy, as well as maintaining an investment portfolio in local capital markets. Cyan Limited is also a public listed investment company and a subsidiary of Dawood Corporation, focusing on equity investments in companies with high growth potential. DH Partners Limited is an investment management company that manages equity investments and was listed on the Pakistan Stock Exchange in February 2025. In its Phase-I competition assessment the Commission observed that all three companies operate primarily as investment vehicles, managing portfolios and investments across different sectors. —APP

Briefs

ICT Police DIG
Joiya chairs
meeting

ISLAMABAD: Director General Safe City/Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Traffic Muhammad Haroon Joiya chaired a meeting with traffic officers to review performance and finalize arrangements for smooth traffic flow on Chand Raat and Eid-ul-Fitr.

An official told on Wednesday that the meeting was attended by Chief Traffic Officer Captain (R) Hamza Humayun, SP Traffic Majid Iqbal and zonal DSPs. The DIG Joiya appreciated the performance of traffic officers during the holy month of Ramadan and directed them to further improve arrangements for the upcoming Eid days.

The official added that a comprehensive traffic plan was devised to ensure uninterrupted traffic flow across the federal capital, facilitating citizens during Eid celebrations.

Joiya emphasized that all officers should remain fully active in the field and ensure effective management at busy markets, commercial centers and major roads. He reiterated that providing maximum travel convenience to citizens during Eid days remained the top priority of Islamabad Traffic Police.—APP

Cement
exports
increases 10%

ISLAMABAD: The exports of cement witnessed an increase of 10.03 percent during the first eight months of the current fiscal year 2025-26 as against the exports of the corresponding months of last year. The cement exports from the country were recorded at US \$228.935 million during July-February (2025-26) against the exports of US \$208.063 million during July-February (2024-25), according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS). In terms of quantity, the cement export however witnessed a nominal decrease of 0.59 percent from 5,861,258 metric tons to 5,826,413 metric tons, the data revealed. Meanwhile, year-on-year basis, the cement exports witnessed an increase of 11.19 percent during the month of February 2026 as compared to the same month of last year.—APP

RWMC
launches Eid
cleanliness
drive

RAWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi Waste Management Company (RWMC) has launched a comprehensive cleanliness drive across all tehsils of Rawalpindi Division to ensure a clean environment for citizens during Eid-ul-Fitr days. Sanitation teams have been deployed round the clock with a target to maintain "zero waste" conditions at mosques, Eidgahs, parks, recreational spots, markets and graveyards, an RWMC spokesman said on Wednesday. Despite rain, the spokesman, the RWMC workers continued special cleaning and washing of masjids and Eidgahs to facilitate worshippers in offering Eid prayers in a clean and hygienic environment. "Cleaning of graveyards is also being expedited to ensure visitors face no inconvenience while paying respects to their loved ones," he added. The spokesman said special teams were assigned to clean markets, bazaars, parks and recreational areas, while bus stands were also being washed.—APP

Pakistani student finds
creative path in Chengdu

ISLAMABAD: For Muhammad Yasir Baloch, a Pakistani undergraduate studying art and product design at Chengdu University, every day in China is a lesson in creativity, according to a report carried by China Economic Net (CEN) on Wednesday. The buildings towering over the city's streets, the ancient artifacts displayed in its museums, and the intricate embroidery on traditional garments all speak to him in the language of design. "When I see the buildings here, I am truly amazed," Yasir Baloch said, describing his surroundings with evident enthusiasm. "China is a vast country with a rich tapestry of culture, art



ISLAMABAD: Women busy in shopping at Karachi Company market to preparation upcoming Eid Ul Fitr festival in the Federal Capital.

ADB launches new country
partnership strategy for Pak

These priorities will be reinforced by crosscutting themes of good governance and institutional strengthening, gender equality and social inclusion, digital transformation, and regional cooperation and integration, said ADB press release received here

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Wednesday launched a new country partnership strategy (CPS) for Pakistan, 2026-2030, setting out a roadmap to support the country's transition to sustainable and inclusive growth through private sector-led development. The five-year strategy will focus on three pathways: enabling private sector development, advancing inclusion and empowerment, and enhancing resilience and sustainability. These priorities will be reinforced by crosscutting themes of good governance and institutional strengthening, gender equality and social inclusion, digital transformation, and regional cooperation and integration, said ADB press release received here. "The new CPS is tailored to address Pakistan's structural challenges and promote ro-

bust and lasting growth, which benefits the whole country, especially the poor and vulnerable," said ADB Country Director for Pakistan Emma Fan. "It promotes strategic investments and reforms across key sectors to stimulate economic growth and create jobs. ADB looks forward to supporting Pakistan's public and private sectors in delivering on this ambitious agenda," Emma Fan added. Pakistan has stabilized its macroeconomic conditions following a series of external shocks and has initiated important structural reforms. The CPS responds to this evolving country context by emphasizing export- and investment-led growth, supported by improved public financial management, an enabling business environment, and investments in high-impact sectors. Private sector development is a central feature of the strategy. Under the CPS, ADB will support reforms and investments to reduce regulatory and

compliance burdens, improve infrastructure, expand access to finance, promote public-private partnerships, and boost private sector operations. The CPS also identifies transformative opportunities in critical minerals, railways and multimodal connectivity, energy security and clean energy, agricultural productivity and value chains, integrated water resource management, and skills development and employment. To effectively address emerging challenges, ADB will increasingly deploy integrated solutions, combining policy reforms, sovereign and nonsovereign financing, technical assistance, and knowledge support across Pakistan. To advance inclusion and empowerment, ADB will prioritize investments and reforms to strengthen human capital, expand access to quality social services, and promote women's economic participation. With Pakistan's high vulnerability to extreme weather events and disasters,

resilience and sustainability form a core pillar of the strategy. ADB will support initiatives on disaster risk management, climate change adaptation and mitigation, integrated flood and water resource management, agriculture value chains and food security, and air quality improvement. The CPS aligns with Pakistan's National Economic Transformation Plan (2024-2029) and ADB's Strategy 2030 Midterm Review, reflecting shared commitments to achieving robust economic growth, social inclusion, resilience, and environmental sustainability. It also reinforces ADB's close coordination with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other development partners to maximize development impact. ADB has been supporting Pakistan since the country became a founding member in 1966, committing 764 public sector loans, grants, and technical assistance totaling \$58.6 billion.

Archbishop
calls for
compassionate
rehabilitation

ISLAMABAD: The Archbishop Dr Joseph Arshad has called for an immediate halt to ongoing actions against informal settlements (katchi abadis) in the federal capital, requesting the authorities to ensure dignified rehabilitation of the affected residents. In his statement issued here, the Archbishop said that displacing thousands of families who have been living in these areas for decades, without providing alternative housing and a clear policy framework, could lead to a serious humanitarian crisis. He requested the relevant authorities to develop a fair and sustainable solution in consultation with the affected communities. He noted that recent developments have created fear, anxiety, and psychological distress among the residents. "These families have lived here for years and have significantly contributed to the social and economic fabric of the capital," he added. Emphasizing that the right to shelter is a fundamental human right, he stated that no citizen should be rendered homeless without due legal process, respect for human dignity, and provision of adequate alternative housing. He urged policymakers to formulate a comprehensive and long-term policy framework ensuring legal recognition of long-established settlements where applicable, provision of adequate alternative housing prior to any relocation, inclusion of community representatives in decision-making processes, and protection of minorities and vulnerable groups from discrimination and forced evictions.—APP

China leads
Pakistan's
Feb FDI with
\$140m in net
inflows

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan attracted \$213.5 million in net foreign direct investment (FDI) in February, with China accounting for the largest share, Gwadar Pro reported on Wednesday quoting the State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) latest statistics. China contributed \$151.2 million in gross inflows during the month, while \$11.1 million was recorded as outflow, bringing its net investment to \$140.1 million. This represents 65.62% of Pakistan's total FDI for February. Cumulatively, during the first eight months of FY 2025-26 (July-February), Pakistan attracted a total net FDI of (\$1.19 billion). Of this total, \$635.7 million was attributed to China alone during the period.—APP

Railways beefed-up security in trains, at stations during Eid

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways Police has issued instructions to all Superintendent of Police (SP) Railways to tighten security in trains as well as at stations to avoid any untoward incident during Eid-ul-Fitr days. On the direction of Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi, the department had directed all SPs Railways to depute sufficient force at exit and entry points of all railway stations and strict watch to be carried out of suspicious persons, an official in the Ministry told APP. Pakistan Railways Police Commando Force would be deputed at vulnerable installations and in trains, while bomb disposal staff would also be kept on alert for search of luggage and passengers at railway stations. "The SPs Railways directed to conduct complete check and search of empty rakes before trains reach the platforms for departure for their destinations," the official added. All the SPs Railways have been directed to remain present on Eid holidays and randomly check trains, stations and escorting staff, he added. The official said the number of passengers was increasing day by day at railway stations and trains ahead of Eid and the Railway administration had arranged special trains across the country to facilitate the extra passengers. To facilitate smooth and hassle-free travel to the passengers during Eid-ul-Fitr, Pakistan Railways has announced the launch of five special trains on key routes across the country. This initiative, introduced under the directives of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, was announced by Federal Minister for Railways Hanif Abbasi.—APP

Zong reports
5G trial
speeds

ISLAMABAD: Zong has released results from its latest 5G speed tests conducted in Islamabad, reporting peak download speeds exceeding 1.4 Gbps. The pre-launch trials were carried out across multiple urban environments, including dense residential and commercial areas, to evaluate network performance under varying conditions, Gwadar Pro reported on Wednesday. The company said the results reflect improvements in infrastructure deployment and spectrum utilization, with a focus on enhancing spectrum efficiency. The trials were aimed at assessing the network's ability to handle high data loads, low-latency requirements, and consistent performance in

real-world scenarios. Zong has been involved in several early developments related to 5G in Pakistan. In 2019, it conducted the country's first 5G trial, establishing an initial functional node. In 2020, it completed an international 5G video call, demonstrating low-latency communication. Between 2021 and 2025, the operator continued investing in network expansion, including upgrades to existing 4G infrastructure and the introduction of AI-powered traffic management systems to improve network efficiency. Industry observers note that such trials are part of broader preparations for 5G adoption in Pakistan, where spectrum allocation and regulatory approvals are still under consideration. While no official timeline for commercial launch has been announced, operators have been conducting tests to demonstrate their readiness and technical capability. Zong stated that its planned 5G rollout will focus on ensuring a smooth transition for existing users, expanding digital services, and maintaining stable network performance during peak usage via automated optimization systems.—DNA

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Analysis: Someone else's war, everyone's crisis

DR. RIKARD JALKEBRO

WRITING this from Abu Dhabi, where the sound of intercepted projectiles has become an unwelcome feature of daily life over the past two weeks, it is difficult not to feel the weight of what the region has stumbled into. The war that was supposed to be somebody else's fight has arrived at our doorstep and, as often happens, the people paying the highest price are those who never had a say in starting it. This is the point the international response has still not faced squarely enough. Lebanon is once again suffering the consequences of a conflict shaped far beyond its borders. For decades, Iran has relied on armed non-state proxies, above all Hezbollah, to project influence across the region. That strategy has often served Tehran's interests. But the human cost has been borne elsewhere, by ordinary people living in the places where those groups operate. Few countries illustrate this more painfully than Lebanon. This did not begin yesterday. When Hezbollah began firing rockets into northern Israel following the attacks of Oct. 7, 2023, it pulled Lebanon further into a confrontation that was never truly about Lebanon's own national interest. The ceasefire in November 2024 brought only temporary relief. Nothing fundamental changed. Hezbollah remained heavily armed, deeply embedded, and willing to use Lebanese territory in pursuit of a wider regional struggle. Israelis inspect the remains of a neighbor's home that was burned following a Hezbollah rocket attack in Nahariya, northern Israel, on March 17, 2026. Iran-backed Hezbollah has been accused of dragging Lebanon into a war it cannot afford to fight. (REUTERS) When it fired into Israel again on March 2, 2026, days after the US-Israeli strikes on Iran, it made a deliberate choice with entirely foreseeable consequences for the Lebanese people. It was also a choice that served Iran's strategic narrative far more than it served Lebanon's interests. In less than two weeks, more than 800,000 people have been displaced across Lebanon. Around 700 people have reportedly been killed since March 2, including many children. Israeli strikes on Lebanon in response to Hezbollah attacks has forced over 800,000 people to abandon their homes in Beirut and in the southern parts of the country. (AP/Reuters/AFP) Shelters in Beirut are overcrowded and under-supplied. Families are sleeping in school corridors, on pavements, and on beaches. This is happening in a country where more than 80 percent of the population was already living in poverty before this latest escalation. As Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam put it: "Our country has been drawn into a devastating war that we did not seek and did not choose." The tragedy is that this is not rhetoric. It is precisely true, and precisely the point. This is what proxy warfare does. When armed groups operate from within civil-

ian spaces, civilians end up trapped in the middle. Their suffering is not simply an unfortunate side effect. It is built into the logic of this kind of conflict. Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam addressing his countrymen on March 12 amid Israeli bombardment of Beirut and others parts of Lebanon. (X: @nawafsalam) That is why it is not enough to speak vaguely about escalation or instability. Responsibility matters and it needs to be acknowledged honestly. Without that, the international debate risks focusing entirely on the symptoms while ignoring the cause. The humanitarian response, meanwhile, cannot wait for the politics to catch up. The UAE has long understood this. During the Hezbollah-Israel escalation in autumn 2024, Abu Dhabi directed \$100 million in urgent relief for the Lebanese people, alongside a further \$30 million for Lebanese citizens displaced into Syria. Through the "UAE Stands with Lebanon" campaign, aircraft and ships carried food, medical supplies, and shelter equipment to those in need. More broadly, the UAE's position as one of the world's leading humanitarian donors reflects a consistent principle: Civilians must not be abandoned because political leaders and armed actors have failed. But this crisis is moving quickly, and Lebanon simply cannot cope on its own. The country was already under immense strain before this latest round of violence, not least because of its economic collapse and the burden of hosting large refugee populations. Lebanese army soldiers and civil defense members inspect a building that burned following Israeli bombardment on the village of Marjayoun in southern Lebanon close to the border with Israel on March 17, 2026. (AFP) Aid agencies are warning that needs are rising faster than available resources. That should concern everyone. What is needed now is immediate access, immediate funding, and immediate coordination. Not another round of carefully worded concern. This crisis will also not stop at Lebanon's borders. Disruptions linked to Iranian attacks on shipping are already affecting global trade routes and energy flows. Rising fuel prices and pressure on supply chains will have consequences far beyond the Middle East. Food-insecure regions of Africa and South Asia may yet pay another price for a conflict in which they had no role. This is one of the cruelest truths about wars of this kind: They rarely remain local for long. It is also important to remember the humanitarian crises the region was already grappling with before Feb. 28. A family receives medical assistance from the Lebanese Red Cross personnel at a medical aid point assisting displaced people following an escalation between Hezbollah and Israel Beirut, Lebanon, March 16, 2026. In Sudan, years of fighting have devastated the country's social fabric and created the largest displacement crisis of our generation, pushing entire communities to the brink of starvation. Refugee camps are overwhelmed, aid is dwindling, and the international response has been slow. With the Sudan crisis still reverberating across the region, the Middle East can ill afford another one. There is no serious path forward without three things. First, emergency humanitarian access and funding for Lebanon must be secured now. Every delay means more avoidable suffering. A Lebanese flag at the top of Al-Jaafareya High School, which is being used as a shelter for families displaced from Majdal Zoun in southern Lebanon, on March 17, 2026. Second, diplomacy must move beyond vague appeals and toward a ceasefire mechanism that can actually hold. For the first time, the Lebanese government has signaled its readiness to engage directly with Israel for an immediate cessation of hostilities, and that call must be taken seriously.

Iran War Exposes Fault Lines in Trump's Team

Qamar Bashir



The same wave of strikes also reportedly eliminated Gholamreza Soleimani, the head of Iran's powerful Basij militia. These targeted killings reflect a strategy aimed at decapitating Iran's leadership structure. However, unlike past conflicts in Iraq or Libya, Iran's political system is built with layers of succession. Leadership losses, while symbolically significant, have not resulted in systemic collapse. Instead, they appear to be producing a new generation of leadership—more aggressive, more reactive, and less constrained by the caution that often accompanies experience

WHAT began as a bold show of military strength is rapidly turning into a complex geopolitical crisis marked by miscalculation, diplomatic isolation, and growing internal dissent within the United States itself. The unfolding war against Iran, launched with expectations of swift dominance, is now exposing deep cracks in strategy, alliance management, and intelligence assessment—leaving Washington increasingly isolated in a conflict it assumed others would help carry. The latest turning point came when President Donald J. Trump openly expressed frustration after failing to persuade European allies to join a U.S.-led naval coalition to secure the Strait of Hormuz. In a striking shift in tone, Trump—who had spent days urging NATO members to send warships—dismissed their refusal with visible irritation, stating, "We don't need any help actually." Yet his remarks revealed more than confidence; they exposed disappointment at what he described as NATO's "very foolish mistake" in refusing to support a war many European leaders insist they did not start. This rejection has profound implications. The Strait of Hormuz carries nearly 20% of the world's oil supply, and its disruption has already sent shockwaves through global markets. While the United States framed its request as a shared responsibility for global energy security, European leaders saw it differently. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Germany's Defense Minister Boris Pistorius made it clear: this was not a NATO mission, nor a war they were willing to join. Their refusal reflects a broader shift—one in which even long-standing allies are no longer willing to automatically align with U.S. military initiatives lacking international consensus. As external support weakens, internal dissent within the U.S. national security apparatus is beginning to surface. The resignation of Joe Kent, Director of the National Counterterrorism Center, has added a dramatic new dimension to the crisis. In a blunt and unprecedented statement, Kent declared that the war was initiated under pressure from Israel and that Iran posed "no imminent threat" to the United States. His resignation is not merely a personnel change; it signals a fracture within the very institutions responsible for shaping and executing U.S. security policy. At the same time, developments on the battlefield are intensifying the stakes. The killing of Ali Larjani in an Israeli airstrike near Tehran represents one

of the most significant escalations in the conflict. Iranian authorities confirmed that Larjani—along with his son, aides, and bodyguards—was killed in what Israel described as a "precise strike." Larjani had emerged as a central figure in Iran's wartime leadership, particularly after the earlier reported killing of Ali Khamenei at the start of the campaign. The same wave of strikes also reportedly eliminated Gholamreza Soleimani, the head of Iran's powerful Basij militia. These targeted killings reflect a strategy aimed at decapitating Iran's leadership structure. However, unlike past conflicts in Iraq or Libya, Iran's political system is built with layers of succession. Leadership losses, while symbolically significant, have not resulted in systemic collapse. Instead, they appear to be producing a new generation of leadership—more aggressive, more reactive, and less constrained by the caution that often accompanies experience. This unintended consequence may prove to be one of the most critical strategic miscalculations of the war. By removing seasoned figures capable of measured responses, the conflict risks escalating under leaders driven by urgency, anger, and a desire for retaliation. What was once a controlled confrontation is increasingly becoming volatile and unpredictable. Meanwhile, the human and economic costs continue to mount. According to Iranian government figures, more than 1,300 people have been killed in U.S. and Israeli strikes, including hundreds of women and children. In Israel, at least 12 people have been killed in Iranian missile attacks. Beyond these numbers lies a broader humanitarian crisis: civilians in multiple countries are bearing the consequences of a conflict they neither initiated nor control. Economically, the impact is being felt worldwide. Oil prices have surged due to disruptions in Gulf production and shipping routes. Insurance costs for tankers have spiked, and global supply chains are under strain. Even in the United States—despite its status as a major energy producer—fuel prices have risen, placing additional pressure on consumers and businesses. Diesel prices, in particular, are affecting transportation costs, which ripple through the entire economy. One of the most striking elements of this conflict is the growing perception that the United States entered the war without fully anticipating its broader consequences. President Trump's own remarks—expressing frustration, surprise at al-

lies' refusal, and shifting rhetoric—suggest a gap between initial expectations and unfolding reality. The assumption that allies would automatically align, that Iran's response would be limited, and that control over strategic waterways could be quickly secured has not held true. Instead, Iran has demonstrated a capacity for asymmetric warfare, leveraging geography, regional influence, and strategic chokepoints to offset conventional military disadvantages. While the United States and Israel dominate in airpower and precision strikes, Iran appears to be shaping the broader trajectory of the conflict—imposing economic costs, influencing global perceptions, and forcing adversaries into a prolonged engagement. This evolving dynamic has also triggered a shift in global alignment. Countries that once followed Washington's lead are now acting independently, prioritizing their own economic stability and political calculations. Some are engaging diplomatically with multiple sides, while others are simply stepping back, unwilling to be drawn into an escalating conflict. For the United States, the implications are significant. A war that lacks broad international support, faces internal dissent, and imposes rising economic costs presents both strategic and political challenges—particularly in a domestic environment where public opinion can shift rapidly. Ultimately, this conflict is no longer just a military campaign; it is a test of strategic judgment, alliance management, and political resilience. It raises fundamental questions about how wars are initiated, how intelligence is interpreted, and how decisions are made under pressure. The lesson emerging is stark: military power alone cannot guarantee success when the underlying strategy fails to account for complexity, resistance, and unintended consequences. In this war, the battlefield extends far beyond Iran—it reaches into global markets, international alliances, and the internal cohesion of the United States itself. And as the conflict continues, one reality is becoming increasingly clear: what was meant to be a demonstration of strength is now evolving into a test of endurance—one whose outcome remains uncertain, but whose costs are already undeniable. **Press Secretary to the President (Rtd)**
Former Press Minister,
Embassy of Pakistan to France
Former Press Attaché to Malaysia
Former MD, SRBC | Macomb, Michigan

Power Without Check: How Veto Politics is Eroding the Soul of the United Nations

Prof Dr Shujaul Mulk Khan

The ripple effects extend beyond the Security Council. The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), which is supposed to stand as the global voice for human dignity, has also suffered reputational damage. Ordinary people often ask a simple question: how can a body meant to defend human rights include countries accused of violating them? The answer, again, lies in politics. Powerful alliances, strategic voting...

THE idea that "power corrupts" is not new. The historian Lord Acton famously warned that absolute power corrupts absolutely. The veto power may not be absolute in theory, but in practice, it often behaves like it is. There is no higher authority within the UN to override it. No appeal. No accountability. And that is precisely where the danger lies. When the United Nations (UN) was founded in 1945, it carried the moral weight of a war-exhausted world that had seen the worst of human brutality. It was not meant to be perfect - it was meant to be better. Yet today, many people across the globe no longer see the UN as a guardian of justice, but as a stage where powerful nations protect their own interests. At the center of this growing disillusionment lies one controversial tool: the veto power held by the five permanent members—the United States, Russia, China, United Kingdom, and France. The problem is not merely structural - it is deeply human. Power changes behavior. It shapes priorities, and, more often than not, it shields those who hold it from accountability. Take a moment to consider what the veto actually does. It allows a single country to stop the entire world from acting - even when there is overwhelming agreement. Imagine a courtroom where one judge can overrule all others, not because they are right, but because they are powerful. Would we call that justice? This is precisely the dilemma the UN faces today. One of the most painful and widely cited examples among dozens of others, is the Syrian Civil War. For years, images of bombed cities, displaced families, and suffering children dominated global media. The world watched in horror. Yet inside the UN Security Council, repeated attempts to take decisive action were blocked - primarily by vetoes from Russia. These vetoes were not abstract diplomatic maneuvers; they had real consequences. Each blocked resolution meant delayed aid, limited accountability, and prolonged suffering. Now consider another example. The United States has consistently used its veto to block resolutions

critical of Israel, even in situations involving humanitarian concerns in the Palestinian territories. Whether one agrees with these positions or not, the pattern is clear: the veto is often used not to uphold universal principles, but to protect allies. The message this sends to the rest of the world is troubling - justice appears selective, not universal. This is where the argument becomes unavoidable: the veto power does not just slow down decision-making; it actively distorts it. It transforms the UN from a moral institution into a political battleground. And when morality becomes negotiable, institutions lose their credibility. The ripple effects extend beyond the Security Council. The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), which is supposed to stand as the global voice for human dignity, has also suffered reputational damage. Ordinary people often ask a simple question: how can a body meant to defend human rights include countries accused of violating them? The answer, again, lies in politics. Powerful alliances, strategic voting, and diplomatic bargaining shape who gets a seat at the table. This contradiction is not lost on victims of injustice. For someone living under oppression, the UN is not an abstract institution - it is a symbol of hope. But when that hope is repeatedly disappointed, cynicism replaces trust. The problem is not that the UN does nothing; it is that it does not act consistently. And inconsistency, in matters of justice, feels like hypocrisy. Supporters of the veto argue that it prevents global conflict by ensuring that major powers remain engaged in the system. There is some truth to this. Without the veto, countries like the United States or Russia might ignore UN decisions altogether. But this argument comes at a cost. Stability achieved through silence in the face of injustice is not true stability - it is suppression. Moreover, the veto creates a dangerous double standard. Smaller nations are expected to follow international law, while powerful ones can bend or block it. This imbalance undermines the very principle of sovereign equality that

the UN was built upon. It tells the world that some voices matter more than others—not because they are right, but because they are strong. There have been attempts to address this issue. Some countries have proposed voluntary limits on veto use in cases of mass atrocities. Others have suggested expanding the Security Council to make it more representative. These ideas are promising, but they face a fundamental obstacle: those who hold power are rarely willing to give it up. Reforming the veto system requires the consent of the very nations that benefit from it. So where does this leave the UN? It is neither entirely broken nor entirely effective. It still delivers humanitarian aid, supports peacekeeping missions, and provides a platform for dialogue. But its moral authority - the very thing that gives it legitimacy - is under strain. And that strain is directly linked to how veto power is used. Ultimately, this is not just an institutional problem; it is a question of political will and ethical responsibility. The veto power itself is not inherently evil - it is the behavior of those who wield it that determines its impact. When used responsibly, it can prevent reckless decisions. But when used selfishly, it becomes a tool of obstruction. The world today is more interconnected than ever. Conflicts, climate crises, and human rights violations do not respect borders. In such a world, global institutions must rise above narrow interests. The United Nations cannot afford to be seen as a club of the powerful - it must be a voice for the powerless. If the current trajectory continues, the risk is not that the UN will collapse, but that it will become irrelevant. And irrelevance, for an institution built on hope, is perhaps the greatest failure of all. In the end, the argument is simple but urgent: power, even when institutionalized as veto power, must be restrained by principles. Without that restraint, the very system designed to protect humanity risks becoming complicit in its suffering. A question comes in mind: Do the world's nation need to free the UN from the custody of Veto Powers?

Briefs

Pakistan temporarily pauses...

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He maintained that on the night of March 16, Pakistan armed forces targeted Afghan military installations in Kabul and Nangarhar. In these strikes, the Pakistan's forces destroyed drone storage and technical support infrastructure and ammunition storage sites in Kabul and Nangarhar, which were being used by the Afghan Taliban and terrorist elements to carry out attacks against innocent Pakistani civilians, he added. Meanwhile, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Director General (DG) Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry has revealed that India-supplied drones were used by the Afghan regime against Pakistan recently. The recent escalation of tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan follows Pakistan's retaliatory actions in response to suicide bombings in Islamabad, Bajaur, and Bannu, all of which were traced back to militants based in Afghanistan. Islamabad, which has repeatedly urged Kabul to prevent its soil from being used by terrorist organisations to carry out attacks, conducted intelligence-based strikes targeting seven terrorist camps and hideouts belonging to Fitna al Khawarij (FAK) — a term used for the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) — its affiliates and the Daesh-Khorasan, along with the Pakistan-Afghanistan border last week.

Taliban regime hiding..

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the United Nations is also saying. They are in contact with his [Osama bin Laden] son Hamza and have asked him to come to Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden was killed in a US raid in Abbottabad on May 2 by Navy SEALs. The US accused the al-Qaeda chief of perpetrating 9/11 attacks on New York that killed over 3000 people in 2001. The DG ISPR went on to say that Pakistan was fighting a war against terrorism imposed on it. "Pakistan is fighting a war against terrorism, and this war has been imposed on us by terrorists and their handlers," he said, adding that militant groups were India-sponsored and funded.

US intel chief says Iranian...

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White House claims about an active Iranian nuclear threat, describes the regime as "intact but largely degraded" with its enrichment capability effectively destroyed and no visible reconstruction efforts underway. Meanwhile, the war's economic fallout intensified as Iran's disruption of shipping through the Strait of Hormuz — the chokepoint for roughly one-fifth of global oil supplies — continued to drive up energy prices. President Donald Trump has urged NATO and European allies to contribute naval forces to restore freedom of navigation. Several allies have responded cautiously: the UK said it is working with partners on a "viable collective plan" but ruled out a formal NATO mission, while Germany declared the conflict "is not a matter for NATO."

Shehbaz discusses Iran war...

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He further stressed upon the need for all the regional countries to work together to maintain peace, stability, and resolve all differences through dialogue and diplomacy. While reaffirming the strong historic fraternal bonds between Pakistan and Kuwait, the Prime Minister reiterated his invitation to His Highness, the Crown Prince of Kuwait, to undertake an official visit to Pakistan at his convenience. Both leaders agreed to remain in touch. Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif received a telephone call today from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq of Oman.

Clinical PSG bury Chelsea to reach Champions League quarter-finals

PSG crush Chelsea 3-0 at Stamford Bridge to seal emphatic 8-2 aggregate win, Kvaratskhelia stars as Blues exit Champions League and Parisians march into quarterfinals in dominant fashion tonight comfortably

LONDON: Paris Saint-Germain snuffed out any chance of a Chelsea comeback with Khvicha Kvaratskhelia among the scorers in a clinical 3-0 victory at Stamford Bridge on Tuesday which took the holders through to the Champions League quarter-finals 8-2 on aggregate.

The Georgian's early opener was soon followed by a brilliant Bradley Barcola strike, quickly ending Chelsea's hopes of turning around their 5-2 deficit from the first leg of the last 16 tie last week. Substitute Senny Mayulu then fired in PSG's third in the second half, as Luis Enrique's men march on to a last-eight tie next month against either Liverpool or Galatasaray — the Turkish side go to Anfield with a 1-0 first-leg advantage on Wednesday. PSG's dream of retaining the Champions League title remains very much alive, a year after winning the trophy for the first time in their history. The Qatar-backed side's comprehensive victory in this tie gives them revenge for their loss to the Blues in last July's Club World Cup final, and indicates that they might be finding their very best form again at just the right time. This was their fourth win in a two-legged knockout tie against Premier League opposition since the start of last year, but while that record is impressive, Chelsea looked a long way short of the level required in Europe's elite club competition. Liam Rosenior's team never really appeared to believe they could come back from their collapse six days ago at the Parc des Princes, when they conceded three late goals to go from 2-2 to 5-2 down. Their attention will now turn back to the fight to qualify for the Champions League again next season, after a miserable week in which two defeats against PSG have come either side of a loss at home to Newcastle United in the Premier League. Robert Sanchez started in goal here, as he had done at the weekend, after Filip Jorgensen replaced the Spaniard and was at fault for PSG's crucial third goal in the first leg. PSG, meanwhile, gave



a start to Kvaratskhelia after he came off the bench to score a late double in Paris which swung the tie decisively in his team's way. The Parisians also made the trip undoubtedly feeling fresher after their scheduled weekend Ligue 1 game against Nantes was called off to aid their preparations. Within six minutes here they were ahead as Mamadou Sarr — making his Champions League debut — misjudged a long kick downfield from PSG goal-

keeper Matvey Safonov and Kvaratskhelia outmuscled the young Chelsea defender before beating Sanchez. The second goal came on the quarter-hour, with Warren Zaire-Emery supplying Achraf Hakimi on the right and the Moroccan finding Barcola who controlled on the edge of the box before sending a superb strike into the top-left corner. The tie was as good as over at that point, and home fans began flooding for the exits when the third goal

arrived just after the hour mark. Kvaratskhelia did the spade work this time down the left before his ball into the middle fell to Mayulu — the 19-year-old, who replaced Joao Neves at half-time, gave Sanchez no chance with a lethal first-time strike. A miserable evening for Chelsea was then compounded when Trevoh Chalobah was stretched off late on, leaving the hosts to finish the game with 10 men as they had used all their substitutes. — Agencies

Kerr fires Australia into Women's Asian Cup final

PERTH: Australia captain Sam Kerr sealed a 2-1 win over China with a stunning second-half goal on Tuesday to put the hosts into their fourth Women's Asian Cup final. The Matildas will hunt a second trophy in the continental tournament and first since 2010 against Japan or South Korea, who play in the second semifinal in Sydney on Wednesday. Scoring in front of hometown fans for the third time in the event, Kerr struck the winner on 58 minutes, threading the needle from an acute angle to send the Perth Stadium crowd into delirium. Defending champions China had leveled the

match with a Zhang Linyan penalty in the 26th minute following an early strike by Caitlin Foord, who also had a hand in Kerr's winner. "I can't really gather my emotions right now," said Kerr. "I know we came in as one of the favorites but we've taken the long road to be here and it just feels so good to be here now in the final. "These girls are like family to me so it would be a dream come true (to win the final)." Though Kerr was typically clinical, Australia coach Joe Montemurro would have been frustrated early when Mary Fowler blazed a volley over the bar in the fifth minute,

having been well served by a Kaitlyn Torpey cross. Fowler redeemed herself quickly, though, combining with Ellie Carpenter to set up Foord's goal after 17 minutes with a neat move down the right wing. Taking the ball from Carpenter near the 6-yard box, Fowler's cut-back pass found Foord who fired a low shot home, belated reward for the Arsenal forward after a quiet tournament. Australia's elation lasted all of eight minutes before defender Clare Hunt failed to deal with a high-bouncing ball behind the lines, allowing Zhang to swoop. Goalkeeper Mackenzie Ar-

nold charged out and made contact with the China midfielder who went down in the box and calmly slotted the spot kick herself. Kerr had the final say after the break, though, producing a sublime finish at the end of another Matildas counter-attack. Sliding the ball to Foord on the left, Kerr continued her run forward, took the ball back and rounded China's keeper Peng Shimeng before tucking in a low left-foot shot from a tight angle near the byline. "These are the nights you've always dreamed of. This is the reason why we play," she said. — APP

Refining sector to benefit from higher GRMs amid widening spreads

Middle East tensions push up crude, HSD, and MS prices globally

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's refining industry is poised to gain from higher gross refining margins (GRMs) as the gap between crude oil and refined petroleum product prices widens. Escalating geopolitical tensions in the Middle East have driven up global prices for crude oil, high-speed diesel (HSD), and motor spirit (MS), resulting in broader refining spreads. The spread between crude oil and HSD has climbed to around \$55 per barrel, while the gap between crude and MS stands at about \$10 per barrel. Historically, the average spread between crude and petroleum products ranges between \$25 and \$30 per barrel, according to industry data. Refinery throughput and product uplift posted a strong recovery in February 2026, with total volumes rising 29% year-on-year (YoY), driven by higher demand for MS, HSD, and furnace oil (FO), according to a report by Arif Habib Limited. HSD uplift surged 43.7% YoY to 458,000 tonnes during the month, reflecting stronger domestic consumption, reduced inflows from Iran and improved refinery utilisation.

DPM /FM Ishaq Dar to visit KSA

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He would also highlight Pakistan's diplomatic outreach efforts as well its desire to continue playing a pivotal role towards resolving the prevailing grave security crisis being faced by the region.

Pakistan says ready to mediate...

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said Larjani's son and his deputy, Alireza Bayat, were also killed in an Israeli attack on Monday night. The attack overnight on Tuesday killed two people in a neighbourhood close to densely populated Tel Aviv, where there are also key military facilities, bringing the death toll in Israel from the war to at least 14. A statement by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps read on state TV said weapons used included Khorramshahr 4 and Qadr missiles, both with multi-warheads.

FO rejects India's 'unwarranted'...

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FO spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said, "Pakistan rejects the baseless, misleading, and unwarranted statement issued by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs on Pakistan's ongoing action against terrorist infrastructure in Afghanistan." "Against the backdrop of India's active sponsorship of terrorism directed at Pakistan from Afghan soil, as well as its historical role as a spoiler, this statement merely reflects India's blatant hypocrisy and duplicity," he said.

New medical board examines...

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day that the medical team, comprising five doctors and supporting medical staff, completed a thorough two-hour assessment during which they examined the PTI founder's affected eye. In a statement, the jail administration said that the Islamabad chief commissioner had formed a new medical board comprising specialist doctors for the health assessment of the jailed former prime minister. The team includes ENT specialist Professor Altaf Hussain, cardiologist Professor Akhtar Ali Badesha, Dr Muhammad Ali Arif, and Professor Nadeem Qureshi from Al-Shifa Eye Hospital.

Russia slams US-Israeli 'murder' of Iran's leaders

FROM PAGE 01

stints running the Supreme National Security Council on either side of his membership in parliament, where he was speaker for 12 years. His role as the ultimate insider in Khamenei's Iran gave him responsibilities across a wide portfolio that included critical nuclear negotiations with the West, managing Tehran's regional ties and the suppression of internal unrest. After the US-Israeli strikes began on February 28, he was one of the first major Iranian figures to speak, accusing Iran's attackers of seeking to disintegrate and plunder the country. He also issued stern warnings against any would-be protesters. The strikes represented the ultimate failure of a nuclear policy he had helped design, which attempted to build atomic capability at the boundary of international rules without provoking an attack. In pursuing that policy, he projected the voice of the supreme leader, using his abilities as a communicator to build a rapport with Western negotiators and lay out Khamenei's vision in frequent television interviews. Even if he had survived the current war, that role may have been curtailed. In the jostling for control after Khamenei's death, it was the Guards who took an ever greater part, leaving fewer decisions to political powerbrokers like Larjani.

Girls in Pakistan more likely to miss education

Survey reveals 34% of girls are out of school compared to 22% of boys

ISLAMABAD: A recent analysis by Gallup Pakistan, using national survey data, shows that almost 28% of Pakistani children aged 5 to 16 are not attending school, with girls disproportionately affected compared to boys. The findings, drawn from the 2024-25 Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (PSLM) and the Household Integrated Economic Survey, reveal that 34% of girls are out of school compared to 22% of boys, highlighting persistent and deep-rooted gender disparities in access to education across the country. The analysis is based on data compiled by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics and examined through Gallup Pakistan's Digital Analytics Dashboard, providing a comprehensive overview of the country's education landscape and its persistent inequalities. Geographical differences are also stark and

continue to shape educational outcomes. In rural areas, 34% of children are out of school, nearly double the 18% recorded in urban centres. Analysts note that rural girls remain among the most affected groups, reflecting the combined and compounding impact of gender inequality and location-based disadvantage. Despite these challenges, overall access to education has expanded over time. Nationally, 67% of individuals aged 10 and above have attended school at some point. However, disparities remain pronounced, with attendance rates reaching 78% for men compared to just 56% for women, and 81% in urban areas versus 61% in rural regions, indicating a clear divide in educational opportunities. Literacy rates follow a similar pattern of inequality. The national literacy rate stands at 63%, but rises to 73% for men while dropping to 52% for women. Urban literacy is recorded at 77%, compared to 56% in rural areas. Provincial variations are also significant, with literacy reaching 66% in Punjab and falling to 43% in Balochistan. — DNA

Real Madrid dump Man City out of Champions League once more

Real Madrid knock out Manchester City with 2-1 win at Etihad, sealing 5-1 aggregate triumph as Vinicius Junior shines and Bernardo Silva sees red

MANCHESTER: Real Madrid dumped 10-man Manchester City out of the Champions League for the fourth time in five seasons as a 2-1 victory at the Etihad Stadium completed a 5-1 aggregate victory for the Spanish giants. City had to make history in overturning a 3-0 first leg deficit against the 15-time European champions, but a difficult task became an impossible one when captain Bernardo Silva was shown an early red card for handling the ball on his own line. Vinicius Junior converted from the spot to kill the tie as a contest as City exited to Madrid for the third consecutive year. Erling Haaland levelled for City before half-time, but Vinicius won the game with virtually the final kick off the ball. City's season is at risk of coming off the rails. Winless in three games, Pep Guardiola's men must raise themselves for the League Cup final against Arsenal on Sunday. They also trail the Gunners by nine points in the Premier League title race and host Liverpool in the FA Cup quarter-finals next month. Once again City's quest for Champions League glory came unstick as Madrid proved they have the knack for finding their best come the knockout stages of this competition, despite unconvincing form in La Liga. Alvaro Arbeloa could afford to leave Kylian Mbappe on the bench on his return from injury, while Jude Bellingham could also be back fit by the time they face a likely quarter-final against Bayern Munich. City needed a fast start to have any chance of becoming the first side to ever overturn a three-goal deficit against Ma-



drid in European competition, but nearly found themselves further behind inside a minute. Federico Valverde was the unlikely Real hero last week with the first hat-trick of his career. The Uruguayan had an easier chance than for any of his three goals at the Santiago Bernabeu seven days ago, but fired meekly into the arms of Gianluigi Donnarumma after his run from midfield went untracked. City did briefly threaten to bring the tie to life but came up against a familiar foe in Thibaut Courtois. The giant Belgian goalkeeper repelled efforts from Rayan Cherki and Rodri before Madrid's threat on the counter-

tack killed off any lingering City hopes. Vinicius had initially been flagged offside in the build up before his effort was turned wide by Silva's left arm. But a VAR review established the Brazilian was onside and left referee Clement Turpin with little choice but to dismiss the City captain and point to the penalty spot. Donnarumma saved a Vinicius penalty in the first leg, but this time was sent the wrong way from the spot. Vinicius should have added plenty more to his 15 goals this season as City pushed forward and left themselves exposed at the back. Twice he fired off target with just Donnarumma to beat before half-time. Haaland now has 43 for club and country, but had netted just twice from open play in his previous 18 games. Even when the Norwegian did equalize, it came from a mishit as he scuffed a shot past Courtois from Jeremy Doku's cross. Courtois failed to reappear for the second half, but his deputy Andriy Lunin twice denied Haaland a double. Haaland was then replaced before the hour mark as Guardiola's mind turned toward Wembley at the weekend. Both sides had two goals ruled out for offside before Vinicius finally had one count when he swept home Aurelien Tchouameni's cross deep into stoppage time. Guardiola has refused to quell speculation this could be his last season after a decade in Manchester. If it is, his return of just one Champions League crown is one of the few disappointments of a golden era for a club that has traditionally lived in the shadow of neighbors Manchester United.

Briefs

Cement exports increases 10% in 8 months

ISLAMABAD: The exports of cement witnessed an increase of 10.03 percent during the first eight months of the current fiscal year 2025-26 as against the exports of the corresponding months of last year. The cement exports from the country were recorded at US \$228.935 million during July-February (2025-26) against the exports of US \$208.063 million during July-February (2024-25), according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS). In terms of quantity, the cement export however witnessed a nominal decrease of 0.59 percent from 5,861,258 metric tons to 5,826,413 metric tons, the data revealed. Meanwhile, year-on-year basis, the cement exports witnessed an increase of 11.19 percent during the month of February 2026 as compared to the same month of last year. The exports of cement from the country during February 2026 were recorded at US \$22.208 million against the exports of US \$19.972 million in February 2025. On a month-on-month basis, cement exports decreased by 33.82 percent during February 2026 when compared to the exports of US \$33.558 million in January 2026, the PBS data revealed.—APP

Rupee gains 02 paisa against US Dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Wednesday appreciated by 02 paisa against the US Dollar in interbank trading and closed at Rs 279.25 compared to the previous day's closing at Rs 279.27. According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs 279.30 and Rs 280.35, respectively. The price of the Euro against the Rupee increased by Rs 0.95 to close at Rs 321.90 from the previous day's close of Rs 320.95, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese Yen remain stagnant and closed at Rs 1.75, whereas the exchange rate of the British Pound witnessed an increase of Rs 1.43 and closed at Rs 372.96 compared to the previous day's Rs 371.53, and the Saudi Riyal came down by 01 and 05 paisa to close at Rs 76.03 and Rs 74.36, respectively.—APP

PSX turns bullish, gains 4,276 points

ISLAMABAD: The benchmark KSE-100 Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bullish trend on Wednesday, gaining 4,276.09 points, a positive change of 2.85 percent, closing at 154,292.26 points compared to 150,016.16 points on the previous trading day, according to PSX data. During the session, the ready market recorded a trading volume of 397.465 million shares with a traded value of Rs 22,352 billion, against 260.428 million shares valuing Rs 17,205 billion in the previous session. Market capitalization increased to Rs 17,254 trillion from Rs 16,793 trillion a day earlier. Out of 483 active companies in the ready market, 339 advanced, 79 declined, and 65 remained unchanged. The Bank of Punjab topped the volume chart with 54.733 million shares, followed by Wasl Mobility with 31.549 million shares and K-Electric Limited with 26.433 million shares. The top gainers included Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited, which rose by Rs 255.00 to close at Rs 24,707.00, and Sazzar Engineering Works Limited, which gained Rs 63.96 to settle at Rs 1,856.41. On the losing side, Super-net Technologies Limited declined by Rs 36.14 to close at Rs 1,263.84, while Tandlianwala Sugar Mills Limited fell by Rs 15.85 to close at Rs 215.15. In the futures market, turnover stood at 107,911 million shares with a traded value of Rs 6,497 billion, compared to 124,467 million shares worth Rs 5,910 billion in the previous session. Out of 316 futures-market companies, 287 recorded gains, while 24 declined and 5 remained unchanged.—APP

PM for railways upgradation to spur industrial growth

The meeting was informed that work on the Karachi-Rohri section of the Main Line-1 (ML-1) project was underway with support from the Asian Development Bank. Engineering design, environmental field surveys, and land acquisition processes were currently in progress

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, Wednesday, underlined the need to rebuild railway infrastructure across the country on sustainable foundations to support economic and industrial growth. He said that modernizing the railway system is a key component of national policy aimed at enhancing regional trade and connectivity. The prime minister chaired a meeting of the Pakistan Railways steering committee at the PM House. The meeting was attended by Minister for Economic Affairs Ahad Khan Cheema, Minister for Railways Hanif Abbasi, Minister for

Finance Muhammad Aurangzeb, Minister of State for Finance and Railways Bilal Azhar Kayani, and relevant senior officials, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release. Addressing the participants, the prime minister said that Pakistan Railways served as the backbone of the country's economy and communication network. He directed authorities to upgrade freight facilities, noting that in the current regional context, rail-based cargo transport became essential for saving fuel and ensuring efficient movement of goods. Officials briefed the meeting on ongoing reforms in Pakistan Railways. It was shared that freight services were expected to grow by 21



Islamabad: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting of the Steering Committee of Pakistan Railways.

percent this year. The meeting was informed that work on the

Karachi-Rohri section of the Main Line-1 (ML-1) project was underway with

support from the Asian Development Bank. Engineering design, environmental

field surveys, and land acquisition processes were currently in progress.

Participants were further informed that 57 percent of the Thr rail connectivity project had been completed. Meanwhile, the upgradation of the Rohri-Nokundi section of Main Line-3 (ML-3) was described as a crucial initiative for transporting minerals from Balochistan. A design consultant had already been hired and the PC-1 was finalized. The meeting also reviewed progress on digitalization within Pakistan Railways, including the introduction of mobile applications, cashless ticketing, and free Wi-Fi at railway stations. Additionally, systems such as freight management systems, digital weighing bridges, and rolling stock tracking have improved the quality and transparency of freight services.

UN Women commits to long-term stand with Afghan women

UNITED NATIONS: UN Women, a world body's organization for gender equality and empowerment of women, will continue delivering for Afghan women and girls despite sweeping restrictions and ongoing instability, a senior UN official has said. "Despite the restrictions on women and girls and the current conflicts...no matter what, UN Women is staying and delivering in Afghanistan," said Susan Ferguson, UN Women Special Representative in Afghanistan, told reporters in New York via video-link from Kabul. The agency is operating in what it describes as the world's most severe women's rights crisis, where women are nearly four times less likely than men to access formal justice. Yet programmes remain active, reaching hundreds of thousands in need. In 2025 alone, UN Women said it helped safeguard access to lifesaving services for more than 350,000 women and girls and supported nearly 200 women-led civil society organizations. However, operations continue to face major constraints. In a country where services for women must be delivered by women, the agency is calling for the ban on Afghan female UN staff and contractors accessing UN premises to be lifted. "We continue to find ways to operate," Ms. Ferguson said, "and stand with those who need support the most." Ms. Ferguson emphasized the impact of Decree No. 12 issued by the Taliban earlier this year, which formally removes equality between men and women before the law and authorizes violence against women by allowing husbands to carry out punishments, including physical violence, in the home. "We call on the de facto authorities to ensure that laws and policies protect the rights of women and girls in line with Afghanistan's international human rights obligations", the UN Women country representative said. "When we start to accept this as normal, we stop believing it can change...change is still possible, but only if the world continues to stand with Afghan women." After an air strike in Kabul on Monday night reportedly killed hundreds of people, more than half of them women and children, Ms. Ferguson said "women and children are paying a heavy price for the continuing violence." At least 64,000 people have been affected by the military escalation with Pakistan, just over half of them women and girls, the UN said. Initial assessments by the UN and partners show that women's most urgent needs are shelter, healthcare and clean water, it was pointed out. UN Women said it is also mobilizing resources to expand cash support for women-headed households, provide well-being kits and help them start small businesses. Despite these initiatives, UN Women faces a 50 per cent funding gap for their work in Afghanistan in 2026 with nearly \$500 million still needed. Calling on the international community, Ms Ferguson said, "we urgently need more funding to meet these needs at this critical moment... If the current hostilities continue, needs will only grow.—APP

Around 4.9m kids under five died in 2024

LONDON: About 4.9 million children died before reaching their fifth birthday in 2024, according to new United Nations estimates, a sign progress to reduce child mortality rates was stalling even before global aid budget cuts last year. Most of the deaths were preventable with better access to healthcare and low-cost interventions for challenges like complications from pre-term birth or diseases like malaria, said UNICEF, the World Bank, the World Health Organization and the U.N. population division, which produced the report. Preventable child deaths have more than halved since 2000, the agencies said, but progress has slowed since 2015. In 2022, the figure was also 4.9 million, then a record-low; in 2023, it was 4.8 million. While the 2024 number appears to show a rise, the agencies said the data was calculated differently in the two different years, and could not be directly compared. "However... we do see a global slowdown in mortality reduction," a WHO spokesperson added, warning that conflict, economic instability, climate change, and weak health systems were all contributing to stalling progress. Aid cuts would add to the challenge, she said. "Together, these pressures risk undermining past achievements and could lead to stagnation - or even reversal - in hard-won child survival gains if not addressed," she said. The figures released on Wednesday cover 2024, before the United States, followed by other big donors like the United Kingdom and Germany, began cutting their international aid budgets. Overall, global development assistance for health fell by just under 27% in 2025 compared to 2024, according to a report by the Gates Foundation at the end of 2025. The foundation warned then that progress on child mortality was going into reverse as a result of the cuts, based on its estimates. "No child should die from diseases that we know how to prevent. But we see worrying signs that progress in child survival is slowing - and at a time where we're seeing further global budget cuts," said UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell. The agencies said the cuts could also make it harder to track progress due to weakened data collection.—APP

Cultural relics from Western Zhou Dynasty found

XI'AN: Archaeologists have made new discoveries dating back to the Western Zhou Dynasty (1046 BC-771 BC) at the Jiangliu Site in Jingyang County, northwest China's Shaanxi Province, according to the Shaanxi Academy of Archaeology on Tuesday. The Jiangliu Site, a large settlement moat site from the late Yangshao culture period, is located northeast of Jiangliu Village. The excavations, carried out in 2022 in the western part of the site, unearthed multiple ash pits and tombs from the Western Zhou Dynasty. In ten ash pits, archaeologists discovered pottery wares like tripod jars, pots and basins. The 13 excavated tombs, mostly simple single-wooden-coffin burials, typically contained one tripod and one jar as funerary objects, with some also yielding small bronze items, including knives and dagger-axes.—APP

UAE gears up for Eid with vibrant events, festive atmosphere

ABU DHABI: The United Arab Emirates is gearing up to celebrate Eid Al Fitr with a vibrant programme of festivals, entertainment shows and family-oriented activities across public spaces, shopping malls and leisure destinations decorated with festive lights and greetings. Shopping centres have seen a surge in activity ahead of Eid, as residents stock up on clothing, sweets and gifts, supported by seasonal promotions that have boosted retail traffic. The Eid holiday, running from 19th to 22nd March, offers an opportunity to visit the country's tourist attractions, major malls and hotels, many of which have rolled out special programmes for the occasion. In Abu Dhabi, a range of cultural and entertainment events targeting families and children will take place, led by the Sheikh Zayed Festival in Al Wathba, which has been running since November and features thousands of cultural and public events with broad international participation. In Al Ain, the second edition of the "Ghaitah Al Ain" festival will run from 20th to 27th March at ADNEC Al Ain, offering live performances, cultural shows and activities for all age groups. The emirate also offers a wide selection of attractions, including the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, Al Maqta'a Museum, Heritage Village, Saadiyat Cultural District and Yas Island's leisure facilities. Dubai is preparing for Eid with a series of entertainment events and experiences for families, alongside retail promotions in shopping malls and special hotel packages. Citywide events include the "Season of Wulfa", running until 23rd March, while Expo City Dubai will host Eid celebrations from 20th to 22nd March. In Sharjah, the "Sharjah Ramadan Festival 2026" will continue through Eid, combining retail offers with cultural and heritage experiences, with participation from local and international brands, entrepreneurs and small businesses. The emirate also offers a mix of leisure, nature and cultural destinations, including Khorfakkan Amphitheater and Waterfall, Al Suhub Rest House, Al Heera Beach, Arabia's Wildlife Centre, Al Jada, Al Majaz Waterfront, Al Montazah Parks and Al Qasba. Ajman features a number of heritage attractions, including Ajman Museum, which dates back to the 18th century and showcases artefacts, manuscripts and traditional costumes. Umm Al Qaiwain offers leisure options such as Dreamland Aqua Park, the emirate's aviation, shooting and marine clubs, as well as equestrian facilities. Ras Al Khaimah has completed preparations to welcome visitors during the holiday, offering a range of experiences including Jebel Jais Flight, one of the world's longest zip lines, Al Hamra Golf Club, Dhayah Fort and its beaches. Fujairah remains a popular destination for Eid holidays, with attractions such as the Fujairah Corniche, Madhab Spring Park, and Wadi Wurayah, alongside a growing selection of hotels and resorts, including beachfront properties in Al Aqah.—DNA

China's economy remains sturdy anchor in choppy waters

BEIJING: The curtain fell last Thursday on an important political gathering in China this year. As the "two sessions" concluded, Beijing sent an unequivocal message to the world grappling with heightened uncertainty: China will remain the most stable engine of the global economy. At this year's two sessions, China set a GDP growth target of 4.5 percent to 5 percent for 2026, markedly outpacing the IMF's January projection of 3.3 percent for the global economy. The target reflects China's confidence that rests on solid fundamentals. Over the past five years, China's economy has grown at an average annual rate of 5.4 percent, contributing around 30 percent to global growth - more than the combined contribution of the G7 nations. "The world can count on China to deliver new contributions to strong and sustainable global growth," Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on the sidelines of the national legislature's annual session. Perhaps the most visible channel through which China is stabilizing the world economy is its massive domestic market. As the world's second-largest consumer market, it is creating vital demand for global goods and services. The 2026 government work report places "building a robust domestic market" first among the major tasks for this year. It pledges concrete measures including 250 billion yuan in ultra-long special treasury bonds for consumer goods trade-in programs, a 100-billion-yuan

fiscal-financial coordination fund to spur domestic demand, and expanded interest subsidies for consumers and service providers. The policy is already yielding results. In 2025, the trade-in program drove over 2.6 trillion yuan in sales, benefiting more than 360 million consumers. "The trade-in program has given our business a real shot in the arm," said Ai Yucheng, who works at a home appliance store in Yuncheng, Shandong Province. "Foot traffic has more than doubled, and customers are coming in ready to buy." The outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) reinforces this priority, vowing to "unleash the potential of service consumption" and "promote the expansion and upgrading of goods consumption." This vibrant demand extends beyond borders. During the recent Year of the Horse Spring Festival, Chinese travelers fanned out across traditional favorites and off-the-beaten-path destinations, with their spending providing a timely boost to tourism economies from Thailand to Europe. The integration of AI with consumption - creating new scenarios for smart homes, intelligent vehicles, and personalized services - is generating new demand that benefits the entire global economy. Yet China's economic contribution runs deeper than consumption alone. Committed to high-level opening up, it is advancing trade and investment liberalization on multiple fronts - anchoring global supply chains while opening its

doors wider to foreign goods and capital. Scarcely three months into 2026, foreign investors are already doubling down: Republic of Korea semiconductor equipment maker STI is building a semiconductor manufacturing base in Guangzhou, with a total investment of approximately 12.4 billion yuan; German automotive parts giant Schaeffler is pouring an additional 1 billion yuan into a humanoid robotics factory in Jiangsu Province. The new investments underscore global confidence in China's dual role as both production hub and consumption engine. Technological innovation has become a key engine driving China's high-quality economic development, and a driving Chinese economy is, in turn, a boon to the whole world. China has placed a great emphasis on fostering "new quality productive forces" - a paradigm shift that prioritizes scientific breakthroughs, green transformation, and digital integration over traditional factor-driven growth. These efforts are built on strong fundamentals. China allocated 2.8 percent of its GDP to R&D in 2025, with annual investment exceeding 3.9 trillion yuan, up 8.1 percent year-on-year. The country's STEM graduates - more than 5 million per year - form a world-leading talent pool. This human capital advantage is being channeled into strategic frontiers: from the AI model DeepSeek to the launch of the Fujian aircraft carrier equipped with electromagnetic catapults.—DNA

Economic growth in Uzbekistan forecast at around 7%

TASHKENT: Economic growth in Uzbekistan is expected to reach around 7% in 2026. The main contributing factors are cited as business activity, monetary and financial systems, banking operations, industrial production, and retail trade. According to the Center for Economic Research and Reforms' forecast for the first quarter of 2026, despite global challenges last year, Uzbekistan's economy remained stable. By the end of 2025, Uzbekistan's GDP grew by 7.7%, exceeding the previous year's indicator (6.7%). The previously published forecast by the Center also demonstrated high accuracy, deviating from the actual result by only 0.2 percentage points. This fact confirms the reliability of the forecasting approaches used. Based on a dynamic factors model, economic growth in the first quarter of 2026 is expected to be approximately 7% year-on-year. The main contribution to the forecast comes from business activity indicators (3.1 percentage points), the monetary and financial sectors (1 percentage point), banking transaction dynamics (0.9 percentage points), industrial production (0.6 percentage points), and retail trade (0.3 percentage points).—APP

Egyptian banks seen resilient to Iran conflict shocks

RIYADH: Egypt's banking sector is positioned to absorb the potential economic spillovers from the ongoing Iran conflict, supported by strong capital buffers, liquidity, and profitability, according to a report by Fitch Ratings. The agency's base-case scenario assumes the conflict will remain short-lived and indirect in its impact on Egypt's economy, limiting pressure on the country's sovereign credit profile and, by extension, its banking system. The assessment comes as escalating tensions in the Middle East raise concerns about broader economic spillovers for oil-importing countries such as Egypt. Higher energy prices, currency volatility and capital outflows have emerged as key risks for emerging markets, putting pressure on fiscal balances, external accounts and financial stability. The agency emphasized that the sector's credit profile remains closely linked to Egypt's sovereign rating, currently at "B" with a stable outlook. Fitch noted that banks are entering the current period from a position of strength, with "healthy profitability, capital and foreign-currency liquidity buffers," which it said, "should enhance its resilience compared, for example, with the escalation of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022." Under its base-line scenario, "in which the conflict lasts less than a month and Brent averages \$70 a barrel in 2026, risks to Egypt's ratings should be contained," though a prolonged conflict or higher oil prices could increase pressure.—APP

Briefs

US judge orders restoration of VOA

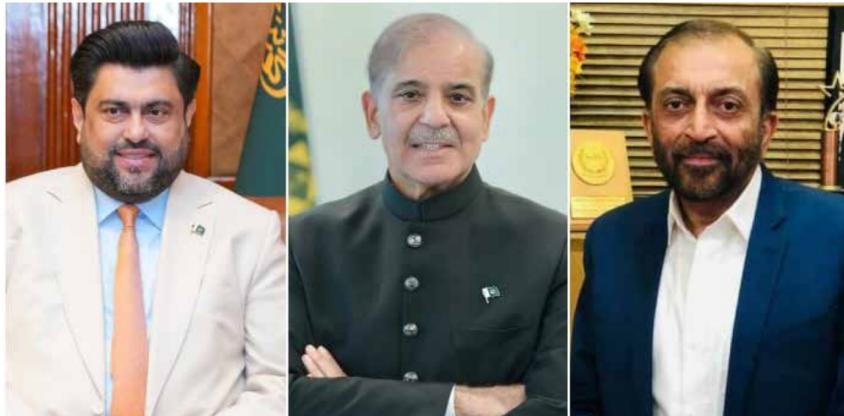
WASHINGTON: A federal judge has ordered the US Agency for Global Media (USAGM) to recall more than 1,000 Voice of America (VOA) journalists and staff by March 23 and restore the broadcaster's operations. In a sweeping decision announced on Tuesday, US District Judge Royce C. Lamberth found that actions taken under the agency's previous leadership to shut down large parts of VOA and its sister networks violated federal law and the agency's statutory mandate. The ruling directs USAGM to return VOA and affiliated networks to the air and reinstate employees who had been dismissed or placed on leave. The dispute stems from restructuring measures carried out in 2025 under Kari Lake, an American political figure and former television news anchor who later became a prominent supporter of US President Donald Trump. In early 2025, the Trump administration brought Lake into USAGM — the independent federal agency that oversees VOA and other US government-funded international broadcasters. She was named senior adviser to USAGM in March 2025, later became deputy chief executive, and from July 31 to November 19, 2025, served as acting Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the agency. — APP

Aleema denies blocking PTI leaders' access to him

ISLAMABAD/LAHORE: Rejecting media reports that she is opposing meetings between Imran Khan and party leaders, Aleema Khan on Tuesday questioned how she could stop such meetings when she herself has been unable to meet her brother. "People across Pakistan are demanding the release of Imran Khan. The whole world is raising the same demand. Just wait and see — people will come out of their homes and secure his release. Moreover, as the global situation changes, I am hopeful he will be released," Ms Khan said while talking to media persons outside Adiala jail. "We are waiting here to find out whether we will be allowed to meet Imran. I believe we will not be granted permission, as they want to hide his health condition and what has been done to him. We had requested the chief justice to allow his medical treatment at Shifa International Hospital. We do not insist on meetings if he is allowed proper medical treatment," she added. She said the Chief Justice had forwarded the request for medical treatment to chief commissioner, who comes under Mohsin Naqvi.

Top MQM-P leader demands PM reinstate Kamran Tessori

PML-N's Hashmi has replaced Tessori, who served as Sindh governor for more than three years



DNA

KARACHI: A top Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) leader has sought the restoration of Kamran Tessori as the Sindh governor. In a statement, MQM-P Senior

Deputy Convener Farooq Sattar said: "Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif should review his decision to remove Kamran Tessori and reinstate him [as the Sindh governor]". Tessori, a MQM-P leader, was removed from the post last week with the government appointing Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) stalwart Nehal Hashmi in his place. Follow-

ing the PM's decision to recommend Hashmi for the post, the MQM-P stated that the party was not taken into confidence by the federal government regarding the decision. Tessori became governor in October 2022 following Imran Ismail's departure. Hashmi, meanwhile, after taking oath as the governor last week, said that the MQM-P remains an ally of the PML-N despite the change — the parties are coalition partners in the Centre. Born in Karachi on January 28, 1960, Hashmi is a prominent lawyer and a seasoned politician. He began practising law in the late 1980s and earlier founded a political organisation called the All Pakistan Youth League during his student years. He formally joined the PML-N in 1992 and served as an adviser on law, justice and human rights to then-prime minister Nawaz Sharif from 1997 to 1999. Hashmi also played an important legal role in several high-profile cases, including those related to Nawaz and the tribunal concerning Murtaza Bhutto. He later served as president of the PML-N Karachi in 2012 and was appointed general secretary of the party in Sindh in August 2014. Hashmi became a member of the Senate of Pakistan in March 2015 and served until February 2018. In 2017, he was expelled from the party over a controversial statement linked to the Panama Papers case in Pakistan, but his party membership was restored in 2021. In February 2018, he was sentenced to one month in prison and fined Rs50,000 in a contempt of court case, resulting in the termination of his Senate membership and a five-year disqualification. He was released after completing his sentence.

CM Maryam meets newly-appointed Chinese envoy

LAHORE: Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif had a meeting with the newly-appointed Chinese Consul General in Lahore, H.E. Sun Yan, in which both sides agreed to further promote strategic cooperation and CPEC. She termed Pakistan-China friendship as unparalleled, and expressed gratitude for China's cooperation in defense collaboration and reducing tensions with other countries. She congratulated the new Consul General on his posting in Lahore, and praised his diplomatic skills. Both leaders emphasized on strategic partnership and friendship between Pakistan and China, and agreed to expand economic and cultural exchanges in collaboration with Punjab government and Chinese Consulate. They vowed to further strengthen Pakistan-China friendship, and stressed on enhancing bilateral cooperation in trade, infrastructure, energy, and information technology. H.E. Sun Yan extended Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif an invitation to visit China, which she accepted with thanks. — DNA

Donald Trump banks upon Japanese support on Iran

TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi visits the White House for meetings that offer U.S. President Donald Trump a chance to lean on a key security partner for support in his Iran war, threatening to strain a decades-old alliance. Takaichi is the first major ally set for face-to-face talks with Trump since he demanded that Japan, among a coalition of nations, send ships to escort tankers through the Strait of Hormuz waterway, largely closed by Iran in the conflict. "Takaichi is in a tight spot," said David Boling, of the Asia Group consultancy in Tokyo and a former U.S. trade negotiator with Japan during Trump's first term as president. "The biggest risk is that Trump publicly presses her for security commitments that she can't deliver on." Japanese officials involved in the preparations said Takaichi had hoped to remind Trump of the dangers posed by a regionally assertive China prior to his visit there, initially planned near the end of March, but now delayed. Instead, she will have to find a way of placating Trump over his demand for ships to guard the Strait, a conduit for a fifth of global energy, while avoiding legal and political pitfalls. U.S. allies such as Germany, Italy and Spain have ruled

out participating in any Gulf mission, while Kaja Kallas, the European Union's foreign policy chief, said on Tuesday, "Nobody is ready to put their people in harm's way." Japan had received no official request from the United States, Takaichi told parliament on Monday, but was checking the scope of possible action within the limits of its pacifist constitution. Fewer than 10% of Japanese support the attacks by the United States and Israel on Iran, a poll by the Asahi newspaper showed this week. Trump has vacillated between chiding allies for their reticence to saying he does not need them, calling out those such as Japan that rely on the United States for their own defence and depend heavily on crude supplies through Hormuz. About 90% of Japan's oil shipments come through the Strait. Tokyo has offered logistical support and intelligence gathering for previous U.S. military efforts in the Middle East. But sending Japanese ships into a conflict area would be legally fraught and deeply unpopular, analysts say. "It has turned into a discussion that shakes the very foundations of the Japan-U.S. security alliance," said Kazuhiro Maeshima, a politics professor at Sophia University in Tokyo. — APP

Ukraine seeks release of citizens arrested in India

DNA

NEW DELHI: Ukraine has asked New Delhi to release six of its citizens arrested in India last week for allegedly entering a restricted border state without permits, and crossing into neighboring Myanmar to train anti-junta ethnic groups in drone warfare. Indian authorities arrested the six Ukrainians as well as one US citizen on the night of March 13 at three different airports. According to a court order from Monday remanding the seven in police custody until a hearing on March 27, they are accused of traveling illegally to India's northeastern state of Mizoram, crossing into Myanmar, and training anti-junta ethnic armed groups in drone warfare, as well as illegally importing large consignments of drones from Europe to Myanmar via India. Mizoram borders Myanmar's Chin State and the country has been engulfed in civil war and a humanitarian crisis since its military overthrew the elected government of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi in a 2021 coup. The probe of the six Ukrainians and the American is being led by the National Investigation Agency, India's main counter-terrorism body. In a statement released late on Tuesday, Ukraine's foreign ministry said that there were "no established facts proving the involvement of the said Ukrainian citizens in unlawful activities on the territory of India or Myanmar."

China ignores Trump's Hormuz request

WASHINGTON: China won't help the United States reopen the Strait of Hormuz as requested by President Donald Trump, but it is probably welcoming the delay in Trump's highly anticipated trip to Beijing as the U.S. risks getting bogged down in the Middle East, analysts say. The latest developments are unfolding as Trump's Iran war, in its third week, is faced with mounting pressure as oil has stopped moving through the strait and U.S. allies have refused to step up to secure the strait. That has produced concerns that China, the United States' biggest geopolitical rival, could stand to benefit from a war that some say was ill-considered. "President Trump's request to delay his long-awaited summit with President Xi Jinping underscores how significantly he underestimated the fallout from Operation Epic Fury," said Ali Wyne, senior research and advocacy adviser for U.S.-China relations at the International Crisis Group. "A show of U.S. force that was meant to intimidate Beijing has instead served to puncture the illusion of U.S. omnipotence: Unable to reopen the Strait of Hormuz alone. — APP

New particle discovered by large Hadron Collider

PARIS: The Large Hadron Collider has discovered a new particle, the 80th identified so far by the world's most powerful particle smasher, Europe's CERN physics laboratory announced on Tuesday. The new particle has been named "Xi-cc-plus". The Large Hadron Collider is a 27-kilometre-long proton-smashing ring running about 100 metres below France and Switzerland. The latest discovery comes as CERN plans to build an even bigger particle smasher, the Future Circular Collider, to continue probing the mysteries of the universe. Scientists hope the particle, which is similar to a proton but four times heavier, will reveal more about the strange behaviour of quantum mechanics. All the matter around us, including the protons and neutrons that make up the nucleus of atoms, are made of baryons. These common particles are composed of three quarks, which are fundamental building blocks of matter. Quarks come in six "flavours": up, down, charm, strange, top and bottom. Each has varying mass, electric charge and quantum properties. In theory, there could be many different types of baryons that mix these flavours, however most are extremely difficult to observe. To chase them down, the Large Hadron Collider sends particles whizzing around

an underground ring at phenomenal speeds until they smash into each other. This gives scientists a brief chance to measure how the more stable elements decay, then deduce the properties of the original particle. The newly discovered "Xi-cc-plus" contains two "charm" quarks and one "down" quark. Normal protons have two "up" quarks and one "down" quark. Because the new particle has two heavier "charm" quarks instead of "up" ones, it has a much greater mass. Vincenzo Vagnoni, spokesman for the Large Hadron Collider beauty (LHCb) experiment, said it was "only the second time a baryon with two heavy quarks has been observed". It was also "the first new particle identified after the upgrades to the LHCb detector that were completed in 2023," he said. According to him, the result will help theorists test models of quantum chromodynamics, the theory of the strong force that binds quarks into not only conventional baryons and mesons but also more exotic hadrons such as tetraquarks and pentaquarks. In 2017, the LHCb experiment announced that it had discovered a similar particle, made of two "charmed" quarks and one "up" quark. The new particle has an expected lifetime six times shorter than this earlier one, making it far trickier to spot, CERN pointed out. — APP



ISLAMABAD: The High Commissioner of Rwanda to Pakistan, H.E Fatou Harerimana, called on the Federal Minister for Human Rights, Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar to discuss bilateral cooperation and areas of mutual interest. The High Commissioner appreciated Pakistan's efforts in promoting gender. — DNA

PIA suspends flights to UAE's Fujairah for 2 days

Indian airline Air Indigo has also suspended operations to Fujairah, Ras Al Khaimah, Sharjah, Doha, Kuwait, Bahrain and Dammam until March 28

DNA

KARACHI: The Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) on Wednesday morning suspended its flights to Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for the next 48 hours in view of the "security situation" as the Middle East war persists. In a statement, the carrier's spokesperson said that for the time being, PIA flights to the UAE will only be operated to Al Ain. The decision comes amid the ongoing Middle East conflict, which began on February 28 with US-Israeli strikes on Iran and the assassination of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. As its leadership continues to be targeted by the US and Israel, Iran has kept up retaliatory strikes targeting US assets and bases in Gulf countries, disrupting air travel as airlines periodically cancel flights. Indian airline Air Indigo has also suspended operations to Fujairah, Ras Al Khaimah, Sharjah, Doha, Kuwait, Bahrain and Dammam until March 28.

A day earlier, the UAE's General Civil Aviation Authority announced the "temporary and full closure" of the country's airspace, according to Al Jazeera. The temporary precautionary measures were lifted later in the day, the UAE's state news agency WAM reported. The development also comes in the wake of an attack on a Kuwait-flagged tanker 23 nautical miles east of Fujairah, according to the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO). On March 14, the Fujairah port, a major global hub for refuelling ships as well as crude and fuel exports, came under attack. The port is located on the Gulf of Oman, approximately 70 nautical miles from the Strait of Hormuz, which is effectively closed due to the Iran war, increasing the importance of Fujairah's flows to the global market during the current conflict. Fujairah exported more than 1.7 million barrels per day of crude oil and refined fuels on average last year, according to Kpler data, a volume equal to about 1.7 per cent of daily world demand.

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