



Islamabad POST

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Spain PM says Israel wants to destroy Lebanon

Detailed News On Page-08

Pakistan wishes peaceful ME solution: Asim

Detailed News On Page-08

War has gone too far: UN chief Antonio

Detailed News On Page-01



More US troops on the way

Iran rejects US plan; issues own demands

Iran's defiance came as Israel launched airstrikes on Tehran and as the United States deployed paratroopers and more Marines to the region

DNA

DUBAI: Iran on Wednesday dismissed an American plan to pause the war in the Middle East and launched more attacks on Israel and Gulf Arab countries, including an assault that sparked a huge fire at Kuwait International Airport. Iran's defiance came as Israel launched airstrikes on Tehran and as the United States deployed paratroopers and more Marines to the region. Iranian state television's English-language broadcaster, Press TV, quoted an anonymous official as saying Iran rejected America's ceasefire proposal. Press TV's report came after Pakistan transmitted the proposal to Iran. "Iran will end the war when it decides to do so and when its own conditions are met," Press TV quoted the official as saying. The official added Tehran will continue its "heavy blows" across the Mideast. Earlier, two officials from Pakistan described the 15-point US proposal broadly, saying it addressed sanctions relief, a rollback of Iran's nuclear program, limits on missiles and reopening the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil is shipped. An Egyptian official involved in the mediation efforts said the proposal also includes restrictions on Iran's support for armed groups. Some of those points were non-starters in negotiations before the war: Iran has insisted it won't discuss its ballistic missile program or its support of regional militias, which it views as key to its security. And its ability to control passage through the Strait of Hormuz represents one of its biggest strategic advantages.

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In call with MBS PM Shehbaz calls for 'end to hostilities'

Premier briefs Saudi leader on Pakistan's constructive diplomatic outreach to all parties, urging de-escalation

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday held a telephone conversation with Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and briefed him on Pakistan's constructive diplomatic outreach to all parties, urging de-escalation and resolution of differences through dialogue and diplomacy. During the "warm and cordial" conversation held early Wednesday morning, the crown prince deeply appreciated Pakistan's peace efforts. Prime Minister Shehbaz reiterated Pakistan's strong condemnation of the recent attacks on Saudi Arabia and reaffirmed Pakistan's complete solidarity and unequivocal support for the Kingdom and its people in these challenging times.

Continued on Page 06

War has gone too far: UN chief

DNA

NEW YORK: The UN secretary-general on Wednesday warned that the war in the Middle East has spiraled "out of control." Antonio Guterres urged an immediate halt to hostilities, called on Iran to stop attacking its neighbors, urged the US and Israel to end the war, and stressed that diplomacy remains the only path out of the crisis. Speaking at the UN headquarters in New York, he said the conflict has exceeded even the worst expectations and risks triggering a global catastrophe. "Just hours into the outbreak of the war in the Middle East, I warned that the fighting risked triggering a chain reaction that no one could control. More than three weeks on, this war is out of control," he added.

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PM Shehbaz talks to Amir of Qatar

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif held a telephone conversation with His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Amir of the State of Qatar, this evening. During their warm and cordial conversation, the Prime Minister conveyed Eid ul Fitr greetings to the Amir of Qatar and the brotherly people of Qatar. These sentiments and good wishes were reciprocated by the Qatari Amir. The Prime Minister expressed his serious concern over the ongoing hostilities in the region. He reiterated strong condemnation of the attacks against Qatar and other brotherly Gulf countries and conveyed deep condolences over the loss of

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Taliban accuses Pak of killing civilians

NEWS DESK

JALALABAD: Taliban officials said two civilians were killed in attacks by Pakistani forces in eastern Afghanistan on Tuesday and Wednesday. Afghanistan and Pakistan have been fighting for months over claims from Islamabad that Kabul is harboring extremists behind cross-border attacks on its territory. Afghanistan denies the allegation. One person died due to artillery fire in Nari district, Ziaur Rahman Spin Ghar, head of

Continued on Page 06

POLITICAL RENDEZVOUS

DNA



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif welcomes PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, at the PM House, on Wednesday. Both sides discussed lockdown possibility; regional situation. - DNA

Middle East conflict

Malaysian PM hails Pakistan's peace endeavors

Anwar Ibrahim says Pakistan's relationships with the relevant parties, and its standing as a credible voice in the Muslim world, place it in a strong position to help create the conditions for meaningful negotiations

DNA

KUALUMPUR: Prime Minister of Malaysia Anwar Ibrahim has welcomed Pakistan's timely and constructive offer to host dialogue between the United States and Iran. "I commend Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and the leaders of other friendly nations for stepping forward at a moment of acute regional danger, following the earlier commendable efforts of the leadership of Oman and other friendly countries". Pakistan's relationships with the relevant parties, and its standing as a credible voice in the Muslim world, place it in a strong position to

Continued on Page 06

Israel claims hitting Iranian missile site

NEWS DESK

JERUSALEM: The Israeli military on Wednesday announced it had struck a naval cruise missile production facility operating under Iran's ministry of defense in Tehran. "In recent days, the Israeli air force acting on IDF intelligence struck two key naval cruise missile

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

Two most wanted terrorists killed in KP

BUREAU REPORT

PESHAWAR: The Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) personnel killed two "most-wanted terrorists" affiliated with the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban (TTP) during an intelligence-based operation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Tank district on Wednesday, according to a press release issued by the CTD. The press release said CTD personnel conducted the operation within the limits of Gomal police station on the basis of "credible intelligence". It said that the suspects, upon encountering CTD personnel, opened fire on them. The press release added that the exchange of gunfire continued for around 40 minutes, following which a search operation was launched.

Four-day week in Sri Lanka also

DNA

COLOMBO: Millions of Sri Lankans enjoyed a government-ordered extra day off on Wednesday as the island nation battles an energy crisis triggered by the Middle East war. Rail and bus stations were largely deserted as most state institutions, schools and universities shifted to a four-day working week. "I am really enjoying the mid-week break because it is a fully paid holiday," said housing ministry official Prarthana Perera, 40. Her office, like many government departments in Battaramulla - the capital's main administrative hub - was closed. Banks operated on shorter hours, while many private firms introduced work-from-home arrangements, industry bodies said, urging members to help curb energy use.

Pakistan condemns sentences to Aasiya

"Pakistan views this decision as part of a broader pattern of politically motivated prosecutions aimed at silencing dissenting voices and intimidating those advocating the legitimate rights of the Kashmiri people"

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Wednesday categorically rejected the awarding of a life imprisonment sentence to Aasiya Andrabi, a prominent Kashmiri political leader, along with the harsh 30-year prison sentences imposed on her two associates, Ms Fehmeeda Sofi and Ms Nahida Nasreen, by a Delhi court. The Foreign Office spokesperson Tahir Andrabi, in a statement, said that the verdict, under the draconian law, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, constituted a grave miscarriage of justice and reflected the continuing suppression of fundamental rights in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). "Pakistan views this decision as part of a broader pattern of politically motivated prosecutions aimed at silencing dissenting voices and intimidating those advocating the legitimate rights of the Kashmiri people," he said and viewed that the sentencing raised serious concerns regarding due process, judicial independence, and adherence to

Continued on Page 06

DPM Dar, EU vice president talk on phone

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar spoke with the European Union's High Representative and Vice President Kaja Kallas on Tuesday night. During the conversation, the two leaders exchanged views on recent regional and international developments. The deputy prime minister emphasized the importance of de-escalation, underscoring that dialogue and diplomacy remained essential for maintaining peace and stability. Both leaders agreed to remain in close contact on the evolving situation.

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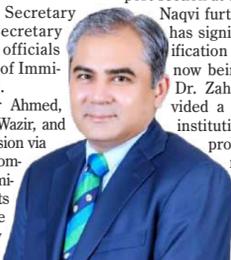
Pakistan moves to facilitate overseas citizens in Spain

It was decided that ahead of Spain's upcoming regularization scheme for undocumented migrants, passports and other required documents for Pakistani applicants will be issued within one week. Minister Saalik Hussain noted that nearly 15,000 Pakistanis are expected to benefit from the Spanish scheme.

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: A high-level meeting chaired by Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis, DG FIA, Additional Secretary Foreign Affairs, MD OPF, as well as senior officials from NADRA and the Directorate General of Immigration & Passports attended the meeting. Pakistan's Ambassador to Spain Dr. Zahoor Ahmed, Consul General in Barcelona Muhammad Ali Wazir, and the Community Welfare Attaché joined the session via Zoom. It was decided that ahead of Spain's upcoming regularization scheme for undocumented migrants, passports and other required documents for Pakistani applicants will be issued within one week. Minister Saalik Hussain noted that nearly 15,000 Pakistanis are expected to benefit from

the Spanish scheme. Saalik Hussain expressed gratitude to the Ministry of Interior for its strong support to the Pakistani community in Spain. Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi emphasized that the swift issuance of passports to overseas Pakistanis is a top priority. However, he directed that no passport should be issued to any criminal or wanted individual. He also ordered immediate deployment of additional staff to the passport section at the Pakistani embassy in Spain. Naqvi further stated that the National Police Bureau has significantly streamlined and expedited the verification of police character certificates, which are now being issued on a priority basis. Ambassador Dr. Zahoor Ahmed and the Consul General provided a detailed briefing, noting that all relevant institutions are working together to ensure timely provision of essential documents to Pakistani nationals. The briefing highlighted that the issuance of passports and character certificates has notably accelerated. The embassy and consulate have so far issued 10,000 authority letters to applicants as part of the facilitation process.





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Kakar calls Pakistan Day renewal of national pledge

QUETTA: Balochistan Health Minister Bakht Muhammad Kakar, a leader of the Pakistan Peoples Party, has said that Pakistan Day is a moment to renew the national pledge to work collectively for the development, prosperity, and strength of Pakistan.

In his statement, Bakht Kakar emphasized that the sacrifices made by the nation's founding leaders laid the foundation for a sovereign, dignified, and democratic state. He described Pakistan as a cherished homeland that will remain strong and enduring.

Highlighting the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, he noted that the creation of Pakistan under Jinnah's dynamic guidance brought a message of peace, brotherhood, and unity to the region. He referred to the Lahore Resolution as a decisive milestone that defined a shared destiny for the Muslims of the subcontinent, ultimately leading to the establishment of a democratic and welfare state.

The minister paid tribute to the people of Balochistan, stating that they continue to play an active role in the country's progress with strong patriotic spirit. He added that the province's residents have made immense sacrifices for the development and stability of Pakistan, particularly in confronting external threats and proxy challenges.—APP

OGRA provided with Rs 27b to settle claims

ISLAMABAD: On the directions of the Prime Minister, OGRA has been provided the first tranche amounting to Rs 27 billion, from Prime Minister's Austerity Fund, to settle the Price Differential Claims arising from the Government's decision to shield the consumers from the impact of rising oil prices in the international market. The funds have been arranged through various expenditure reduction measures implemented within the federal government & deposited in the PM Austerity Fund. Government is also considering additional cost-cutting measures to ensure that the relief to the public is provided while staying within the budget and identifying additional savings.—DNA

Muqam meets Caretaker CM GB

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Gilgit Baltistan and Kashmir Affairs and President of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, Engr Amir Muqam, met with Caretaker Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan, Justice (R) Yar Mohammad Khan, on Wednesday. The meeting focused on the law and order situation and development projects in Gilgit-Baltistan, said a statement issued here. Muqam stated that the government, led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, prioritizes the development and prosperity of all regions, particularly Gilgit-Baltistan. He emphasized that a peaceful environment is essential for sustainable development and tourism promotion. Yar Mohammad Khan appreciated the minister's efforts in maintaining peace in Gilgit-Baltistan and thanked the federal government for its support.—APP

PN welcomes PLA(N) Ship DAQING fourth SEA GUARDIAN exercise

DNA

KARACHI: Pakistan Navy extends a warm welcome to People's Liberation Army (Navy) Ship DAQING for its participation in the 4th iteration of bilateral exercise SEA GUARDIAN, scheduled from 25 March to 2 April 2026. Upon arrival, PLA(N) Ship DAQING was accorded a ceremonial welcome and escorted into port by Pakistan Navy ships with traditional zeal. The SEA GUARDIAN exercise aims to further strengthen bilateral relations through the mutual exchange of maritime expertise and enhanced interoperability between



ISLAMABAD: People enjoying pleasant weather at Pakistan Monument as the flowers full blooming, in the Federal Capital.

Kundi reviews passport services, Radio Pak revival

The Governor directed authorities to take up the matter with the Interior Department for increasing the number of regional passport offices in the province, terming it essential in view of the growing population

PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi was given separate departmental briefings on Wednesday at Governor House on the performance of Immigration and Passport offices in the province and the historical and operational status of Radio Pakistan Peshawar.

Officials of Immigration and Passport Department, including Zonal Head North Sheikh Ashfaq Ahmad and Zonal Head South Faiz-ul-Hasan, briefed the Governor on overall performance and service delivery. It was informed that passport services in the province are being provided through two zones North and South with five regional passport offices, including Dera Ismail Khan.

The briefing highlighted that 15 passport offices are functioning in DI Khan zone, while 24 offices are providing services in various districts of Peshawar zone. The Governor was also apprised of the upgradation of the Regional Passport Office DI Khan. Kundi was further briefed on online services, one-window operations, legal framework, fee structure and procedures for issuance and renewal of passports. The Governor directed authorities to take up the matter with the Interior

Department for increasing the number of regional passport offices in the province, terming it essential in view of the growing population.

He also instructed that the case for establishment of a regional passport office in the newly created district of Paharpur, as well as a passport office at tehsil level, be taken up with the Ministry of Interior.

Appreciating the performance of both North and South zones, the Governor said that a large number of people from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reside abroad, while millions travel to Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran and Syria for Umrah and religious visits. He stressed the need to further facilitate the public in passport issuance and renewal.

In another briefing, the Governor was informed about the history and functioning of Radio Pakistan Peshawar. Station Director Tufail Ahmad, along with senior producer Sardar Azam Khan, briefed the Governor.

It was shared that Radio Pakistan Peshawar was established on March 6, 1935, with transmissions initially starting from the Civil Secretariat. Later, on April 28, 1985, regular broadcasts began from the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation's dedicated

building, airing 16 hours of daily programming covering current affairs, political, social and cultural content.

The Governor was informed that the station's transmissions are heard in remote areas of the province as well as bordering regions of Afghanistan. Broadcasts are aired in multiple languages including Urdu, Pashto, Hindko, Khowar and Gojri, reflecting the region's cultural diversity.

Officials also briefed the Governor on damages caused to the building during the May 9 incident, adding that restoration work was completed in January 2026 and all departments have resumed operations.

Governor Kundi termed the restoration of the historic institution a positive development and appreciated the efforts of the authorities.

He emphasized the importance of protecting national institutions, calling them an integral part of the country's cultural and informational heritage.

He also underscored the need to align Radio Pakistan with modern digital requirements to effectively engage the younger generation, and directed officials to further improve broadcast quality, promote regional languages and culture, and highlight public issues.—DNA

Sindh to follow centre to prevent fuel shortage

KARACHI: Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon on Wednesday said that the Sindh government would respond to any decisions taken by the federal government to prevent a fuel shortage. The provincial government is implementing all federal government decisions, and further important measures were also being taken, he said this in statement issued here on Wednesday to elaborate provincial government's austerity measures. The Senior Minister said, in view of the current situation, the Sindh cabinet has decided to forgo salaries for three months. It has also been decided to implement a four-day workweek, while Fridays would be observed as work-from-home days. He said that the decisions of the federal government would continue to be supported at all levels. All possible steps were being taken to ensure public needs to be targeted and fuel reserves to be maintained. These measures would remain in place until the situation is fully under control. Sharjeel Memon further stated that if the federal government decided to impose a lockdown, the Sindh government would fully implement it. He emphasized the importance of avoiding a situation that could lead to fuel and energy shortages. He added that, under a Sindh government decision, 60 percent of government vehicles have been grounded. Several key measures were being taken to conserve fuel and prevent possible inflation. If the federal government required further cooperation, the Sindh government would extend full support.

He also appealed to the public to work from home wherever possible, stating that this was not an individual issue but a collective challenge. He stressed that fuel conservation and energy reserves could only be preserved through public cooperation.

He further said that, given the current regional situation, all decisions were being made with the government's top priority being to keep prices under control and prevent fuel shortages at all costs. Important decisions have also been taken regarding public transport to ensure maximum facilities for the people.—APP

Mohtasib visits regional office Hyderabad, reviews performance

HYDERABAD: Wafaqi Mohtasib (Ombudsman) Naveed Kamran Baloch on Wednesday paid an official visit to the Wafaqi Mohtasib Secretariat (WMS), Regional Office Hyderabad. During the visit, he held a comprehensive meeting with the Regional Head Ghulam Rasool Ahpan. The meeting was attended by senior officers of the Secretariat including Senior Advisor Dr. Syed Rizwan Ahmed, Advisor Dr. Shaikh Imtiaz Ali, Deputy Director Qazi Nazim Naeem and Assistant Registrar/Implementation Officer Munir Ahmed. On this occasion, Wafaqi Mohtasib was briefed in detail about the performance, case disposal and implementation status of decisions at the Regional Office. Various issues relating to expeditious redressal of public complaints and improvement in service delivery were also discussed. Naveed Kamran Baloch appreciated the efforts of the Regional Office Hyderabad in addressing public grievances and emphasized the need for further enhancing efficiency, transparency and promptness in complaint resolution.—APP

CDA chief reviews major water projects

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A high-level meeting was held on Tuesday at the CDA Headquarters under the chairmanship of Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, to address water-related challenges and review ongoing initiatives aimed at improving water supply in the Federal Capital.

The meeting was attended by senior officials including CDA Board Member Planning and Design Dr. Khalid Hafiz, Member Finance Tahir Naem, Member Environment Esfand-yar Baloch, DG Islamabad Water Imran Ali Zaidi, and other relevant officers.

During the session, participants reviewed the progress of multiple water-related projects and were issued directives to ensure their timely completion. Officials briefed the chair on ongoing efforts to upgrade and rehabilitate water infrastructure, including waterworks, transmission pipelines, treatment plants, and pumping stations. The installation of a modern monitoring

system, including SCADA and flow meters, is also underway to improve efficiency and oversight.

The meeting was also informed about initiatives to enhance rainwater storage and groundwater recharge. Around 100 recharge wells are planned across Islamabad to help raise groundwater levels and reduce water wastage. Additionally, approximately 20 rainwater storage tanks will be constructed at various locations. Authorities highlighted that rooftop rainwater harvesting has been made mandatory under CDA building bylaws, and the Chairman directed strict enforcement of this policy.

An improved system for managing water tanker services and addressing public complaints through a digital dashboard was also discussed.

Progress on key dam projects came under review, with officials stating that the feasibility study for the Shahdra Dam has been completed and its design phase is nearing completion. Meanwhile, the feasibility study for the Dotara Dam is in progress and expected to conclude by May 2026. The meeting

also examined developments related to the construction of three Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) along Korang Nullah. The project will be executed on an EPC basis, with the process of hiring a design consultant currently underway. Furthermore, the PC-I for 11 wetlands in Islamabad has been approved, and site selection is ongoing. Work on two wetlands has already begun in collaboration with the FDO. Chairman Randhawa emphasized the importance of adhering to clear timelines for all ongoing and planned projects. He also directed authorities to ensure the timely issuance and monthly delivery of water bills to consumers without delay. Highlighting long-term reforms, the Chairman noted that an autonomous Islamabad Water Agency has been established to provide sustainable solutions to water challenges and modernize the capital's water supply system. He added that these measures aim to make water management more efficient, transparent, and reliable for residents of Islamabad.

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

MARCH

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

Turkish Airlines.....8494949



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- PIMS.....9261170-79
- Polyclinic.....9218300-09
- Shifa International 4603666



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- RDA.....5555864
- TMA.....5770886
- Cantonment Board 9270151-3



Islamabad Metropolitan

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

Water Tank

- Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Vibrant exhibition celebrates Japan-Pakistan cultural bonds



SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Bridging cultures through creativity, the Embassy of Japan in Pakistan, alongside the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) and Pakistan-Japan Cultural Association (PJCA) Islamabad, unveiled the captivating painting exhibition "Japan in Art" at the National Art Gallery, PNCA. Akamatsu Shuichi, Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan, together with Mr. Ayoub Jamali,

Director General PNCA, and acclaimed artist Mr. Jamal Shah, President of PJCA Islamabad, inaugurated the exhibition. The event drew young artists, art enthusiasts, and dignitaries from all walks of life. "Japan in Art" displays around 40 stunning works by emerging Pakistani talents, reimagining Japanese socio-cultural life through innovative lenses. From delicate brushstrokes and colored pencils to the timeless artistry of woodblock printing, these pieces fuse

imagination with cultural insight. Ambassador Akamatsu, while speaking at the inaugural ceremony, deeply appreciated the remarkable skill and imagination of the young Pakistani artists for their portrayal of Japanese culture through the artistic works of paintings. "This event is a beautiful testament to the enduring friendship between Japan and Pakistan, a friendship rooted not only in diplomacy, but also in culture and people to people exchange," said



the Ambassador. President PJCA Islamabad conferred Ambassador's Commendation for 2026: At the inaugural ceremony of the exhibition, Ambassador Akamatsu presented the prestigious Ambassador's Commendation for 2026 to Mr. Jamal Shah, President of Pakistan-Japan Cultural Association (PJCA) Islamabad recognizing his pivotal role in advancing Japan-Pakistan cultural ties. While paying rich tribute to Mr. Shah's leadership

role not only as President PJCA Islamabad but also as a tireless champion of the arts, Ambassador Akamatsu said that the conferment of this Commendation is a meaningful recognition of his sustained dedication to strengthening cultural ties. The Ambassador briefly touched upon the contributions of Mr. Shah as a lead role at the Expo 2005 Aichi, Japan, as Director of the Pakistan Pavilion and also extending his support, during his tenure as

Minister for Culture, for events hosted by the Embassy such as the Emperor's Birthday Reception and Japan Foundation's traveling exhibition "Yakishime". Most recently, Mr. Shah held the "Remains of Ruins" exhibition which highlighted the tragedy of nuclear devastation on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, said the Ambassador. Ambassador Akamatsu expressed his hope that Mr. Shah will continue to contribute to strengthening bilateral relationships and promoting Japanese culture.

Machinery imports rise by 11.73% in 8 months

ISLAMABAD: Imports of the overall machinery group increased by 11.73 percent during the first eight months of the current fiscal year (July-February) compared to the corresponding period of last year. The increased inflow of machinery is considered a positive indicator for the national economy as it supports productivity enhancement, technology transfer and infrastructure development across multiple sectors. Experts believe that the rising imports align with the government's ongoing policy initiatives aimed at strengthening industrial capacity, boosting exports and accelerating economic growth. According to the official data available with APP, the total imports of the machinery group during July-February of fiscal year 2025-26 were recorded at \$6.987 billion compared to \$6.253 billion during the same period of the previous fiscal year. The data revealed that imports of agricultural sector machinery and implements grew by 17.14 percent, rising from \$77.528 million to \$90.815 million, which is expected to help improve farm mechanization

and enhance agricultural productivity. Similarly, the imports of textile machinery surged by 25 percent from \$328.510 million to \$411.441 million, supporting modernization in Pakistan's key export-oriented textile sector and enabling manufacturers to adopt advanced production technologies. Power-generating machinery imports also increased by 9.30 percent from \$497.458 million to \$543.728 million, reflecting continued investment in energy infrastructure to ensure a reliable electricity supply for industries and households. The import in telecom sector. A significant rise was recorded in imports of construction and mining machinery, which jumped by 83.28 percent from \$89.307 million to \$163.682 million. The increase indicates strong momentum in infrastructure development and construction activities across the country. Likewise, imports of office machinery, including data processing equipment, witnessed a notable growth of 41.48 percent, increasing from \$335.230 million to \$474.285 million, highlighting the growing

pace of digital transformation and automation in both public and private sectors. Imports of other apparatus rose by 29.39 percent to \$477.201 million from \$368.810 million, while other machinery imports increased by 26.98 percent from \$1.411 billion to \$1.791 billion during the period under review. Telecom sector imports increased by 29.54 percent, from \$1.368 billion to \$1.772 billion, while mobile phone imports rose by 29.59 percent, from \$999.555 million to \$1.295 billion. However, imports of electrical machinery and apparatus declined by 18.96 percent, falling from \$2.146 billion to \$1.739 billion. When evaluated on a year-on-year basis, the overall imports of the machinery group rose by 4.31 percent, from \$834.824 million to \$870.799 million. Economists believe that the growing imports of industrial machinery reflect improved investor confidence and the government's emphasis on facilitating industrial growth, technological upgradation and sustainable economic development.—APP

LCVs, vans, jeeps output surges 24.04%

However, farm tractor production declined by 16.53 percent, falling to 18,825 units from 22,554 units, primarily due to sector-specific challenges

ISLAMABAD: The production of Light Commercial Vehicles (LCVs), vans and jeeps in the country rose by 24.04 percent during the first eight months of fiscal year 2025-26, reflecting the positive impact of government policies aimed at promoting industrial growth and import substitution. A total of 28,944 LCVs, vans and jeeps were manufactured during July-February (2025-26), compared to 23,333 units produced in the same period of last fiscal year, according to official data of the Pakistan Automobile Manufacturers Association available with APP. The growth in output is attributed to policy continuity, improved macroeconomic stability, and facilitative measures introduced by the government to encourage local manufacturing, enhance vendor capacity and ensure smoother supply chains. During the period under review, truck production recorded a significant increase of 87.86 percent, rising from 2,539 units to 4,770 units, indicating heightened economic activity and expansion in logistics and infrastructure sectors. Bus production also grew by 26.61 percent, reaching 639 units from 493 units last year. Meanwhile, car production witnessed a notable increase, surging to 104,652 units from 68,708 units in the corresponding period last year. Similarly, the output of motorcycles and three-wheelers rose by 31.20 percent, climbing to 1,266,481 units from 965,274 units, underscoring improved consumer demand and accessibility. However, farm tractor production declined by 16.53 percent, falling to 18,825 units from 22,554 units, primarily due to sector-specific challenges. Overall, the upward trend in automobile production highlights the effectiveness of government policies focused on industrial expansion, localization, and economic revival, contributing positively to employment generation, value addition and strengthening of the national economy.—APP

NDMA warns of rain, thunderstorms

ISLAMABAD: The National Emergencies Operation Center (NEOC) of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has warned of thunderstorms and rainfall across the country over the next 12 to 24 hours. According to the advisory, a system of western winds entering from the southwestern belt of Balochistan is likely to impact most regions, bringing showers accompanied by strong winds and gusty storms. NDMA has cautioned about the risk of urban flooding in low-lying areas of Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Attock and Chakwal amid ongoing rainfall. Residents in vulnerable localities have been advised to remain alert and adopt precautionary measures to minimize potential damage. Rain accompanied by thunderstorms and strong winds is expected over the next 12 to 24 hours in Islamabad and several cities of Punjab, including Murree, Rawalpindi, Attock, Jhelum, Chakwal, Gujrat, Sialkot, Lahore, Mianwali and Mandi Bahauddin. According to the forecast, rainfall is also likely in Khushab, Sargodha, Gujranwala, Hafizabad, Faisalabad, Kasur, Okara, Narowal, Dera Ghazi Khan, Multan, Bahawalpur, Sahiwal, Bahawalnagar and Rahim Yar Khan. Rain accompanied by thunderstorms, dust storms and strong winds is expected in various parts of Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with chances of hailstorms at isolated locations. In view of the anticipated downpour, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has already issued an alert for possible flooding in several districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has forecast flash floods in Balochistan, particularly in Turbat, Kech, Gwadar, Khuzdar, Zhob and Lasbela. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, flood-like conditions are also expected in Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu, Parachinar, Peshawar, Mardan and Swabi, prompting authorities to advise precautionary measures in vulnerable areas.—DNA

Tahir for policy support to overcome housing shortage

ISLAMABAD: President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) Sardar Tahir Mehmood has urged the government to take urgent and coordinated measures in collaboration with the private sector to address Pakistan's growing housing crisis, which has been aggravated by rapid urbanization and population growth. Talking to a group of visiting businessmen belonging to Construction sector here on Wednesday, he said that Pakistan is currently facing a housing shortfall estimated at around 10 million units, while the annual addition of new housing units is far below the growing demand. With rapid migration to urban centres in search of better employment opportunities, the pressure on housing infrastructure in major cities is continuously increasing, making affordable housing a serious challenge for a large

segment of the population. Sardar Tahir Mehmood emphasized that the housing and construction sector holds immense potential to stimulate economic growth, generate employment and activate over 40 allied industries. He stressed that the government should formulate a comprehensive housing policy that encourages public-private partnerships and facilitates private sector investment in affordable housing projects. The CCI President further called for simplifying regulatory procedures, reducing approval timelines, and ensuring the availability of land and infrastructure to encourage developers and investors to undertake large-scale housing initiatives. He also underscored the need to introduce incentives such as tax relief, low-cost housing finance schemes,

and facilitation for construction materials to make housing projects viable for both builders and buyers. He said that financial institutions should also be encouraged to expand housing finance facilities so that middle- and low-income groups can access affordable mortgages and fulfill their dream of owning a house. Sardar Tahir Mehmood noted that addressing the housing shortage would not only improve living standards but would also contribute significantly to economic activity and sustainable urban development. He reiterated that the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry stands ready to work closely with the government and relevant stakeholders to promote practical solutions for overcoming the housing deficit and ensuring planned urban growth in the country.—APP

Power suspension programme

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) on Wednesday issued a power suspension programme for Thursday, in various areas of its region due to necessary maintenance and routine development work. According to an IESCO spokesperson, electricity supply in Islamabad Circle will remain suspended from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm for feeders including Khana Dak, Burma, Ghouri Garden, Shareefabad, Sudran Road, and Scheme-I. In Rawalpindi City Circle, power supply will remain disrupted from 7:00 am to 12:00 pm in areas served by Khurram City feeder. Similarly, in Chakwal Circle, electricity will remain suspended from 7:00 am to 12:00 pm for feeders including CWO, Abdullah Pur, Jalal Pur, Sagharpur, Duffer, and PD Khan. In GSO Circle, power supply will remain affected from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm on transmission lines including 132-KV Chakwal-Bhagwal-Talagang and 132-KV Kahuta City-Palandri, while from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm, outages will also be observed on the 132-KV transmission line at New Wah Bahter More and adjoining areas. The IESCO management apologized to consumers for the inconvenience and said that power supply may be restored earlier than scheduled if the maintenance work is completed ahead of time.—APP

IESCO chief to hold live E-Kachehri today

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chief Executive of Islamabad Electric Supply Company, Engineer Chaudhry Khalid Mahmood, will directly hear consumer complaints and suggestions during a live e-Kachehri on Thursday. According to an IESCO spokesperson, the session will be held from 9:00 am to 11:00 am through Facebook Live, providing consumers across the region an opportunity to interact with the chief executive and seek resolution of their electricity-related issues. Consumers can participate via the official Facebook ID "CEO-IESCO E-Kachehri" or contact the designated telephone number 051-9253105 during the scheduled hours. The spokesperson said that consumers are required to provide their name, electricity bill reference number, and contact details while registering complaints to facilitate prompt resolution.

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Briefs

Abbasi orders probe into Tezgam Express incident

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi has ordered a high-level inquiry to determine the exact cause of an incident involving the 8-Down Tezgam Express. According to a spokesperson for Pakistan Railways, the investigation's findings will help identify any lapses and ensure measures are taken to prevent similar incidents in the future. The spokesperson said Pakistan Railways launched an immediate relief operation following the incident. The Multan Division responded swiftly by dispatching a relief train and trucks to the site. He said the rescue teams, including Rescue 1122 personnel and railway medical staff, reached the location promptly and are actively engaged in assistance efforts. He further confirmed that no casualties have been reported. Work is currently underway to restore the affected track at the earliest, aiming to resume normal train operations without delay.—APP

Mushaal denounces Andrabi verdict as 'Assault on Justice'

ISLAMABAD: Mushaal Hussain Mullick, wife of imprisoned Kashmiri freedom leader Yasin Malik, vehemently denounced a recent Indian court verdict sentencing Aasiya Andrabi to life imprisonment, terming it a "deliberate conspiracy" to silence Kashmiri leadership and suppress the right to self-determination in Kashmir. Ms Mullick said the ruling was "not justice, but a premeditated plot," adding that the sentence handed to Andrabi reflected a systematic attempt to crush dissenting voices in the region. She maintained that such decisions run in stark contradiction to the principles of justice and due process. Describing the move as part of a broader crackdown, she alleged that "controversial laws" were being used as tools to stifle the freedom movement. "This is not merely the punishment of a few individuals; it is an attack on an entire nation's right to self-determination," Mrs Malik said. She further warned that efforts to silence Kashmiri leadership had intensified. "The conspiracy to suppress Kashmiri voices is at its peak," she said, adding that those imprisoned had become a "collective cry for freedom." Ms Mullick also criticised the international community's response, saying its continued silence would be "tantamount to complicity in oppression." Questioning the credibility of the judicial process, she remarked, "Truth has been criminalised, what kind of system is this?—APP

Govt plans optional multi tariff ToU mechanism

Under this proposed framework, industrial consumers will have the flexibility to opt into a multi-slab tariff structure, where energy pricing is based on average marginal cost signals across defined time-of-use slabs. This approach is designed to better reflect the actual cost of electricity supply during different periods

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Under a special initiative by the Federal Minister for (Power Division) Sardar Awaiz Ahmed Khan Leghari, the Division is considering introduction of a new optional tariff mechanism aimed at facilitating industrial consumers and enhancing overall efficiency in electricity utilization. According to a press release issued by the Ministry of Energy (Power Division), several internal consultative and technical meetings have already been undertaken by the Minister in this regard. Under this proposed framework,

industrial consumers will have the flexibility to opt into a multi-slab tariff structure, where energy pricing is based on average marginal cost signals across defined time-of-use slabs. This approach is designed to better reflect the actual cost of electricity supply during different periods. The tariff will consist of two primary components: fixed charges based on Maximum Demand Indicators (MDI) and are expected to be relatively higher. This will incentivize consumers to optimize and reduce their peak demand and variable energy charges significantly rationalized and aligned closer to actual energy costs, enabling

more cost-reflective pricing. This structure is expected to deliver the following benefits, encourage efficient load management by allowing industries to align their operations with lower-cost time periods, promote higher electricity consumption during off-peak hours, and improve system load factor. Incentivize peak demand reduction, thereby reducing stress on the grid and minimizing the need for costly capacity additions. Support industrial productivity and competitiveness through more predictable and potentially lower energy costs. Overall, this tariff reform is expected to act as a catalyst for sustainable in-

dustrial growth in Pakistan, improving energy efficiency while supporting long-term economic development. The minister after technical proposals, has now directed to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness for the proposed regime through extensive stakeholder consultations. In this regard, stakeholder consultations will be conducted with industrial consumers, chambers of commerce, and trade bodies across the country. Feedback from these engagements will be incorporated to refine the mechanism. The first consultative conference will be held tomorrow March 26, online.



ISLAMABAD : Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a review meeting on exports of essential food items to the Gulf countries and Pakistan's Maritime Operations in wake of current regional situation. DINA

Pak botanist mastering advanced science to transform arid lands

ISLAMABAD: For Imran Baloch, a PhD student in botany at Northwest A&F University in Yangling, Shaanxi Province, the journey from Pakistan to China's agricultural heartland is driven by a mission that resonates deeply with his homeland's most pressing challenge: how to grow more food with less water. According to China Economic Net, arriving in September 2024, he immediately found himself in an environment uniquely suited to help him find answers. The challenge is particularly acute in Pakistan, where approximately 75 to 92 percent of the national territory is classified as arid or semi-arid. These conditions extend from the drought-affected expanses of Balochistan, Pakistan's largest province, to the southern districts of Punjab—the country's agricultural heartland—which

increasingly face water scarcity. Similar challenges also affect large areas of Sindh and parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. For farmers across these regions, every drop of water counts, and every crop variety must be resilient. "I think my major is very important for Pakistani agriculture," says Imran Baloch. To address this, Imran is mastering an impressive suite of cutting-edge plant science techniques at Northwest A&F University, including gene cloning, CRISPR/Cas9, RNAi, Dual-Luciferase Assay, BiFC Assay, and subcellular localization assay. "There are many techniques to edit genes. We modify the genetic structure of the plant, and then we grow that plant and experiment with different techniques to help arid and semi-arid regions," he explains. His research focuses

on crops such as canola and alfalfa—the former essential for Pakistan's edible oil supply and the latter for animal fodder. "Protein-protein interactions, mutant preparation, transgenic plant preparation—we study these techniques because they are crucial for Pakistan to get more yield from these crops against drought or salinity stress. China is very advanced in all these areas and is doing excellent research." Baloch believes he has found the ideal place to pursue this mission. Yangling is not merely a university town; it is China's sole Agricultural High-tech Industrial Demonstration Zone. Crucially, it carries a national mandate to promote agricultural modernization in arid and semi-arid regions—a mission that aligns directly with Pakistan's climatic realities.—APP

PTI leader Seemabia gets bail relief till April 2

ISLAMABAD: The District and Sessions Court on Wednesday extended the pre-arrest bail of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Saemabia Tahir till April 2 in a case related to alleged anti-state tweets, as police failed to submit the case record during the hearing. The case was heard by Additional District and Sessions Judge Muhammad Afzal Majoka. During the proceedings, the accused filed a request seeking exemption from personal appearance, which was taken up by the court. Police officials did not present the case record at the hearing. The court directed authorities to ensure that the complete record is produced at the next hearing and instructed the accused to appear before the court. The court then extended the pre-arrest bail of Seemabia Tahir and adjourned further proceedings till April 2.—APP

431 cases registered, 644 arrested

RAWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi Police are continuing a comprehensive crackdown against violations of the tenancy law across the district. A police spokesman said on Wednesday that 431 cases had been registered so far this year over breaches of the Tenancy Act, while 644 individuals had been apprehended. He said that daily search operations were being conducted across the district on the instructions of City Police Officer (CPO) Syed Khalid Mahmood Hamdani to ensure strict enforcement of the law. Senior officers also regularly scrutinised tenant registration reports to ensure compliance, he added. The spokesman urged citizens to ensure immediate registration of tenants and domestic employees at the relevant police station, Police Khidmat Markaz or through the Punjab Police mobile application. He further appealed to the public to report any violations of the tenancy law through official social media platforms or at the nearest police station, assuring that the identity of informants would be kept confidential. "Failure to register tenants is a punishable offence," he emphasised. The spokesman added that the Rawalpindi Police were also obtaining verification certificates from representatives of all union councils, including chairmen, councillors and market association office-bearers, to strengthen enforcement measures. He stressed that it was mandatory for all citizens to ensure timely registration of tenants and employees to maintain law and order.—APP

Scholars kick off one-year program

ISLAMABAD: Ten scholars from Pakistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, South Africa, Benin, Laos, Rwanda, Uganda, Sri Lanka and Indonesia will carry out a one-year research program at China Meteorological Administration (CMA)-affiliated institutions and research institutes, focusing on meteorological observation, forecasting services and climate change. CMA held a welcome ceremony for the 2026 cohort on March 20, attended by Zhang Zuqiang, Deputy Administrator of CMA, according to a report carried by China Economic Net on Wednesday. On the occasion, Zhang Zuqiang welcomed the scholars, noting that the program has helped strengthen cooperation between national meteorological services and CMA. He said that participants will conduct joint research in areas such as numerical forecasting, artificial intelligence and early warning systems, and encouraged exchanges on China's AI-powered integrated meteorological system to provide early warnings for all, or "MAZU", to deepen practical cooperation and jointly address climate challenges. The program is jointly established by CMA and the Ministry of Education under the Chinese Government Scholarship - Silk Road Program. Organized by CMA Training Centre (International Cooperation and Training Center) in collaboration with Peking University, the program selects candidates through global recruitment and interviews. This cohort marks the third group of visiting scholars since the program's launch.—DNA

Seafood exports up by 9.7pc to \$289m

ISLAMABAD: The exports of fish and fish preparations increased by 9.7 percent during the first eight months of the current fiscal year as compared to the corresponding period of last year, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported. The country earned \$289.162 million from seafood exports during July-February (2025-26) against the exports of \$263.589 million in July-February (2021-22), showing growth of 9.70 percent, according to PBS data. In terms of quantity, the exports of fish and fish preparations increased by 0.99 percent, going up from 126,057 metric tons last year to 127,308 metric tons in the first eight months of this fiscal year. On a year-on-year basis, seafood exports increased by 12.89 percent to \$35.350 million in February 2026 as compared to exports of \$31.315 million during February 2025. In terms of quantity, the exports however witnessed a 1.85 percent decrease, going down from 16,006 metric tons last year to 15,710 metric tons this year. On a month-on-month basis, the seafood exports witnessed nominal decline of 0.01 percent when compared to the exports of \$35.353 million in January 2026, according to PBS data. In terms of quantity, fish exports went down by 5.5 percent in February 2026 compared to the exports of 16,624 metric tons in January 2026. It is pertinent to mention here that the overall food exports from the country were recorded at \$ 3,394,884 million during July-February (2025-26) against the exports of \$ 5,173,737 million recorded during July-February (2024-25), showing negative growth of 34.38 percent.—APP

Nayyar urges global efforts to prevent escalation

ISLAMABAD: Secretary General of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Nayyar Hussain Bukhari Wednesday stressed the need for coordinated international efforts to prevent further escalation in the ongoing tensions involving the United States, Israel, and Iran. In a statement, Bukhari said Pakistan has adopted a cautious and balanced diplomatic approach in the prevailing situation, which reflects maturity and responsibility on the global stage. He said that as an Islamic country, Pakistan is deeply concerned as the repercussions of the conflict are largely affecting Muslim nations. Highlighting Pakistan's role, he said the country's leadership has played a constructive and positive part by "calling right as right and wrong as wrong," demonstrating principled diplomacy. Nayyar Bukhari said that Iran maintains it has no hostility towards any Islamic country or its people.—APP

Eid celebrations: Gwadar witnessed tourists' influx

ISLAMABAD: During the three days of Eid celebrations scheduled from Mar 22 to Mar 24, Gwadar turned into a major tourist hub as hundreds of people hailing from different parts of the country poured into the city and enjoyed the festive days with great enthusiasm. Gwadar Pro reported on Wednesday Beaches, resorts, Pidri Zari Park, Kohe Batil, and Koh-e-Mehdi were the main tourist attractions. Director General of the Gwadar Development Authority (GDA), Moin ur Rehman Khan, visited GDA's Padi Zar Park, Marine Drive, and various beaches, and observed an unusually high influx of tourists during the Eid-ul-Fitr holidays. On this occasion, Director Environment Rasool Bakhsh and Assistant Director Municipal Wing Yahya Wadelah accompanied him. During the Eid holidays, Model Park, GDA Central Park, Marine Drive, and different beaches witnessed a large number of visitors, including local residents as well as hundreds of tourists from other cities. Expressing satisfaction, the Director General stated that due to the quality facilities provided by GDA, it was not only possible to host tourists effectively, but people were also able to enjoy a safe, clean, and environmentally friendly recreational environment. He particularly appreciated the arrangements made for women at the Beach Model Park, where a three-day Meena Bazaar was held before Eid, followed by large participation of women during the holidays in a peaceful environment. However, he also expressed concern that at some locations, visitors did not maintain cleanliness, discipline, and proper upkeep, resulting in littering and minor damage. He urged citizens and tourists to take responsibility for maintaining cleanliness and order at recreational spots. The Director General further said that Gwadar is rapidly emerging as a key tourist destination in the region. During Eid, not only residents of the city but also people from Karachi and nearby districts and tehsils visited in large numbers. He added that the city's beauty, clean coastline, improved infrastructure, and development projects by GDA have played a significant role in making Gwadar an attractive tourist destination.—DNA

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Peace Is Not Claimed, It Is Earned

MUHAMMAD MOHSIN IQBAL

POWER in the modern age seldom speaks in whispers; it announces itself with assertions, repetitions, and claims designed to shape perception as much as reality. In recent months, one such assertion has echoed persistently from Washington, where President Donald Trump has, on numerous occasions, declared that he prevented a full-scale war between Pakistan and India following the tense military exchange of May 2025. Repeated with striking frequency, this claim seeks not merely to inform but to construct a narrative in which the United States appears as the indispensable arbiter of peace in a volatile region. Yet history, when examined with sobriety rather than spectacle, often reveals a more intricate truth. The brief but intense confrontation between Pakistan and India did not unfold in a vacuum, nor did its de-escalation hinge upon a single external intervention. Credible reports and observable developments indicated that the realities on the ground, particularly the balance of military response and the swift demonstration of technological capability, played a decisive role in shaping the trajectory of events. It became evident to impartial observers which side had sought external mediation and which had asserted control through measured but firm action. Pakistan's conduct during and after the confrontation offers a study in calibrated restraint. A nation often compelled by circumstance to defend its sovereignty, it has consistently articulated its preference for peace, not as a rhetorical device but as a strategic doctrine. However, peace, when mistaken for passivity, invites miscalculation. The response delivered by Pakistan's armed forces was not only swift but precise, reaffirming a long-standing principle that restraint does not equate to weakness. The memory of aerial engagements, including the capture of Abhinandan Varthaman in an earlier episode, still lingers as a reminder of how quickly the dynamics of conflict can shift when resolve is tested. What distinguishes Pakistan's posture, however, is not merely its capacity to respond, but its refusal to succumb to triumphalism. Military success was not followed by chest-thumping rhetoric or theatrical displays of dominance. Instead, there emerged a quieter, more dignified expression of gratitude and humility, rooted in a consciousness that power, if left unchecked by moral restraint, can become self-defeating. This balance between strength and sobriety remains rare in a world where victories are often amplified beyond proportion for domestic or international consumption. Beyond its immediate neighbourhood, Pakistan's diplomatic engagements further underscore its commitment to stability. Its par-



ticipation in international efforts concerning the crisis in Gaza Strip, despite the evident limitations of such initiatives, reflects a willingness to contribute to collective peace even when outcomes remain uncertain. The tragic reality, however, is that while forums are convened and declarations issued, the suffering in Palestine continues unabated, exposing the inadequacy of global mechanisms when confronted with entrenched power asymmetries and selective enforcement of international norms. The unfolding tensions involving Iran, United States, and Israel have added yet another layer of complexity to an already fragile international order. Pakistan, adhering to its consistent approach, advocated dialogue at a time when diplomacy still held the promise of averting escalation. However, the subsequent military strikes altered the equation, transforming a negotiable dispute into a confrontation marked by unpredictability. Iran's response, both strategic and resolute, challenged prevailing assumptions and demonstrated that even under pressure, nations retain the capacity to redefine the terms of engagement. As the conflict edged towards a precarious equilibrium, the familiar question resurfaced: who can be trusted to mediate, to guarantee, to ensure that commitments are honoured? The credibility of traditional power brokers has been eroded by precedents that cast doubt on their impartiality. In this context, attention has once again turned towards Pakistan, not as a claimant of influence but as a practitioner of balanced diplomacy. Reports suggesting its quiet but active role in facilitating de-escalation point to a recognition that effective mediation requires not only strategic relevance but also a reputation for sincerity.

This evolving role, however, is not without its challenges. Mediation in contemporary geopolitics demands more than access; it requires trust, and trust is forged over time through consistency of conduct. Pakistan's past and present efforts suggest an awareness of this responsibility, yet the ultimate test lies in whether conflicting parties perceive it as a credible guarantor in an environment where assurances are often viewed with scepticism. The broader lesson emerging from these developments is both sobering and instructive. Peace in the twenty-first century cannot be sustained through unilateral claims or self-congratulatory narratives. It is shaped instead by a convergence of restraint, resilience, and responsible diplomacy. Nations that possess the capacity to wage war must also cultivate the wisdom to prevent it, and those who seek to mediate must demonstrate integrity beyond rhetoric. In this delicate balance, Pakistan appears to be carving out a role that aligns with its professed ideals. It has shown that strength need not be loud, that victory need not be vaunted, and that the pursuit of peace, though often fraught with contradiction, remains the only viable path in a world perpetually on the brink. Whether this approach will yield enduring stability is a question that time alone can answer, but for the present, it offers a counter-narrative to the prevailing discourse of power—a reminder that true leadership lies not in claiming to stop wars, but in striving, quietly and consistently, to prevent them.

Hormuz at the Centre of a Gathering Storm

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



The ripple effects of the confrontation are being felt across the region. In Baghdad, security concerns intensified after reports that two drones struck the compound housing the United States Embassy in Baghdad. American officials later confirmed that no personnel had been injured in the incident, though Iraqi security sources suggested that a missile had hit a helipad inside the heavily fortified complex. The episode highlights the vulnerability of American interests across the Middle East at a time of heightened tensions with Iran and its allied groups. Militia organisations aligned with Tehran have long maintained a presence in Iraq and have previously targeted facilities...

THE narrow waters of the Strait of Hormuz have once again become the focal point of a dangerous confrontation that threatens not only the security of the Middle East but also the stability of global trade. As tensions deepen between Iran and the United States following a series of military strikes, the world's most important energy corridor has entered a period of uncertainty. Statements by Iran's foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, suggest that while the waterway has not been formally closed, navigation through it has become increasingly precarious, prompting diplomatic outreach from several countries seeking assurances for the safety of their vessels.

In a televised interview on the programme Face the Nation aired by CBS News, Mr Araghchi addressed mounting concerns about the security of maritime traffic passing through the strait. The narrow channel linking the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman carries roughly a fifth of the world's traded oil, making it one of the most strategically sensitive waterways on the planet. Any disruption there reverberates far beyond the region, influencing global energy markets and geopolitical calculations alike.

The Iranian foreign minister indicated that Tehran was open to discussions with countries that wished to secure safe passage for their ships. According to him, several governments had already approached Iran seeking assurances for their commercial vessels navigating the tense waters. Although he declined to identify specific countries, diplomatic sources in Europe have previously suggested that officials from France and Italy were in contact with Tehran on precisely this matter. Mr Araghchi emphasised that the decision regarding which vessels might receive safe passage ultimately rests with Iran's military authorities. He suggested that some ships from various countries had already been permitted to pass through the strait under Iranian security arrangements. The implication, however, was that the situation remained fluid and heavily influenced by the broader military confrontation currently unfolding in the region. Tehran maintains that the strait has not been formally shut. Instead, Iranian officials argue that the heightened risks stem from the military escalation triggered by American and Israeli strikes on Iranian territory two weeks ago. In this narrative, it is the atmosphere of conflict rather than an explicit blockade that has discouraged commercial shipping from entering the passage. Yet the distinction may be largely academic for global markets. The practical effect has been a sharp reduction in maritime traffic, with shipping companies increasingly reluctant to send tankers into a potential combat zone. The resulting uncertainty has already pushed oil prices higher, adding to concerns about economic stability in a world still grappling with inflationary pressures and fragile supply chains.

The Donald Trump administration, meanwhile, has responded by urging several major powers to contribute naval forces to safeguard the waterway. Washington has reportedly encouraged countries such as the United Kingdom, China and France to dispatch warships to the strait in an effort to deter attacks and restore confidence among commercial shipping operators. Such a move, however, carries its own risks. A heavier naval presence from multiple countries could transform an already volatile situation into a crowded and unpredictable theatre of military manoeuvre. In the confined waters of the Strait of Hormuz, even minor incidents have the potential to escalate rapidly.

Beyond the immediate issue of maritime security lies a deeper political dispute. Mr Araghchi used his television interview to reject assertions by President Trump that Iran had sought negotiations or requested a ceasefire. Tehran's position, he said, was precisely the opposite. According to the Iranian foreign minister, the government had not asked for talks or for a pause in hostilities. From Tehran's perspective, the current conflict is the result of a deliberate decision by Washington to launch military strikes despite ongoing diplomatic engagement. Mr Araghchi pointed out that Iranian officials had been engaged in discussions with American representatives when the attacks were carried out. For Tehran, this sequence of events reinforced a long-standing suspicion that negotiations with Washington could not be relied upon as a guarantee against military pressure. In his remarks, the foreign minister characterised the conflict as a "war of choice" initiated by the United States. Iran, he said, would continue to act in what it described as legitimate self-defence. Such language reflects the hardened tone that has increasingly defined relations between the two countries since the outbreak of the present crisis. The ripple effects of the confrontation are being felt across the region. In Baghdad, security concerns intensified after reports that two drones struck the compound housing the United States Embassy in Baghdad. American officials later confirmed that no personnel had been injured in the incident, though Iraqi security sources suggested that a missile had hit a helipad inside the heavily fortified complex. The episode highlights the vulnerability of American interests across the Middle East at a time of heightened tensions with Iran and its allied groups. Militia organisations aligned with Tehran have long maintained a presence in Iraq and have previously targeted facilities associated with the United States.

In response to the deteriorating security environment, the embassy in Baghdad has advised American citizens to consider leaving Iraq and to maintain a low public profile if they remain in the country. The diplomatic mission also urged residents to keep essential supplies — including food, water and medicines in anticipation of potential disruptions. Washington has

maintained its highest level of travel warning for Iraq, citing the continuing risk of attacks against American citizens, infrastructure and diplomatic sites. Such advisories reflect the broader concern that the conflict between Iran and the United States could ignite flash-points across a wide geographic arc stretching from the Persian Gulf to the eastern Mediterranean.

The stakes are particularly high in the maritime domain. The Strait of Hormuz, only about 33 kilometres wide at its narrowest point, has long been recognised as one of the world's most sensitive chokepoints. Each day, millions of barrels of crude oil and refined petroleum products pass through its shipping lanes en route to markets in Asia, Europe and beyond. Even temporary disruptions can send shockwaves through global energy markets. Tanker operators, insurers and port authorities closely monitor security developments in the strait, adjusting routes and risk premiums accordingly. The present uncertainty has already prompted some shipping firms to delay voyages or seek alternative supply arrangements where possible. For oil-importing countries, particularly those heavily dependent on Gulf supplies, the situation presents an uncomfortable reminder of how quickly geopolitical tensions can translate into economic strain. Higher fuel prices ripple through transportation costs, industrial production and consumer markets. Yet despite the tensions, Tehran appears keen to signal that it does not seek a permanent closure of the waterway. Allowing selected vessels safe passage — particularly those belonging to countries maintaining diplomatic channels with Iran — could serve both practical and political purposes. On the practical side, Iran itself relies on maritime trade and energy exports that pass through the same waters. A total shutdown of the strait would inflict economic harm on Tehran as well as its adversaries. Politically, maintaining limited navigation allows Iran to present itself as acting responsibly while placing the blame for instability on the actions of its opponents. Whether such a delicate balance can be sustained remains uncertain. With military forces from several countries operating in close proximity and with armed groups across the region closely watching developments, the margin for miscalculation is thin. Diplomats quietly acknowledge that a return to dialogue may ultimately prove the only path toward stabilising the situation. For now, however, the rhetoric from both sides suggests that neither is ready to step back. As oil tankers hesitate at the mouth of the Persian Gulf and naval vessels gather in the surrounding waters, the Strait of Hormuz stands as a reminder of how geography and politics intersect in the modern world. A narrow channel carved by nature has become the stage for a confrontation whose consequences may extend far beyond the horizon of the Gulf.

Operation Muhafiz-Ul-Bahr: Carving Pakistan's Maritime Future

Miss Komal Shabbir

Pakistan's geography places it in a particularly advantageous position in this emerging strategic landscape. Ports such as Port of Karachi and Gwadar Port lie close to the Gulf shipping lanes yet outside the immediate zone of confrontation. If supported by modern logistics infrastructure, port efficiency, and reliable maritime security, these ports could serve as important transshipment and logistics nodes for cargo moving between the Gulf, South Asia, Central Asia, and beyond

THE ongoing conflict among the United States, Israel and Iran has once again exposed the fragility of global maritime trade and the strategic vulnerability of energy supply chains. As tensions escalate around the Strait of Hormuz; through which nearly one-fifth of the world's oil passes, the ripple effects are being felt far beyond the immediate conflict zone. For countries like Pakistan, which rely heavily on maritime trade and imported energy, such crises reveal both serious risks and unexpected opportunities. In this context, Pakistan Navy's Operation Muhafiz-ul-Bahr represents not merely a defensive maritime initiative but a strategic response to an evolving regional security environment. Operation Muhafiz-ul-Bahr reflects Pakistan's recognition that the security of sea lines of communication is central to national economic stability. Nearly all of Pakistan's international trade and a significant portion of its energy imports travel through sea routes connected to the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea. Any disruption in these routes; whether due to military confrontation, maritime blockades, or increased insurance risks for commercial shipping, can have immediate economic consequences. By deploying naval assets to monitor maritime activity and ensure safe passage for merchant vessels, Pakistan has signalled its commitment to protecting its maritime lifelines during a period of heightened geopolitical uncertainty.

At the same time, the crisis presents an opportunity for Pakistan to rethink its broader economic and maritime strategy. One obvious lesson is the urgency of accelerating the transition toward renewable energy in order to reduce exposure to external oil shocks. Yet the opportunities extend well beyond

energy diversification. The current instability in the Gulf highlights the growing importance of maritime logistics, supply-chain resilience, and alternative trade corridors. As shipping companies and global insurers reassess risk around the Strait of Hormuz, there is increasing interest in diversifying maritime hubs and transshipment points across the northern Indian Ocean.

Pakistan's geography places it in a particularly advantageous position in this emerging strategic landscape. Ports such as Port of Karachi and Gwadar Port lie close to the Gulf shipping lanes yet outside the immediate zone of confrontation. If supported by modern logistics infrastructure, port efficiency, and reliable maritime security, these ports could serve as important transshipment and logistics nodes for cargo moving between the Gulf, South Asia, Central Asia, and beyond. In periods of geopolitical tension, global shipping networks often shift toward ports that offer stability, security, and efficient connectivity. Pakistan, therefore, has a window of opportunity to strengthen its role within the evolving architecture of Indian Ocean trade.

Another important opportunity lies in maritime services and shipping-related industries. Heightened tensions in strategic chokepoints increase demand for maritime insurance services, naval escorts, ship maintenance facilities, and port-based logistics support. Pakistan could expand its maritime services sector by developing ship repair yards, bunkering facilities, maritime insurance partnerships, and logistics parks near its major ports. Such initiatives would not only generate economic activity but also integrate Pakistan more deeply into regional and global maritime supply chains. The crisis also underscores the importance of maritime diploma-

cy and cooperative security arrangements in the northern Arabian Sea. By maintaining an active naval presence and safeguarding commercial traffic through Operation Muhafiz-ul-Bahr, Pakistan can strengthen its credibility as a responsible maritime stakeholder. This role can open avenues for greater cooperation with regional and international navies in areas such as maritime domain awareness, anti-piracy operations, and coordinated protection of shipping routes. Over time, such engagement can enhance Pakistan's influence in discussions surrounding Indian Ocean security governance.

In a broader sense, geopolitical crises often reshape economic geography. Disruptions in traditional supply routes encourage the emergence of alternative corridors, new logistics hubs, and diversified energy and trade networks. The current US-Iran confrontation, therefore, represents more than a regional security challenge; it is also a moment that may accelerate structural changes in global trade patterns. For Pakistan, the challenge is not merely to shield itself from the immediate shock but to strategically position itself within these emerging dynamics. Operation Muhafiz-ul-Bahr thus carries significance beyond naval deployment. It represents a recognition that maritime security, economic resilience, and strategic geography are deeply interconnected. If Pakistan can combine maritime security initiatives with investments in port infrastructure, shipping services, renewable energy, and regional trade connectivity, the present crisis may ultimately serve as a catalyst for strengthening its economic and strategic standing in the wider Indian Ocean region.

— The writer is associated with the National Institute of Maritime Affairs; views expressed are her own.

Briefs

Iran rejects
US plan;
issues...

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Iran's attacks on regional energy infrastructure along with its restrictions on the strait have sent oil prices skyrocketing and sparked fears of a global energy crisis, in turn putting pressure on the US to find a way to end the chokehold and calm markets. At least 1,000 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division will be sent to the Middle East in the coming days, three people with knowledge of the plans told The Associated Press. The paratroopers are trained to jump into hostile or contested areas to secure key territory and airfields. The Pentagon is also in the process of sending about 5,000 more Marines, trained in amphibious assaults, and thousands of sailors to the region.

In call with
MBS PM
Shehbaz...

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Accipiating the Saudi leadership for demonstrating remarkable restraint in the current crisis, the prime minister reassured the crown prince that Pakistan would always stand by the Kingdom and the brotherly people of Saudi Arabia, just as they had always supported Pakistan, through thick and thin. Prime Minister Shehbaz called for an immediate end to hostilities and a return to normalcy so that the regional situation could be stabilized, besides calling for unity and harmony in the ranks of the Ummah, which was needed more than ever before. The prime minister conveyed heartfelt Eid-ul-Fitr greetings to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, to the crown prince, and the Saudi people. The crown prince also reciprocated the sentiments.

Pakistan
condemns
sentences...

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international human rights obligations. The spokesperson said that Aasiya Andrabi had long been a vocal advocate for the Kashmir cause and her conviction and harsh sentencing underscored the shrinking space for political expression and civil liberties in IIOJK. "Pakistan believes that such actions further exacerbate tensions and undermine prospects for peace and stability in South Asia." The spokesperson urged the international community, including the United Nations and global human rights organisations, to take immediate notice of this development and to hold India accountable for its actions in IIOJK. He also called for the protection of the political, social, and human rights of the Kashmiri people, including the right to freedom of expression and a fair trial.

Malaysian
PM hails
Pakistan's...

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help create the conditions for meaningful negotiations. Malaysia supports this initiative and encourages in particular the United States and Iran to respond in the spirit in which it was offered. I note with cautious hope the signals, however incomplete, that suggest some space for diplomacy may still exist. That space should be treated with the seriousness it deserves. He said, any negotiation must proceed on the basis of genuine intent: a clear commitment to ending the conflict, not managing its tempo for tactical advantage. The international community has seen too many ceasefires that function as pauses rather than conclusions. The region deserves something more durable. Malaysia reaffirms Iran's right to defend its sovereignty, as recognised under international law, particularly in the face of continued Israeli strikes in the country and in Lebanon. At the same time, we call on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and to ensure that civilian populations and the infrastructure of neighbouring states, namely the Gulf states,

Liverpool's Salah to
end glittering Anfield
career at end of season

Salah expressed his wish to make this announcement to the supporters at the earliest possible opportunity to provide transparency about his future due to his respect and gratitude for them, the club said in a statement

DNA

LONDON: Mohamed Salah, one of Liverpool's greatest-ever players and the driving force behind the club's modern era of success, will leave Anfield at the end of the season.

The Egyptian forward, whose goals, durability, and iconic moments helped deliver two Premier Leagues, the Champions League, and a host of other major trophies, confirmed his departure in an emotional video on his social media accounts on Tuesday. "Unfortunately the day has come. This is the first part of my farewell," Salah said. "I will be leaving Liverpool at the end of the season.

"I never imagined how deeply this club, this city, these people, would become part of my life," the 33-year-old added. "Liverpool is not just a football club, it's a passion, it's a history, it's a spirit. I can't explain in words to anyone not part of this club. We celebrated victory, we won the most important trophies, and we fought together through the hardest time in our life." Signed from AS Roma in 2017, Salah established himself as one of the best players in the club's history, helping Liverpool to two Premier League titles, the Champions League, FIFA Club World Cup, UEFA Super Cup, FA Cup and two League Cups, as well as a Community Shield. Third-highest goalscorer

He has scored 255 goals in 435 appearances, making him the club's all-time third-highest goalscorer, just behind Ian Rush and Roger Hunt, while he has won the Premier League Golden Boot on four occasions.

"Salah expressed his wish to make this announcement to the supporters at the earliest possible opportunity to pro-



vide transparency about his future due to his respect and gratitude for them," the club said in a statement.

Salah came into this season on the back of a 2024/25 campaign that was widely regarded as one of the finest individual seasons in league history.

He scored 29 Premier League goals and made 18 assists in 38 matches, equalling the league record for most goal involvements in a single season while setting the record for a 38-game campaign.

He was named Premier League Player of the Season and

won the Golden Boot and Playmaker Award, becoming the first player to win all three in a single campaign.

But this season has been markedly different. He has struggled for form from the outset and endured lengthy stretches of games without scoring.

Benched for key matches

His slump saw him benched for several key matches, including Champions League fixtures, as his confidence and influence waned.

The on-field struggles were later compounded by a public flare-up with Liverpool boss Arne Slot.

In early December, after being left out for the third straight match, Salah accused the club of "throwing me under the bus" and suggested that his relationship with Slot had broken down. He was linked to a potential big-money move to Saudi Arabia.

Slot later attempted to downplay the rift, but the episode underscored just how strained things had become during a season in which Salah, long a defining presence at Anfield, found himself out of favour.

A recent improvement in form saw him score a jaw-dropping goal in Liverpool's 4-0 win over Galatasaray last week in their Champions League last-16 tie, Salah's 50th in Europe's elite club competition.

Salah, the "Egyptian King", is beloved by fans, whose affection is reflected vividly in the many murals, mostly depictions of Salah's signature goal celebrations, that have coloured the streets around Anfield.

"Leaving is never easy," Salah said. "You gave me the best time of my life. I will be always one of you. This club will always be my home to me and to my family. Thank you for everything. Because of all of you, I will never walk alone."

Pakistan denounces 'forcible
displacement' of Palestinians

UNITED NATIONS: Pakistan and seven other members of the UN Security Council Tuesday condemned "escalating" Israeli settlers' attacks against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank as "unacceptable," and demanded accountability and the prosecution of perpetrators. Delivering a part of the statement sponsored by Arab, OIC and European members of the 15-member Council, Pakistan's UN Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad reiterated their firm opposition to annexation of any part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and to any forcible displacement of the Palestinian people.

The part read out by the Pakistani envoy dealt with the rejection of annexation and forcible displacement of Palestinians and was on behalf of his country as also Bahrain, Denmark, France, Greece, Latvia, Somalia and United Kingdom. "We recall that the Security Council has condemned all measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem. Such measures violate international law, undermine ongoing peace efforts, run counter to the Comprehensive plan and jeopardize the prospect of achieving just and lasting peace," Ambassador Asim Ahmad said. "The Council has also de-

manded that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and that it fully respect all of its legal obligations in this regard, reaffirming its determination to examine practical ways and means to secure the full implementation of its relevant resolutions.

"This illegal settlement policy and Israeli settlers' continuous and escalating attacks against the Palestinian civilian population, as well as the violence against Palestinian communities, including the recent killing of Palestinian children by Israeli forces, are unacceptable and must be brought to an immediate end and we call for those responsible to be held to account." The part on historic status quo (of Jerusalem), economic and humanitarian situation and New York declaration on 'Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution' was delivered by French Ambassador Jerome Bonnafont. "We also reaffirm the Council's call for the preservation of the historic Status Quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem," he said. "We express our deep concern regarding the grave humanitarian and economic situation unfolding in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, notably

due to the severe restrictions on movement and access and to the withholding of Palestinian tax revenues by Israel. We call for these matters to be addressed urgently," the French envoy said.

"We reaffirm the collective commitment reflected in the New York Declaration to take concrete measures, in accordance with international law, and in line with the relevant UN resolutions and the 19 July 2024 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, to help realize the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to counter policies and threats of forcible displacement and annexation throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory."

The part on ending occupation and two-State solution, with sovereign and independent Palestine, as only path to peace and security in the region delivered by Bahraini Ambassador Jamal Fares Alrowaie. "We reiterate our commitment towards achieving just and lasting peace on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, and the Arab Peace Initiative, ending the Israeli occupation and implementing the two-State solution, where two democratic States. - Agencies

UNICEF warns of
rising child casualties

"We are calling for three immediate actions: a cessation of hostilities and protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure," Chaiban said, reminding all parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law

WASHINGTON: Children across the Middle East are facing a "devastating price" since the US-Israeli war with Iran started last month, a senior official at UNICEF warned Monday. "Twenty-three days into the escalating conflict in the Middle East, children across the region are paying a devastating price. A further descent into a wider or protracted conflict would be catastrophic for millions more," Ted Chaiban, UNICEF's deputy executive director for humanitarian action and supply operations, told reporters in New York. Chaiban said more than 2,100 children have been killed or injured, including 206 children killed in Iran and 118 in Lebanon. He also warned against rapid displacement across several countries driven by relentless bombardment and evacuation orders. In Iran, he said the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) estimates that up to 3.2 million people have been displaced, including up to 864,000 children. "We are calling for three immediate actions: a cessation of hostilities and protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure," Chaiban said, reminding all parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law.

A regional escalation has continued to flare since the US and Israel launched a joint offensive on Iran on Feb. 28, killing over 1,340 people so far, including then-Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Iran has retaliated with drone and missile strikes targeting Israel along with Jordan, Iraq and Gulf countries hosting US military assets, causing casualties and damage to infrastructure while disrupting global markets and aviation. - APP

Azerbaijan,
Italy expanding
agricultural
cooperation

BAKU: As part of his visit to Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan's Minister of Agriculture Majnun Mammadov met with Minister of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forestry of the Republic of Italy Francesco Lollobrigida and President of the Italian Trade Agency (ITA) Matteo Zoppas. The meetings focused on enhancing agricultural cooperation by boosting trade in food products and fostering direct ties between entrepreneurs through international exhibitions. The sides also exchanged views on technology transfer, joint research, and the exchange of expertise in key sectors such as animal husbandry, and dairy farming. Both parties expressed their interest in further advancing bilateral cooperation in the agricultural sector between the two countries, as well as expanding the trade of agri-food products. On the margins of the meeting, the "Agro Procurement and Supply" OJSC under the Ministry of Agriculture and "Coldiretti", the main Italian farmer organization, as well as the "Filiaria Italia" Association, which combines agriculture and agro-industrial sectors, signed a memorandum of cooperation. Under the agreement, the parties will expand cooperation across the agricultural and agro-industrial sectors to build a productive, sustainable, and export-driven economy. - APP

Pakistan says Kashmir not
a narrative but legal reality

GENEVA: Pakistan on Wednesday told the United Nations Human Rights Council that Jammu and Kashmir was an internationally recognized disputed territory, as reflected in relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions, and no unilateral action could erase that.

"Let me reiterate a simple and undeniable fact: Jammu and Kashmir remains an internationally recognized disputed territory, as reflected in relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions. This is not a narrative. This is a legal reality that no unilateral action can erase," Pakistan's First Secretary Adeel Mumtaz Khokhar said, exercising the right of reply at the UN Human Rights Council here.

Rejecting India's false assertions, he said that Pakistan had raised a fundamental issue that under the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (VDP), any denial of the right to self-determination constituted a violation of human rights. "India, as a member of the international community, and a State that arrogantly projects itself as a Vishwa Guru, is therefore obliged to create an enabling environment for the exercise of the right to self-determination by the people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. It is thus not surprising that Pakistan's reminder of India's fundamental obligations under the UN Charter appears to have rattled this rogue State, causing it to descend into name-calling and baseless attacks against

my country," Khokhar added.

He said that in IIOJK, India's brutal actions had led to the systematic curtailment of fundamental freedoms as mainstream Kashmiri leaders remained detained, peaceful assembly was suppressed, and even religious freedoms were restricted, including severe restrictions on Friday prayers and Eid gatherings. "Let us be clear: a State that fears prayers, fears its people," he remarked. He told the House that the Indian government had been involved in cross-border terrorist actions that extended beyond its territory, as the capture of a serving Indian naval officer, Commander Kulbhushan Jadhav, who was involved in perpetrating terrorist acts on Pakistani soil, was a living testament to this reality. The first secretary maintained that India's illegal campaign was not restricted to its neighbors but extended far beyond to North America and Europe.

"The killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada and the ongoing trial of Mr. Nikhil Gupta in the United States, an Indian agent acting at the behest of the Indian government, point to a disturbing trend of the current Indian government employing terrorism as a tool of state policy." He said that in the last year, India unilaterally announced to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960, despite the fact that the Treaty contained no provision permitting unilateral suspension. - DNA

Kazakhstan shapes its new technological agenda

Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev declared 2026 the Year of Digitalization and Artificial Intelligence, marking a new stage in the nation's modernization

DNA

ASTANA: As part of the Nauryznama decade, Kazakhstan marks the Day of Renewal, which this year focuses on digital transformation. Various technological exhibitions and presentations of innovative projects are being held countrywide, Qazinform News Agency reports. Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev declared 2026 the Year of Digitalization and Artificial Intelligence, marking a new stage in the nation's modernization. According to the AI and Digital Development Ministry, more than 200,000 people are working in the sector, including 20,000 AI specialists. Over the next five years, 1 million citizens are expected to get digital skills. In 2025, more than 900,000 people

completed training programs, gaining both basic and applied competencies.

To note, the AI Governance 500 strategic program was launched to create a pool of digital officer, leaders tasked to implement AI based on a unified data architecture and processes. Over the past seven years, the number of residents at the Astana Hub international IT startup park reached 1,875, with a combined revenue hitting 4.3 billion US dollars. At the working meeting on the Digital Qazaqstan project, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev revealed exports of Kazakhstan's IT services are set to approach 1 billion US dollars.

He also highlighted the importance of advancing digital payments. The National Bank has introduced interbank QR payments, transfers, and settlements using the digital tenge. While legislation requires all

banks to connect to this infrastructure, the largest banks have been slow to comply.

Minister Zhaslan Madyev reported that all 54 government services in the construction sector were fully automated. Work is also underway on a system for early forecasting of water consumption, including a unified database of irrigation infrastructure in southern regions, updated boundaries of irrigated land, and remote sensing technologies for monitoring farmland.

It should be noted, Kazakhstan also invests in satellite internet. Last year, an agreement was signed with Amazon Kuiper, while Starlink and OneWeb entered the Kazakh market. The Generation Nation initiative attracted tens of thousands of school children and students to study artificial intelligence, robotics, and programming. This year, Kazakhstan unveiled its national

supercomputer cluster Alem.Cloud, capable of performing in one second the equivalent of work that would take 8 billion people four days to complete. The project was developed in partnership with Presight, a technology company from the UAE's G42 group. In addition, Kazakhstan signed an agreement with NVIDIA and Freedom Holding Corp. to establish an independent artificial intelligence center.

Alem.Cloud's resources are available to universities, research centers, and companies working with AI. Last November, Alem.Cloud ranked 86th in the international list of the world's most powerful computing systems. As part of the Year of Digitalization and AI, Kazakhstan also launched the alem.ai battle, a national competition designed to support and develop AI talent across the country.

Israel claims
hitting
Iranian
missile site

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production sites in Tehran," the military said. According to the military, the facility was used to "develop and manufacture long-range naval cruise missiles, which are capable of rapidly destroying targets at sea and on land." The strikes "represent another step in deepening the damage done to the regime's military production infrastructure," it added. Meanwhile, The Qatari representative to the United Nations has said that his country will not be a part of regional escalation, Al Jazeera reported. "To attack a state that is not a party to the conflict, and which has not allowed use of its territory in the hostilities, is a violation of international law, and undermines international peace and security," Hind Bint Abdul Rahman Al Muftah said in Geneva. "We have dissociated ourselves from the outset from this war, and we have refused to be part of the escalation. However, Iranians continue to target us and other neighbouring countries."

War has
gone too far:
UN chief

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"The conflict has broken past the limits even leaders thought imaginable. The world is staring down the barrel of a wider war, a rising tide of human suffering, and a deeper global economic shock." Guterres said "my message to Iran is to stop attacking their neighbors," adding that the UN Security Council has condemned such attacks and demanded they end, while reaffirming that navigational rights and freedoms must be respected in key maritime routes, including the Strait of Hormuz. The prolonged closure of the strait is "choking the movement of oil, gas and fertilizer at a critical moment in the global planting season," he said. "My message to the United States and Israel is that it is high time to end the war as human suffering deepens, civilian casualties mount, and the global economic impact is increasingly devastating." Declaring that "this has gone too far," Guterres said: "It is time to stop climbing the escalation ladder and start climbing the diplomatic ladder and return to full respect of international law."

PM Shehbaz
talks to...

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precious lives in these attacks, while praying for the injured. He assured His Highness of Pakistan's full solidarity and support with the brotherly people of Qatar, especially at this challenging time. While appreciating Qatar's remarkable restraint in the wake of the ongoing hostilities, the Prime Minister apprised His Highness the Amir of Pakistan's diplomatic outreach and its peace efforts. He emphasized that Pakistan had consistently called on all parties to de-escalate and resolve their differences through dialogue and diplomacy. His Highness the Amir appreciated Pakistan's sincere diplomatic efforts for regional peace. Both leaders agreed to remain in close contact in the coming days.

Taliban
accuses...

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the information and culture department in Kunar province, said in a statement. In Kunar's Sarkani district, Afghan forces attacked Pakistani military posts, he added, while Pakistani forces launched artillery fire and drone strikes, killing one civilian. Given the inaccessibility of some remote areas in Pakistan and Afghanistan, it is difficult to independently and immediately verify the number of casualties. Both sides announced a truce over the Eid Al-Fitr holiday marking the end of Ramadan, but it ended on Monday evening. The truce came after a Pakistani strike on a drug rehabilitation center in Kabul on March 16 which Afghan authorities said killed more than 400.

Briefs

Rupee gains 01 paisa against US Dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Wednesday appreciated by 01 paisa against the US Dollar in interbank trading and closed at Rs279.21 compared to the previous day's closing of Rs 279.22. According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs 279.45 and Rs 280.2, respectively. The price of the Euro against the rupee decreased by Rs 0.21 to close at Rs 323.80 from the previous day's close of Rs 324.01, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese Yen came down by 01 paisa and closed at Rs 1.75, whereas the exchange rate of the British Pound witnessed a decrease of Rs 0.75 and closed at Rs 374.05 compared to the previous day's Rs 374.80. The exchange rate of the Emirate and the Saudi Riyal surged by 01 and 02 paisa to close at Rs 76.02 and Rs 74.40.—APP

Gold price surges sharply by Rs15,200 per tola

ISLAMABAD: The prices of gold witnessed a significant increase in the local market on Wednesday, with the rate of 24 karat per tola gold rising by Rs 15,200 to settle at Rs 479,262 compared to its sale at Rs 464,062 on the previous trading day. Similarly, the price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold increased by Rs 13,031 to Rs 410,889 from Rs 397,858, whereas the price of 10 grams of 22 karat gold went up by Rs 11,945 to Rs 376,661 against Rs 364,716. The rates of silver also recorded an upward trend, as per tola silver increased by Rs 370 to Rs 7,824, while the price of 10 grams of silver rose by Rs 317 to Rs 6,707. In the international market, the price of gold increased by \$152 to \$4,565, whereas silver prices gained \$3.70 to settle at \$73.40, according to the All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association.—APP

Uzbekistan's agro-industry enters global stage

TASHKENT: From March 25 to 27 this year, the 21st International Exhibition "Agriculture - AgroWorld Uzbekistan 2026" is being held at the Uzexpocentre National Exhibition Complex. On the eve of the event, the Itca Exhibitions held a press conference for media representatives. The organizers provided detailed information on the preparation process, participants, and expected outcomes. - This year's exhibition differs from previous ones, - said Nodira Khayitboyeva, a manager at the company. - The exposition will cover all pavilions and open areas of Uzexpocentre. Applications from foreign manufacturers continue to be received. However, all spaces are already booked, and the capacity to accommodate new participants is limited. The event will bring together 162 companies from 19 countries, including Uzbekistan, Austria, the United States, Belarus, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Spain, and Italy. Today, large-scale changes are taking place in Uzbekistan's agro-industrial sector. According to the 2025 results, steady growth has been recorded in the country's agricultural products and services, valued at 538 billion 919.7 million UZS, up 4.4 percent from 2024. Currently, export directions are expanding in this sector, and international cooperation is being strengthened. The 2026 exposition will showcase practical technological solutions required by modern agro-industrial enterprises. The developments presented will cover poultry farming and livestock breeding, feed production, veterinary services, grain processing and storage, and agrochemical solutions aimed at increasing yields and protecting crops.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry chairing a meeting to discuss measures aimed at facilitating maritime trade at ports.

OGDC exposes theft, illegal refinery in Tando Allahyar

The stolen crude oil was being transported and processed at an illegal refinery before being sold in the local market

ISLAMABAD: Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDC) has uncovered a major crude oil theft operation and an illegal refinery in Sindh's Tando Allahyar district and sought strict legal action against those involved.

According to officials, the theft involved illegal tapping of the Kunnar Pasakhi Deep (KPD)-TAY oil field pipeline near Tando Jam, close to the Machhi Hotel police check post. The stolen crude oil was being transported and processed at an illegal refinery before being sold in the local market.

OGDC initiated a coordinated investigation in January 2026, working closely

with intelligence and law enforcement agencies to trace the network. After weeks of surveillance and technical tracking, the company successfully identified tapping points along the pipeline and the location of the illegal refining facility.

A raid was conducted in the Siri area of New Hyderabad City involving eight police vehicles, five OGDC vehicles, and additional support from an intelligence agency. During the operation, authorities recovered refining equipment and a large quantity of stolen crude oil. The culprits fled the scene, leaving behind five motorcycles. Tando Jam police have registered a case against the thieves' gang leader,

Wazir Daudani, along with his associates Ghani Daudani, Badshah Nizamani, Mabaan Nizamani, and six others, according to a copy of the FIR.

The FIR was lodged on the complaint of an OGDC security supervisor at Pasakhi Oil Field. Police also seized three Suzuki vehicles and a Mazda truck carrying stolen crude oil.

The accused were operating an illegal refinery where crude oil stolen from OGDC pipelines was being processed and sold, posing serious safety and environmental risks. Residents also expressed serious concerns over the unsafe transportation and handling of oil.

OGDC has called for strict action against the culprits, including proceedings under Section 7 of the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), citing the scale of the operation and its threat to critical national infrastructure.

OGDC's proactive efforts to trace and dismantle the theft network have prevented significant financial losses to the national exchequer at a time of rising energy costs due to the regional conflict. OGDC reaffirmed its commitment to safeguarding national resources and enhancing indigenous energy production to reduce reliance on imports and save foreign exchange reserves.—DNA

KSA condemns disruption of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz

"Recent missile strikes near nuclear sites in both Israel and Iran underscore the immense danger of further escalation

GENEVA: Saudi Arabia's representative to the Human Rights Council condemned the disruption of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz on Wednesday. Speaking at the United Nations in Geneva, Saudi Arabia said Iranian aggressions are a clear violation of international law, and are unjustifiable. "Iran's continued approach will not yield any results, we reiterate our condemnation of Iranian aggressions," he added. The UAE Representative to the Human Rights Council said the UAE rejected Iran's cowardly justifications for its brutal attacks and called on the council to condemn Iran's attack. "Since its founding, the UAE has been built on the principle of good neighborliness, we affirm that we reserve all our rights to preserve our sovereignty," he added. Qatar's Representative to the Human Rights Council said Iran is targeting civilians and public services in Gulf countries. The United Nations' top rights official on Wednesday urged states to end the Iran conflict, describing the situation in the Middle East as extremely dangerous and unpredictable. "This conflict has an unprecedented power to ensnare countries across borders and around the world," United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk told an emergency meeting of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva called by Gulf states. "The only guaranteed way to prevent this is to end the conflict, and I urge all states, and particularly those with influence, to do everything in their power to achieve this," he said. The UN rights chief also warned that strikes around Iran and Israel's nuclear sites risk unleashing an "unmitigated catastrophe." "Recent missile strikes near nuclear sites in both Israel and Iran underscore the immense danger of further escalation. States are flirting with unmitigated catastrophe," Volker Turk said in a video statement.—Agencies

SECP authorizes seven pension funds for Balochistan govt

ISLAMABAD: The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) on Wednesday approved seven pension funds for the government of Balochistan, marking the practical implementation of the Defined Contribution (DC) pension model in the province. "This development is part of the government's broader strategy to shift from the traditional Defined Benefit (DB) pension system to a more sustainable and transparent Defined Contribution framework," said a news release. Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have already implemented contributory pension schemes, while the Federal and Sindh governments are in the process of operationalizing their pension fund structures. It is noteworthy that the federal and all provincial governments in Pakistan have introduced the required legal frameworks to support this transition. The SECP is playing a central enabling role in shifting Pakistan from the traditional Defined Benefit system to a modern Defined Contribution pension framework. This new system will help reduce government's long-term pension liabilities, gradually move pension obligations off the budget, and improve fiscal sustainability.—APP

LCCI session discusses woman eco empowerment

LAHORE: The Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) Wednesday organized an awareness session on "Government Policies Related to Women," where detailed discussions were held on women's economic empowerment, protection, and promotion of business opportunities. The event was attended by LCCI President Faheem Ur Rehman Saigol and Parliamentary Secretary of Punjab Women Development Department Salma Saadia Taimoor as the chief guest. Senior Vice President Tanveer Ahmed Sheikh, Vice President Khuram Lodhi, former Vice President Tahir Manzoor Chaudhry, Executive Committee members Amna Randhawa, Firdous Nisar, Amir Ali, Umar Sarfaraz, Vice chancellor LEEDS University Nadeem Bhatti, Vice chancellor Nur University Dr. Farooq Anwer and several business and social personalities also participated. Speaking on the occasion, LCCI President Faheem Ur Rehman Saigol said that women are a vital part of society and play a key role in the development of any country. He announced that a special ceremony related to International Women's Day will be held at Lahore Chamber on March 27 (Friday). He added that LCCI has always taken practical steps to guide and support its women members so they can actively participate in business activities. He said that today's women are not only managing household responsibilities effectively but are also proving their capabilities in business, industry, education, and many other fields. However, he emphasized that women still face challenges such as lack of information, limited access to financial resources, and insufficient professional guidance in business. He explained that the purpose of the awareness session was to inform women about facilities, schemes, and policies offered by the government and financial institutions. According to him, women's economic independence improves not only individual lives but also strengthens the national economy, as equal opportunities enable women to contribute actively to national development. Chief Guest Salma Saadia Taimoor said in her address that Pakistani society has traditionally been male-dominated, but women have proven their abilities in every sector through their talent and determination. She stated that under the leadership of the Chief Minister of Punjab, women's development, protection, and economic empowerment have been given central importance in government policies, and all departments have been directed to introduce special programs for women. She highlighted several initiatives taken by the Punjab government for women's safety and facilitation, including virtual police stations, a panic button system under the Safe City project, women desks in police stations, a dedicated women's helpline (1043), free travel in electric bus services, e-taxi and e-bike schemes, easy business financing programs, skill development initiatives, and women incubation centers. She further said that working women hostels, daycare centers, training programs, IT and vocational education, bank account facilitation, and legal support services aim to create a safe and empowered environment so women can actively participate in economic activities. At the end of the event, speakers agreed that the government, private sector, and all segments of society must work together to promote women's.—DNA

Kazakhstan shapes its new technological agenda

ASTANA: As part of the Nauryznama decade, Kazakhstan marks the Day of Renewal, which this year focuses on digital transformation. Various technological exhibitions and presentations of innovative projects are being held countrywide, Qazinform News Agency reports. Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev declared 2026 the Year of Digitalization and Artificial Intelligence, marking a new stage in the nation's modernization. According to the AI and Digital Development Ministry, more than 200,000 people are working in the sector, including 20,000 AI specialists. Over the next five years, 1 million citizens are expected to get digital skills. In 2025, more than 900,000 people completed training programs, gaining both basic and applied competencies. To note, the AI Governance 500 strategic program was launched to create a pool of digital officer, leaders tasked to implement AI based on a unified data architecture and processes. Over the past seven years, the number of residents at the Astana Hub international IT startup park reached 1,875, with a combined revenue hitting 4.3 billion US

dollars. At the working meeting on the Digital Qazaqstan project, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev revealed exports of Kazakhstan's IT services are set to approach 1 billion US dollars. He also highlighted the importance of advancing digital payments. The National Bank has introduced inter-bank QR payments, transfers, and settlements using the digital tenge. While legislation requires all banks to connect to this infrastructure, the largest banks have been slow to comply. Minister Zhaslan Madyiev reported that all 54 government services in the construction sector were fully automated. Work is also underway on a system for early forecasting of water consumption, including a unified database of irrigation infrastructure in southern regions, updated boundaries of irrigated land, and remote sensing technologies for monitoring farmland. It should be noted, Kazakhstan also invests in satellite internet. Last year, an agreement was signed with Amazon Kuiper, while Starlink and OneWeb entered the Kazakh market. The Generation Nation initiative

attracted tens of thousands of schoolchildren and students to study artificial intelligence, robotics, and programming. This year, Kazakhstan unveiled its national supercomputer cluster Alem.Cloud, capable of performing in one second the equivalent of work that would take 8 billion people four days to complete. The project was developed in partnership with Presight, a technology company from the UAE's G42 group. In addition, Kazakhstan signed an agreement with NVIDIA and Freedom Holding Corp. to establish an independent artificial intelligence center. Alem.Cloud's resources are available to universities, research centers, and companies working with AI. Last November, Alem.Cloud ranked 86th in the international list of the world's most powerful computing systems. As part of the Year of Digitalization and AI, Kazakhstan also launched the alem.ai battle, a national competition designed to support and develop AI talent across the country.—Agencies

Lebanon says Israeli strikes kill 9 in south

BEIRUT, Lebanon: Lebanese state media reported on Wednesday that Israeli strikes killed at least six people in a town and a Palestinian refugee camp in the southern Sidon area, and three more in another town. Israel has stepped up its campaign against Tehran-backed militant group Hezbollah, whose rocket attacks on March 2 pulled Lebanon into the regional war, triggered by US-Israeli strikes on Iran. Citing the health ministry, Lebanon's official National News Agency (NNA) said four people were killed in an "Israeli enemy raid" on the town of Adloun, and another two in a strike on an apartment in the Mieh Mieh refugee camp that left four others wounded. In another area of southern Lebanon, the NNA earlier said an Israeli raid on the town of Habboush killed at least three people and wounded 18 others. There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military, which earlier warned of an imminent attack on Beirut's southern suburbs, a Hezbollah stronghold that has been targeted multiple times during the war. Military spokesman Avichay Adraee said in a statement posted online that Israeli forces were targeting Hezbollah's "military infrastructure... throughout the suburb with increasing force." "For your safety, you must evacuate immediately," Adraee told residents.—APP

Drone attack hits fuel tank at Kuwait Airport

KUWAIT CITY: Drones hit a fuel tank and sparked a fire at Kuwait's international airport, the civil aviation authority said on Wednesday. "The Directorate General of Civil Aviation announced on Wednesday that drones targeted a fuel tank at Kuwait International Airport, causing a fire at the site," the aviation agency posted on X, adding that firefighting teams were at the scene and there were no reports of casualties.—APP

UK, Turkiye sign multi-billion-pound air defense deal

LONDON: Britain and Turkiye on Wednesday signed a multi-billion-pound agreement for a major new training and support contract as part of its 8-billion-pound (\$10.73 billion) Typhoon fighter jet deal the two countries concluded last year. The new contract covers UK-based training for Turkish pilots and ground crew as Turkiye moves toward operating its first batch of British-built jets, Britain's Ministry of Defense said in a statement. Defense firms including BAE Systems, Leonardo UK, MBDA, Rolls-Royce and Martin-Baker will supply components and training equipment. Defense Secretary John Healey and Turkish Defense Minister Yasar Guler signed the agreement in London, which the British government said marked the next phase of Turkiye's entry into the Eurofighter program and reinforcing NATO's combat air capability on its eastern flank.—APP

Kyrgyzstan to restore forests on 2,500 hectares

BISHKEK: Signing ceremony for grant agreements worth over 81 million sums was held in Bishkek. The grants were allocated for forest restoration as part of the Regional Resilience of Pasture Communities (ADAPT) project. According to Ministry of Agriculture, the event was attended by the representatives of the ministries and other relevant specialists. This initiative implemented by the ministry of agriculture aimed at sustainable forest management, restoration of degraded areas, and improvement of living conditions for local communities. The project plans to conduct large-scale forest restoration work on an area of 2,500 hectares, create new forest plantations, and promote natural regeneration processes. It is worth noting that these activities are in line with the national initiative "Jashyl Muras" (Green heritage) launched by the President Sadyr Zhaparov.—APP

Briefs

Spanish PM slams Israeli attacks on Lebanon

NEWS DESK

MADRID: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "seeks to inflict the same level of damage and destruction" on Lebanon as Israeli forces had wrought on the Gaza Strip, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez told lawmakers on Wednesday. Sanchez, who appeared before the lower house to explain his government's stance against the US-Israeli war on Iran, added that Iran's new Supreme Leader was more hard-line than his predecessor. "Mojtaba Khamenei is an equally dictatorial and even more bloodthirsty tyrant than his father," Sanchez said. He also warned that the Middle East war presented a "far worse" scenario than the invasion of Iraq in 2003. "This is not the same scenario as the illegal war in Iraq. We are facing something far worse. Much worse. With a potential impact that is far broader and far deeper," he told parliament.

Airstrike in western Anbar kills 7 Iraqi soldiers

DNA

BAGHDAD: Seven Iraqi soldiers were killed and 13 others wounded in an airstrike on a site belonging to Iraq's Popular Mobilisation Forces near an army medical centre in western Anbar, security sources and the defence ministry said on Wednesday. The ministry said the strike, which took place at around 9 local time, hit a military clinic and a nearby engineering unit. Rescue teams were still searching the site for possible additional casualties. The ministry condemned the strike as a "blatant and serious violation" of international laws and norms prohibiting attacks on medical facilities and personnel, describing it as a dangerous escalation and calling for those responsible to be held accountable.

Fire at Iraq airport

KUWAIT CITY: Drones hit a fuel tank and sparked a fire at Kuwait's international airport, the civil aviation authority said on Wednesday. "The Directorate General of Civil Aviation announced on Wednesday that drones targeted a fuel tank at Kuwait International Airport, causing a fire at the site," the aviation agency posted on X, adding that fire-fighting teams were at the scene and there were no reports of casualties. - APP

PM Shehbaz directs swift steps to boost food exports

The prime minister also instructed preparation of a comprehensive plan to increase flight operations at key international airports, including those in Karachi and Gwadar, to facilitate exports and improve connectivity

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD, Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday directed authorities to accelerate exports of surplus food commodities to Gulf countries while ensuring an uninterrupted domestic supply, and called for a comprehensive plan to expand flight operations and enhance port efficiency in view of the evolving regional situation. Chairing a high-level review meeting at the Prime Minister's House on the supply of food commodities to Gulf states and Pakistan's maritime and logistics preparedness, the prime minister expressed satisfaction over the strategy formulated and progress achieved so far to support the region's food security needs, a Prime Minister's Office news release said. He appreciated the performance of relevant ministries and officials

and instructed all departments concerned to remain in close coordination with Gulf countries regarding their food requirements. Referring to disruptions in global supply chains amid the current regional situation, the prime minister said Pakistan had a responsibility to help meet the food needs of friendly Gulf nations, adding that exports should be expedited without affecting domestic availability of essential commodities. He emphasized strict monitoring of demand and supply of food items within the country and warned that delays in decision-making at the institutional level would not be tolerated, directing authorities to ensure accountability in case of negligence. The prime minister also instructed preparation of a comprehensive plan to increase flight operations at key international airports, including those in Ka-

rachi and Gwadar, to facilitate exports and improve connectivity. During the briefing, the meeting was informed that a special committee had approved 40 food items for export to Gulf countries, including rice, edible oil, sugar, meat, poultry, powdered milk, dairy products, fruits and vegetables. The officials said a database of exporters had been prepared, while exports of vegetables, fruits and meat would be facilitated without additional charges. Open sea and air routes were being utilized to enhance shipments, and business-to-business meetings and webinars with Gulf partners were also being organized to promote trade. The meeting was further informed that port operations at Karachi and Port Qasim remained fully functional during the Eid holidays, while amendments had been

introduced in customs rules to allow transshipment handling at off-dock terminals to increase capacity. Transportation charges at ports had been reduced by up to 60 percent and export facilitation desks had been activated to support exporters. Ships carrying crude oil were also being given priority berthing at ports to ensure smooth energy supplies. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif, Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal, Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar, Economic Affairs Minister Ahmad Khan Cheema, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, National Food Security Minister Rana Tanveer Hussain, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar, Maritime Affairs Minister Chaudhry Junaid Anwar, SAPM Haroon Akhtar and senior officials attended the meeting.

Jewish people ambulances attacked in UK

LONDON: British police said they arrested two men in connection with the suspected antisemitic arson attack on four Jewish community ambulances in north London earlier this week. Police said on Wednesday the men, aged 47 and 45, were arrested at addresses in north west London and central London respectively, and were being held in custody. The ambulances were set on fire in the early hours of Monday morning in an attack which British Prime Minister Keir Starmer called a "deeply shocking antisemitic arson attack." No injuries were reported. Police, who had previously said they were looking into a possible link to Iran, said the investigation continued, as CCTV footage had suggested there were at least three people involved. - APP

Deadliest year for the migrants

The majority of victims were from Ethiopia, the second most-populous country in Africa with more than 130 million people

ADDIS ABABA: The number of migrants who died on the "Eastern Route" from the Horn of Africa to the Arabian Peninsula doubled to a record high of 922 last year, the UN migration agency said Wednesday. Tens of thousands of migrants from Ethiopia, Somalia and neighboring countries take the route across the Red Sea each year, mostly from Djibouti to Yemen, in search of work as laborers or domestic workers in wealthy Gulf countries. "2025 was the deadliest year ever recorded on the Eastern migration route... with 922 people dead or missing - double the number from the previous year," Tanja Pacifico, head of mission for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Djibouti, told AFP. The majority of victims were from Ethio-

opia, the second most-populous country in Africa with more than 130 million people. It is plagued by multiple internal conflicts and deep poverty. "IOM remains fully committed to working alongside the government of Djibouti to promote safe and dignified migration pathways, in order to prevent further tragedies," said Pacifico. Many migrants who cross the Red Sea find themselves stuck in Yemen, the poorest country on the Arabian Peninsula, which has been embroiled in a civil war for nearly a decade, and some even choose to return. Rapid economic growth in Ethiopia - estimated to reach around 10 percent in 2026 - could encourage less migration, IOM says, but that is mitigated by high inflation, also around 10 percent in February. - DNA

Train derailment injures 25

DNA

KARACHI: A late-night derailment of the Tezgam Express near Adam Wahan, close to Lodhran, left passengers injured and rail traffic badly hit, with multiple bogies overturned and the track blocked for hours, Pakistan Railways officials said on Wednesday. According to officials, the accident was caused after a coupling hook broke, splitting the express train into two parts, which caused at least four bogies, including a dining car, to derail. The wreck also violently overturned some coaches, sparking panic inside the packed compartments as frenzied passengers scrambled to save themselves and their loved ones in the darkness. Officials now say 25 passengers were injured in the accident. Of them, 17 were given first aid and discharged, while eight in critical condition were shifted to DHQ hospital, according to the Lodhran Deputy Commissioner (DC) Muhammad Ashraf. Passengers were left stranded as darkness set in and rescue work began, according to eyewitnesses, while DC Ashraf said people were moved to a nearby school for the night and more space was arranged at the Circuit House. "Food and basic facilities were also provided," the top city executive added. The authorities said the rescue teams, medical staff and machinery were participating in relief work on site, adding that Rescue 1122 teams were also assisting in evacuations, while a relief train and trucks took part in the effort. Officials said there was no loss of life, but train services on the down track remained suspended, with Karachi-bound trains stopped at Lodhran station.

Pakistan, other Asian countries turn to Covid-era playbook

NEWS DESK

KARACHI: Countries across Asia, including Pakistan, are weighing work-from-home policies and stimulus measures enforced during the Covid-19 pandemic, as they scramble to respond to global fuel shortages triggered by the Iran war. Asia is at the frontline of the fuel crisis, buying more than 80% of the crude that transits the Strait of Hormuz, which has been almost totally blocked by Iran since the war broke out on February 28. No country in the region has implemented full work-from-home measures yet, but some have said they are on the table. Pakistan closed schools for

two weeks and said office workers would work more from home. The island nation of Sri Lanka declared a public holiday every Wednesday to help make its fuel supplies go further. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif held a meeting with Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari to discuss the evolving regional situation and matters related to national security, sources told Geo News. Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah and Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti also attended the meeting. The participants reviewed measures being taken in light of the prevailing regional tensions and exchanged views on the broader security situation.

Oil tumbles nearly 6% to \$98.30

Retreat follows surge in previous session as traders at large grow cautious over peace prospects

DNA

LONDON: Brent crude oil, the global market benchmark, dropped close to 6% Wednesday after US President Donald Trump sent a peace plan to Iran. At around 0030 GMT, a barrel of Brent crude was down 5.92% at \$98.30. Benchmark US oil contract, West Texas Intermediate, was down 5.01% at \$87.72. In Asian markets, Japan's Nikkei index and South Korea's Kospi were up by more than 3%. Trump sent a peace plan to Iran as he voiced optimism Tuesday at ending nearly a month of war, with Tehran announcing that it will let "non-hostile" oil vessels go through the crucial Strait of Hormuz. The tentative signs of a diplomatic solution came despite new violence, with an Iranian missile causing injuries in Israel, which in turn pressed on multiple fronts and vowed to seize control of a strip of southern Lebanon. The fall in oil Wednesday came after prices jumped a day earlier, with traders turning cautious over the prospect of a negotiated agreement to end the war.

Trump, whose pronouncements in recent days have swung wildly from vowing massive attacks on Iran to declaring the nearly month-long war virtually over, said the United States was "in negotiations right now" with Iran, which has not confirmed any formal talks. "They did something yesterday that was amazing, actually. They gave us a present, and the present arrived today. And it was a very big present worth a tremendous amount of money," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office. "That meant one thing to me - we're dealing with the right people." He did not explain further but said it related to the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran has largely blockaded in retaliation for US and Israeli strikes, sending global energy prices soaring. Iran, in a message circulated by the International Maritime Organisation shortly afterwards, assured safe passage to "non-hostile vessels" going through the strait, the gateway for one-fifth of the world's oil. Iran had already, in recent days, said it was not targeting friendly nations, although many vessels have shied away as insurance companies refuse to take risks.

Petrol pump owners threaten nationwide shutdown

ISLAMABAD: The All Pakistan Petrol Pump Owners Association (APPPPOA) has warned of a nationwide shutdown of petrol pumps if its concerns are not addressed, seeking an immediate meeting with Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervez Malik. In a letter addressed to the minister, Vice Chairman APPPOA Nouman Ali Butt maintained that petrol pump owners across the country are facing serious challenges related to operations, finance, pricing, and sudden disruptions caused by force majeure situations. The development comes amid uncertainty over fuel prices due to ongoing Middle East tensions, which have prompted the government to increase fuel prices. In his letter, Butt said that they had previously raised the same issues on March 6 but received no response. The association called on the government to include industry stakeholders in policymaking related to the petroleum sector. The APPPOA also requested an urgent meeting with the minister to discuss the concerns of approximately 14,000 to 15,000 petrol pump owners, stating that these issues require immediate attention. - APP

Pakistan wants cessation of hostilities & peace in Mideast

The ambassador's statement followed Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's announcement in Islamabad that Pakistan was "ready" to host "meaningful and conclusive" talks between the US and Iran for a "comprehensive settlement" to end the war in the Middle East

DNA

UNITED NATIONS: As tensions escalate in the Middle East, a senior Pakistani diplomat told the UN Security Council that Pakistan is playing an active role in encouraging all parties to cease hostilities and move towards peaceful resolution of the issues in the region. "Together with other partners, Pakistan is actively engaged in promoting this objective," Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, permanent representative of Pakistan to the UN, said in a debate on the situation in the Middle East held on Tuesday. The region, he pointed out, stands at a perilous crossroad, with risk of wider conflagration and far-reaching consequences. "Against this already dire backdrop, further escalation must be avoided at all costs," the Pakistani envoy said, adding, "We call on all parties to exercise maximum restraint." The ambassador's statement followed Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's announcement in Islamabad that Pakistan was "ready" to host "meaningful and conclusive" talks between the US and Iran for a "comprehensive settlement" to end the war in the Middle East. At the outset, Ramiz Alakbarov, UN Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, focused on UNSC resolution 2334 (2016), which, among others, demanded that Israel cease all settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, while Nikolay Mladenov, High Representative for Gaza on President Donald Trump's Board of Peace, outlined

the implementation of UNSC resolution 2803 (2025), which endorsed the United States's "Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict" and welcomed the establishment of the Board as a "transitional governance administration" in Gaza. In his remarks, Ambassador Asim Ahmad highlighted that the unresolved Palestinian question remains at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, perpetuating instability, shaping dynamics, fueling grievances, and undermining prospects for a just and lasting peace. "The Palestinian people continue to endure illegal occupation, dispossession, systemic violence, and the denial of their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination," he said. Over the past two years, their suffering had reached unprecedented levels, particularly in Gaza - where more than 71,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, have been killed, and now violence had also intensified in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, where more than 1,100 Palestinians have been killed in the last couple of years. Referring to the recent wave of Israeli settler attacks across the occupied West Bank, he said masked groups set fire to homes, burned mosques, destroyed vehicles and injured dozens of civilians. "As the occupying power, Israel bears legal obligation under international law to protect Palestinian civilians," he said, adding, "That obligation is being violated with impunity." The High-level International Conference for the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution, and the General Assembly's endorsement of the New York Declaration last year, "established a multilateral pathway" to a Palestinian State, the Pakistani envoy recalled.





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