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Briefs

Pause in Afghan operation ends: FO

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office (FO) on Thursday said that the temporary pause in Operation Ghazab li-Haq against the Afghan Taliban had concluded and the operation would continue "until its objectives are achieved". FO Spokesperson Tahir Andrabi made the remarks while answering questions during his weekly press briefing regarding whether the pause had been extended. Operation Ghazab li-Haq was launched on the night of Feb 26 following cross-border firing by the Afghan Taliban. "Operation Ghazab li-Haq is ongoing. It is a precise, targeted operation, military campaign directed against terrorist leadership and their support and command, infrastructure, logistics, logistic networks and facilitators and abettors of these terrorist acts within the Taliban regime and in the Taliban controlled area," he said. Andrabi said that a temporary pause was observed in "deference to Eidul Fitr celebrations and in response to requests from our brotherly Islamic countries".

Another Pakistani killed in Emirates

NEWS DESK

ABU DHABI: Another Pakistani national died due to "falling debris" from missile interception in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Thursday, the Abu Dhabi Media Office said. The development takes the total number of Pakistani nationals killed in the UAE as a result of falling debris from missile interceptions amid the ongoing US-Israeli war on Iran to four. In a post on X earlier in the day, the media office said that an incident "involving falling debris" from the interception of a ballistic missile resulted in "deaths of two unidentified individuals, three injuries, and damage to a number of cars". It said that the incident occurred on Sweihan Street. In a later post, it confirmed that the incident resulted in the death of "two individuals of Pakistani and Indian nationality". It added that the incident also resulted in "injuries ranging from serious to moderate sustained by three individuals of Emirati, Jordanian and Indian nationality".

Zelensky to sign deal with Saudi Arabia

NEWS DESK

RIYADH: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky arrived in Saudi Arabia for an unannounced visit, as the war in Iran spurs interest among Gulf countries in Ukrainian arms technology. The two countries are set to sign an agreement on "security cooperation — in particular, the protection of the skies", later on Thursday, a senior official told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity. They did not provide further details of what was set to be in the accord. Kyiv has sought to leverage its expertise in downing Russian drones to help Gulf nations, which are being attacked with the same Iranian-designed Shahed drones that Russia fires on Ukraine.

Middle East crisis

US-Iran 'talks' under way, says Dar

"Islamabad continues to make every effort to ensure stability in region and beyond," says foreign minister

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar has confirmed that indirect talks between the United States and Iran are under way through messages being relayed by Pakistan, with Turkiye and Egypt also helping in the effort. "There has been unnecessary speculation in the media regarding peace talks to end [the] ongoing conflict in the Middle East," he wrote on X on Thursday, confirming that indirect talks were underway through messages being relayed by Pakistan. The deputy premier further said that Iran was deliberating upon 15 points shared by the United States. "Pakistan remains fully committed to promoting peace and continues to make every effort to ensure stability in the region and beyond," he said, reiterating that "dialogue and diplomacy" was the only way forward. The remarks come amid efforts to open a window for diplomacy to end the nearly month-long war between the US, Israel, and Iran, which began on February 28 and has affected the broader Middle East. Pakistan, working closely with Turkiye and Egypt, has played a key role in back-channel diplomacy, relaying messages between Washington and Tehran to prevent further escalation and maintain regional stability. These efforts included direct contact between Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) and Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Field Marshal Asim Munir and

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US proposal to end war 'one-sided': Iranian official

CENTRELINE REPORT

DUBAI: A senior Iranian official has described the United States' proposal to end the ongoing war as "one-sided and unfair," while indicating that the door to diplomacy remains open if Washington shows more realism. The official told Reuters that Iran had reviewed in detail the US 15-point proposal, which was conveyed to Tehran via Pakistan. He said the plan essentially demands that Iran relinquish its ability to defend itself in exchange for a vague promise of sanctions relief, serving primarily US and Israeli interests and lacking the minimum requirements for success. "Diplomacy has not stopped, and if realism prevails in Washington, a path forward may still be found," the official added. However, he stressed that there is still no arrangement for negotiations and no plan for talks appears realistic at this stage. The senior Iranian source confirmed that both Turkiye and

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US-Iran mediation

Politicians castigate India's Jaishankar for spiteful remarks on Pak

"Jaishankar thinks of himself as a hi-fi dalal, remarks reflect personal frustration," says Defence Minister Asif

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Indian External Minister for Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar came under heavy criticism from politicians for issuing spiteful remarks about Pakistan over the latter's mediation role in the ongoing US-Israel war against Iran. During an all-party meeting in India, Jaishankar said that India does not view itself as a "dalal" (broker) like Pakistan, dismissing Pakistan's efforts as a mediator between Iran and the US. The News reported on Thursday.

"There is nothing new in Pakistan's mediation efforts, as that country has been 'used' by the US since 1981," Jaishankar said during the all-party meeting convened by the government to discuss the ongoing West Asia crisis. The development comes days after reports suggested that Pakistan is positioning itself as

a key mediator to help broker an end to the US-Israel war against Iran through active back-channel diplomacy. According to international media reports, Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Asim Munir recently held a telephonic conversation with US President Donald Trump, with the White House also confirming the contact. Senior Pakistani officials have reportedly been facilitating communication between Tehran and key US interlocutors, including Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner. Reports also suggest that Islamabad is being considered as a potential venue for a high-level meeting between the United States and Iran later this week, with US Vice President JD Vance expected to attend if the proposal materialises. Castigating the Indian foreign minister, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said that Jaishankar thought of himself as "a hi-fi dalal", adding that the remarks "reflect personal frustration".



ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari chairing a high-level meeting which was also attended by the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, Bilawal Bhutto and others. (News of Back Page) — DNA

PTI Senator Murad Saeed disqualified

Saeed elected senator from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in July 2025, but could not take oath as he remains in hiding

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Thursday disqualified Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Senator Murad Saeed following his conviction in May 9 case related to 2023 violent protests. In a notification, the election body stated that Saeed was sentenced to 10 years in prison by an anti-terrorism court in Rawalpindi, leading to his disqualification under Article 63(1)(h) of the Constitution. Following the decision, the Senate's general seat from KP has been declared vacant. Saeed was elected senator from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in July 2025, but could not take the oath as he remained in hiding.

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Asian countries line up for Russian oil

COMMERCE DESK

MOSCOW: Asian countries including Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka are lining up to buy Russian oil as the Iran war blocks supplies, raising the possibility that demand may exceed supply, several sources including Russia said. Since the war in Ukraine prompted European customers - once the biggest buyers of Russian oil and gas - to shun Moscow, India and China have accounted for around 80% of Russian oil exports. Turkey has also been a significant buyer.

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In meeting with Chinese envoy

PM Shehbaz highlights Pakistan's de-escalation role amid Mideast tensions

Premier Shehbaz reaffirms CPEC 2.0 push, Beijing backs Islamabad's economic reforms and stability efforts

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday highlighted Pakistan's constructive role in promoting de-escalation and regional stability amid reported efforts to open a window for diplomacy to end the nearly month-long war between the US, Israel, and Iran, which affected the broader Middle East. He made these remarks during a meeting with Chinese Ambassador Jiang Zaidong, who, along with a delegation, called on him at the Prime Minister's House in Islamabad, according to a statement issued by the Prime Minister's office. The development comes days after reports suggested that Pakistan is positioning itself as a key mediator to help broker an end to the US-Israel war against Iran through active back-channel diplomacy. The risk of a prolonged war in Iran spilling over into Pakistan is among Islamabad's biggest fears, analysts and security officials say.

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Prime Minister receives telephone call from Malaysian PM Anwar Ibrahim

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif received a telephone call from H.E. Dato Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Prime Minister of Malaysia, this morning. During their warm and cordial conversation, the two leaders exchanged Eid ul Fitr greetings and prayed for unity and progress of the Ummah. The Prime Minister conveyed his deep appreciation to the Malaysian Prime Minister for his strong message of support for Pakistan's leadership and endorsement of Pakistan-led

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Russia says Bushehr plant narrowly avoids tragedy

The lives of the plant's personnel, including Russian specialists working there, remain under constant threat

DNA

MOSCOW: The Russian Foreign Ministry has expressed deep outrage over a new and highly dangerous strike carried out on March 24 in the immediate vicinity of Unit 1 at Iran's Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant.

This incident occurred despite US President Donald Trump's unsubstantiated assurances that, on March 23, he had ordered a five-day pause in attacks on Iran's energy infrastructure. "We are extremely outraged by this reckless and irresponsible manifestation of a destructive course," the ministry stated. It added that the attacks give the impression that the aggressors are

deliberately seeking to trigger a large-scale nuclear catastrophe in the region in order to conceal and justify their criminal actions, which have already caused numerous innocent civilian casualties in Iran.

The ministry warned that any strike on the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant would inevitably lead to irreversible humanitarian and environmental consequences across the region. So far, a major tragedy has been avoided only by sheer luck, yet the strikes continue to come ever closer to the operating power unit. The lives of the plant's personnel, including Russian specialists working there, remain under constant threat — a

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France to continue supporting Pakistan, says envoy

Finance Minister, French Ambassador Nicolas Galey discuss Pakistan-France economic engagement

ANSAR M BHATTI / DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb met H.E. Mr. Nicolas Galey, Ambassador of France to Pakistan, who called on him at the Finance Division. Welcoming the Ambassador, the finance minister underscored the importance Pakistan attaches to its longstanding and multifaceted relationship with France, particularly in the areas of economic cooperation, investment, and development partnership. He noted that Pakistan remains committed to maintaining macroeconomic stability and advancing structural reforms to support sustainable economic growth. The finance minister briefed the Ambassador on the Government's ongoing economic priorities, including efforts to preserve hard-earned macroeconomic stability amid evolving global and regional challenges. He emphasized that the Government is proactively monitoring developments and preparing policy responses to safeguard economic gains, ensure continuity in critical supply chains, and maintain investor confidence.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of France Nicolas Galey in a meeting with the Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb. — DNA

Discussions also covered Pakistan's engagement with international financial institutions. The finance minister shared that Pakistan remains committed to its reform agenda under the IMF-supported programme and expressed confidence in the country's continued progress, noting that ongoing engagements with the Fund are constructive and moving forward positively. The Ambassador appreciated the Government's efforts toward economic stabilization and reform, and acknowledged Pakistan's resilience in navigating external challenges. He reiterated France's continued support for Pakistan's economic development and expressed interest in further strengthening bilateral cooperation across key sectors. The meeting also included an exchange of views on the evolving international situation and its potential implications for global energy markets and economic conditions. The Finance Minister noted that the Government is closely monitoring developments and is engaged with relevant stakeholders to manage potential risks to energy supply and pricing, while ensuring that appropriate policy measures are in place to respond to emerging challenges.

KP CM launches good governance roadmap

Under the roadmap, 10 new departments and 88 new initiatives have been added, increasing the total number of initiatives from 362 to 450

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Muhammad Sohail Afridi has inaugurated the Good Governance Roadmap 2.0, terming it a major step toward improved governance and effective public service delivery in the province. Under the roadmap, 10 new departments and 88 new initiatives have been added, increasing the total number of initiatives from 362 to 450. The government has also declared delays in public services as a serious offense, with the Chief Minister personally overseeing implementation and monitoring. In the infrastructure and tourism sector, key projects include a circular railway, expansion of railway lines to Khyber and Mardan, upgradation of tourist destinations, and

directives to ensure a safe environment for visitors. Digital reforms feature prominently, including the introduction of e-challan and e-pension systems, digital land records integrated with NADRA, digitization of driving licenses, and camera-based traffic enforcement. Environmental measures include the Billion Tree Plus program, smog monitoring systems, establishment of climate observatories, and strict monitoring of wastewater and hazardous waste. In the health sector, 150 Basic Health Units (BHUs) will be made operational round the clock, alongside recruitment of 700 doctors and approval of 2,400 medical officers. Polio campaigns are being expanded, while vaccination services are

being further strengthened. In education and local government, the roadmap includes provision of furniture for 100,000 students, 3,500 scholarships, cleaning of 2,500 kilometers of sewerage lines, and activation of rural waste collection systems. Agriculture and social welfare initiatives include improvement of 150,000 wild olive trees and financial support for over 3,000 orphan children and 3,000 widows. Officials said reforms are currently underway in 16 departments, with more than 2,200 action steps prepared. The initiative aims to establish a transparent, efficient, and people-friendly governance system across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.—DNA

PHC seeks report on renaming of Arbab Niaz Stadium after IK

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court has directed the provincial government to submit a detailed report regarding the renaming of Arbab Niaz Stadium to Imran Khan Cricket Stadium. A two-member bench comprising Justice Syed Arshad Ali and Justice Sadiq Ali Momand heard the petition challenging the name change. The court adjourned the hearing and granted the government 10-day to present complete records on the matter. Earlier, during proceedings, the petitioner's counsel argued that the renaming violates precedents and legal precedents, which discourage naming public assets after living individuals. He pointed out that Imran Khan is alive and had reportedly opposed the renaming himself. The court observed that previous judicial rulings exist on this issue and questioned whether relevant judgments, including those by former judges, had been considered. It also suggested that the government could name a newly constructed stadium after Imran Khan instead. According to the petition, the provincial cabinet approved the renaming on February 21, 2025.

The lawyer further stated that under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Council Rules (1994), a place's name cannot be changed within 50 years of its designation.—APP

Bugti for timely completion of Rakhni-Bekar Road project

QUETTA: Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti chaired an important meeting to review progress on the construction of the Rakhni-Bekar blacktop road project, where officials briefed him on the current status of work. Bugti expressed strong displeasure over delays in the project, making it clear that sluggishness in development schemes would not be tolerated under any circumstances. He directed that the concerned construction company, along with the Superintending Engineer (SC) and Executive Engineer (XEN), must remain present at the project site until completion to ensure both pace and quality of work.—APP

150,000 illegal Afghan repatriated from Punjab

A spokesperson for the Punjab Home Department said on Thursday that the Foreign National Security Cell of the department was continuing effective operations across the province in line with the national policy, under which illegally residing Afghan nationals were being sent back to their homeland

LAHORE: Around 2.132 million illegal Afghan nationals have been repatriated from Pakistan so far, including over 150,000 from Punjab, under the ongoing campaign against illegal foreign residents. A spokesperson for the Punjab Home Department said on Thursday that the Foreign National Security Cell of the department was continuing effective operations across the province in line with the national policy, under which illegally residing Afghan nationals were being sent back to their homeland. During the closure of the Torkham border, 936 illegal Afghan residents were repatriated via the Chaman border, while authorities have announced that the Torkham border

would reopen from today following improved conditions along the Pak-Afghan border. The spokesperson reiterated that, according to the government of Pakistan's clear policy, the stay of Afghan nationals without valid visas is illegal. He said that during the crackdown, authorities inspected 2,667 residential areas and 1,177 markets across Punjab. Over the past one month, 468 FIRs were registered and 591 illegal Afghan nationals were sent to jail. At present, 36 holding centres are operational in Punjab, where 259 Afghan nationals are present, and arrangements have been made for their temporary accommodation, registration and repatriation. The spokesperson said the figures reflected the Punjab government's effective strategy and proactive administrative measures, adding that public cooperation was essential for the success of the national repatriation mission. Citizens have been urged to report illegal residence, identity fraud or suspicious activities involving Afghan nationals by calling Emergency Helpline 15. So far, 842 complaints have been received and acted upon, while the identity of informants is kept confidential. The spokesperson clarified that action was being taken only against illegally residing individuals, while Afghan nationals possessing valid visas were allowed to conduct business, employment and other activities within the ambit of law.—APP

LAHORE: An enforcement team of Punjab Food Authority, under the directions of Director General PFA Muhammad Asim Javaid, carried out an operation in Township and discarded 1,000kg of hazardous meat prepared for supply, foiling an attempt to compromise public health. The team sealed the meat store, lodged an FIR and seized equipment including three freezers, 50 hooks, two counters, two weighing scales, a vehicle, a mixing machine and two steel tubs. Food safety teams revealed that a diseased animal had been illegally slaughtered within the unit premises. During on-site inspection, the meat was declared unfit and dangerous for human consumption. DG PFA Muhammad Asim Javaid said that extremely poor hygiene conditions were observed at the unit, with presence of flies and insects. Mandatory medical and food safety training certificates of workers were also not available. DG further stated that, in line with the vision of the Chief Minister Punjab, businesses involved in food fraud will be shut down completely. He has requested the public to support the PFA in eliminating the adulteration mafia and report to the PFA on its 1223 helpline number in case of any complaints.—APP



KARACHI: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif visits Member Sindh Assembly Faryal Talpur at her residence in Karachi to congratulate her on wedding of her daughter.

PFA discards 1,000kg hazardous meat

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Consultant staff deployed in 51 cities for PDP

LAHORE: Minister for Local Government Zeeshan Rafique was informed during a meeting that consultant staff has been deployed in 51 cities for Punjab Development Program (PDP). Moreover the excavation of most of the underground tanks for rainwater drainage and storage has been completed, while the construction of roadside water storage tanks in several cities has entered the final stages. Secretary Local Government Shakeel Ahmed Mian and Special Secretary Asia Gul also attended the meeting. Project Director PDP Ahmed Sohail Kaifi made a presentation to the participants.

Minister for Local Government Zeeshan Rafique expressed satisfaction over the progress on the "Maryum Nawaz Ka Sohna Punjab" program directing that the delay in the work due to the recent rains and Eid holidays should be overcome. He said that both quality and speed should be taken care of during the work. "The concerned Deputy and Assistant Commissioners should make regular visits to the construction sites," he directed. Zeeshan Rafique reiterated his commitment that the Local Government Department will meet the expectations of the public and Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif. He

observed that the completion of the PDP will help in controlling urban flooding. "Financial bids for 119 out of 124 packages of development schemes for different cities have been opened. The entire tendering process is being completed in a transparent manner", he added. The Local Government Minister also directed that the Municipal Officers Infrastructure (MOI) should upload all the progress on the dashboard. "Elected public representatives should be taken into confidence on all the schemes. Alternative arrangements for traffic at excavation sites should also be taken into consideration", he concluded.—APP

PSCA installs 950 cameras for PSL security

LAHORE: The Punjab Safe Cities Authority (PSCA) has finalised comprehensive security arrangements, installing over 950 modern cameras to ensure a safe and secure environment during Pakistan Super League (PSL) Season 11 matches in the provincial capital. According to a spokesperson of PSCA, a joint security strategy has been implemented in coordination with Lahore Police to secure Gaddafi Stadium, Allama Iqbal International Airport, team hotels and match routes. He said that more than 950 surveillance cameras were actively monitoring the city, while the system

had been further strengthened with facial recognition technology, artificial intelligence-based analytics and other advanced tools. A state-of-the-art digital wall at the Safe City Control Room was ensuring round-the-clock monitoring of the stadium and its adjoining areas. The spokesperson added that Safe City drones were also being utilised for aerial surveillance of the stadium, team routes, hotels and airport vicinity. He further said that the use of facial recognition cameras and modern LTE handsets had enhanced the operational efficiency of field forces, while virtual patrolling officers and techni-

cal teams were performing duties round the clock at the Safe City Headquarters. The spokesperson said foolproof security arrangements had been ensured in line with international standards through effective use of modern technology and strong coordination, providing a secure environment for citizens and cricket fans. He also highlighted that Safe City FM 88.6 was providing timely updates regarding traffic routes, alternate pathways and parking arrangements. Citizens have been advised to dial Emergency Helpline 15 in case of any emergency to ensure prompt response.—APP

Kundi reviews Sehat Insaf Card services

PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Thursday reviewed facilities being provided under the Sehat Insaf Card programme and stressed the need for improving healthcare services, particularly in rural areas of the province. The Governor was briefed during a meeting at Governor House Peshawar by Chief Executive Officer Health Card State Life Insurance KP, Riaz Tanoli. The briefing highlighted medical facilities being extended to the public under the Sehat Insaf Card initiative. It was informed that four hospitals in Dera Ismail Khan were currently providing treatment facilities under the programme. However, the Governor was told that specialist doctors were not available in hospitals located in Parova, Daraban, Paharpur and Kulachi tehsils. Expressing concern, the Governor said that the absence of specialist doctors in rural areas reflected a lack of seriousness on the part of the provincial government in the health sector. He said that advanced procedures such as kidney and liver transplants were only available in major hospitals in Peshawar. Kundi said he would take up the matter of appointing specialist doctors in Dera Ismail Khan with the health authorities and directed that transparency and quality of the programme be further improved, adding that no compromise would be made on provision of healthcare facilities to the public. Meanwhile, in a separate ceremony held at Governor House, young artist and singer Saif Ali Khan was appointed as Goodwill Ambassador of the Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed by Governor Faisal Karim Kundi and the singer, in the presence of PRCS officials, volunteers and youth representatives. Speaking on the occasion, the Governor congratulated Saif Ali Khan and expressed hope that he would effectively represent the organisation at national and international levels. He said engaging youth talent was among his top priorities and termed the initiative a step towards empowering young people to take leadership roles in various sectors. He also appreciated the performance of the Red Crescent in both settled and merged districts, saying its active role in relief efforts during natural disasters and assistance to affected communities, including distribution of food items during Ramadan.

The Governor expressed confidence that the inclusion of a young goodwill ambassador would further enhance the organisation's outreach and strengthen public trust, particularly among the youth.—DNA

Mandokhail highlights Lawyers' role in justice, democracy

QUETTA: Balochistan Governor, Jaffar Khan Mandokhail, has emphasized the pivotal role of lawyers in promoting justice, democracy, and social responsibility, describing them as among the most perceptive and conscientious members of society. Speaking during a meeting with a delegation of the Balochistan High Court Bar Association, led by its president Advocate Atullah Langau, the governor highlighted that the legal profession carries broad influence and significant responsibilities. Jaffar Mandokhail added that lawyers must actively raise public awareness about fundamental rights and duties while fostering patriotism among the younger generation. He noted that the legal community serves as a crucial bridge between the law and marginalized populations who often lack access to justice.—APP

Musadik vows weekly plantation drives in Islamabad

Musadik Malik linked tree plantation with broader climate concerns, saying rising temperatures, carbon emissions and greenhouse gases were contributing to extreme weather events, including floods and glacier melt

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination Musadik Malik on Thursday said weekly tree plantation drives would be held across Islamabad after March 31, as the government stepped up efforts to promote environmental protection in the capital. Addressing a tree planta-

tion drive at Shakarparian, the minister said the campaign would continue for at least one to two months, with plantation activities to be carried out at different locations across the city. He said the government had already pledged to plant 10 trees for every one cut in Islamabad and added that the process had now begun in practi-

cal terms. He also invited the media and the public to observe the plantation work and assess the government's progress on the commitment. Musadik Malik linked tree plantation with broader climate concerns, saying rising temperatures, carbon emissions and greenhouse

gases were contributing to extreme weather events, including floods and glacier melt. He said trees played a key role in maintaining ecological balance by absorbing carbon dioxide and producing oxygen. Referring to earlier plantation efforts, the minister said trees planted previously were being protected and had start-

ed to grow, describing this as evidence that the government's promise was being implemented. He also stressed the importance of involving children in environmental efforts, saying public awareness and participation in tree plantation could help build a wider culture of climate responsibility across the country.—DNA

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

MARCH

- March 01/Bosnia National Day
- March 03/Bulgaria National Day
- March 06/ Ghana Independence Day
- March 12/Mauritius National Day
- March 17/Ireland St. Patrick's Day
- March 20/Tunisia Independence Day
- March 21/Namibia National Day
- March 25/Greece National Day
- March 26/Bangladesh National Day
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- PIMS.....9261170-79
- Polyclinic.....9218300-09
- Shifa International 4603666



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Islamabad Metropolitan

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

Water Tank

- Islamabad.....0321-5744480

5 shopkeepers detained over encroachments

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration, on the reports of encroachments outside shops blocking pedestrian movement, took action and detained 5 shopkeepers during an on-site operation. The Assistant Commissioner reached the area following the complaint about shopkeepers placing items and structures outside their shops, which reduced space for pedestrians and created difficulty for people walking along the road. During the visit, the official reviewed the situation and directed immediate removal of all encroachments set up in front of shops. Staff carried out the operation on the spot, clearing the pathways to restore access for pedestrians. Authorities said that several shopkeepers had extended their business space onto public areas, affecting the normal flow of foot traffic. The administration acted to ensure that public spaces remain open and accessible. As part of the enforcement action, 5 shopkeepers were taken into custody and shifted to the police lock-up for violating regulations related to public space usage. Officials stated that such actions will continue in response to public complaints to maintain order and ensure that roads and walkways are not obstructed. The administration has also urged shopkeepers to follow the rules and avoid placing goods or structures outside their designated shop areas. Citizens have been encouraged to report similar issues so that timely action can be taken. The operation in Bara Kahu is part of ongoing efforts by local authorities to address encroachments and improve access for pedestrians in busy areas.—APP

Noor Zaman storms into Optasia Championships quarter-finals

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Noor Zaman delivered an impressive performance to reach the quarter-finals of the Optasia Championships in England, a Gold-level event offering a prize purse of US \$130,000. The tournament, being held from March 24 to 29, has attracted top-ranked players from around the world, but Noor Zaman stood out with a commanding display in his second-round encounter. Facing Mexico's Leonel Cardenas, who is ranked World No. 14 and seeded eighth in the tournament, Noor Zaman, currently World No. 31, produced a clinical performance to secure a straight-games victory, according to information made available here by Pakistan Squash Federation.

Noor won the match 3-0 with game scores of 11-7, 11-5, and 11-7 in 32 minutes. From the outset, Noor dictated the pace of the match with aggressive shot-making and tight control, giving his higher-ranked opponent little opportunity to settle. His consistency and precision proved decisive as he comfortably closed out all three games without conceding momentum.—APP



ISLAMABAD: High Commissioner of Brunei hosted Eid Milan party at his residence. Seen in the picture are diplomats from the Brunei and Malaysian high commissions. Editor Daily Islamabad POST Ansar M Bhatti also present in the picture. NDA

ME crisis sends shockwaves through Pakistan's economy

The study estimates that Pakistan's direct exports to GCC countries could fall by \$1.5 to \$2 billion if disruption in the Strait of Hormuz persists, while imports from the region, particularly energy imports, could decline sharply—disrupting domestic production and export activity

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), in its latest Policy View Point authored by Dr. Syed Hasanat Shah (Professor of Economics, PIDE) and Wajid Islam (Research Economist, PIDE), has warned that the ongoing Middle East crisis has evolved into a global economic shock, posing serious risks to Pakistan's trade, energy security, and external sector stability. The study estimates that Pakistan's direct exports to GCC countries could fall by \$1.5 to \$2 billion if disruption in the Strait of Hormuz persists, while imports from the

region, particularly energy imports, could decline sharply—disrupting domestic production and export activity. At the same time, rising international oil prices could add \$4.5 billion to Pakistan's import bill, further widening the current account deficit and increasing pressure on foreign reserves. PIDE's analysis underscores that Pakistan's vulnerability is structural. The report notes that 81.6 percent of Pakistan's energy imports transit through the Strait of Hormuz, exposing the economy to severe supply shocks. It further highlights that if global oil prices rise from \$80 to \$160 per barrel, Pakistan's trade deficit could expand from \$24 billion to \$41.8 billion, while inflation may surge from 7.1 percent to 11.1 percent.

Beyond trade volumes, the study warns of broader spillover effects. Rising freight costs, war risk premiums, and disrupted shipping routes could significantly weaken Pakistan's export competitiveness, particularly in the textile sector, which accounts for nearly 60 percent of total exports. Moreover, any slowdown in remittances from GCC economies would further strain Pakistan's balance of payments, given the country's reliance on external inflows. The report emphasizes that the crisis has exposed deep-rooted weaknesses in Pakistan's economic structure, including overdependence on imported energy, limited export diversification, and fragile supply chains. It calls for a shift away from reactive policymaking

toward proactive, resilience-driven strategies. To mitigate these risks, PIDE recommends immediate and long-term policy measures. In the short term, Pakistan should reroute oil imports to Yanbu Port via the Red Sea to bypass the Strait of Hormuz. In the long run, the country must diversify energy sources, invest in renewable energy, and leverage CPEC 2.0 to expand trade routes toward China and Central Asia. The report concludes that while the crisis presents significant risks, it also offers an opportunity for Pakistan to strengthen its economic foundations. Moving forward, resilience will depend on competitiveness, innovation, and strategic policymaking rather than reliance on external support.

Export of sports goods increase by 13.26%

ISLAMABAD: The exports of sports goods from the country did increase by 13.26 percent during the first eight months of the current fiscal year (2025-26) as compared to the corresponding period of last year. The country exported sports goods worth \$282.69 million during July-February (2025-26) as against \$249.59 million in July-February (2024-25), according to official data of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) available with APP. The growth in exports is largely attributed to consistent government policies aimed at promoting export-oriented industries, along with incentives, facilitation measures, and improved access to international markets. Enhanced focus on product quality, compliance with international

standards, and innovation has further strengthened the position of Pakistani sports goods globally. Among sports products, exports of footballs rose significantly by 18.98 percent, increasing from \$147.17 million last year to \$175.09 million during the current year. The strong performance of football exports reflects Pakistan's established reputation for producing high-quality, hand-stitched balls that meet international specifications. However, exports of gloves declined by 9.19 percent, falling from \$43.37 million last year to \$39.38 million during the current year, the PBS data revealed. The decline is attributed to shifting demand patterns and increased competition in international markets. Likewise, exports of all other sports goods increased

by 15.51 percent to \$68.22 million from \$59.06 million last year, indicating diversification in the product base and growing acceptance of Pakistani products abroad. Meanwhile, on a year-on-year basis, sports goods exports increased by 6.60 percent in February 2026 compared to the same month last year. The exports were recorded at \$33.25 million in February 2026 against \$31.19 million in February 2025. During the month, exports of footballs and other sports products increased by 9.43 percent and 13.35 percent, respectively, while gloves exports decreased by 13.22 percent. On a month-on-month basis, sports goods exports decreased by 20.15 percent in February 2026 compared to \$41.64 million in January 2026, mainly due to seasonal trends and shipment adjustments, according to PBS data.—APP

Pakistan, China strengthen educational ties

ISLAMABAD: The Belt and Road Ambassador Scholarship Award Ceremony was held here, recognizing outstanding students from Pakistan and countries participating in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and highlighting the importance of educational exchange in fostering people-to-people connectivity. China Economic Net (CEN) reported on Thursday. Speaking at the event, Pakistan's Ambassador to China, Khalil Hashmi, commended the Overseas Chinese Charity Foundation of China for launching the scholarship program, noting that it provides students from BRI partner countries with valuable opportunities to pursue higher education, gain international exposure, and develop critical skills. Congratulating the award recipients, including students from Pakistan and Malaysia, he noted that their achievements reflect the shared potential and aspirations of youth across the region. Five Pakistani students, Khalid Atia, Asad Muhammad, Qaisar Irfan, Jamil Muhammad Fawad, and Risalat Amina, were among those honored for their academic excellence. The ceremony was jointly hosted by the Overseas Chinese Charity Foundation of China, the Science and Technology Department of the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, and Tsinghua University.—DNA

ZGC Forum becomes Platform for innovation exchange

Participants agreed that the forum underscores the importance of open collaboration, with China and Pakistan poised to deepen cooperation in science, technology, and industrial development

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Zhongguancun Forum 2026, being held from March 25 to 29, has emerged as a key platform for strengthening innovation exchange between China and Pakistan, with a growing number of Pakistani entrepreneurs, researchers, and industry representatives actively participating in this year's event. China Economic Net (CEN) reported on Tuesday. Muhammad Ammar, Secretary General (Pakistan side) of the China-Pakistan International Industrial Academic Integration Alliance, said that the forum is a meeting point "where tomorrow's technologies meet today's industries." He highlighted the strong integra-

tion of cutting-edge research with practical applications, as witnessed firsthand at the Zhongguancun International Innovation Center. Ammar also emphasized that the forum's focus on coordinated development in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region reflects China's systematic approach to building robust innovation ecosystems. For international participants, including those from Pakistan, this presents valuable opportunities to engage with one of the world's most dynamic technology hubs. The release of key reports, such as the "2025 Global Engineering Frontiers" and the "Open Science International Cooperation Action Plan," provided strategic insights into future global innovation trends.

Abdul Rehman, co-founder of Smart-Soil AI, said that he was honored to represent Pakistan and showcase his startup at the forum. He noted that engagement with global technology leaders is accelerating his company's mission of transforming degraded land into productive farmland through advanced artificial intelligence and precision sensors. He added that the insights and partnerships gained at the forum are vital to launching large-scale agricultural restoration projects and advancing broader food security goals. Participants agreed that the forum underscores the importance of open collaboration, with China and Pakistan poised to deepen cooperation in science, technology, and industrial development.

Legislative output, robust oversight, remain hallmark of Parliamentary Year

ISLAMABAD: The Senate of Pakistan has released its Annual Report for Parliamentary Year 2025-2026, presenting a comprehensive account of the Upper House's performance from 12 March 2025 to 11 March 2026. The report reflects a year of exceptional achievement across all dimensions of the Senate's constitutional mandate, including legislative productivity, executive oversight, institutional strengthening, and an unprecedented expansion of parliamentary diplomacy. The reporting period is distinguished by the successful hosting of the inaugural Inter-Parliamentary Speakers' Conference (ISC) in Islamabad, positioning Pakistan at the forefront of global parliamentary dialogue and cooperation. During the year under review, the Senate convened twelve sessions (348th to 359th), alongside three Joint Sittings of Parliament. A total of 64 sittings were held over 112 working days, accumulating 158 hours and 53 minutes of proceedings. Combined with Joint Sittings, total parliamentary engagement reached 161 hours and 43 minutes, reflecting sustained and active legislative participation. Attendance remained strong, with a peak of 88 Senators recorded during the 355th Session and an average attendance of 55 Senators per sitting. Eleven Private Members' Days were also held, ensuring space for non-government legislative initiatives. The Senate demonstrated high legislative output, processing a significant volume of government and private members' business. Seventeen Government Bills were introduced, with fourteen passed, while thirty-one additional bills received from the National Assembly were considered, resulting in a total of thirty-three bills passed during the year. Private Members' contributions were equally substantial, with forty bills introduced and forty-four passed, underscoring the inclusive and participatory nature of legislative processes. Notably, the Constitution (Twenty-seventh Amendment) Bill, 2025 emerged as the most significant constitutional development of the year. A wide range of legislation covering national security, judicial reform, economic governance, human rights, media regulation, and social welfare further highlighted the Senate's comprehensive engagement with national priorities. The Senate maintained its critical oversight role through an active Question Hour, receiving 1,157 starred questions, of which 479 were answered on the floor of the House. Additionally, 85 resolutions were tabled, with 19 adopted—15 unanimously—demonstrating cross-party consensus on key national and international issues.—DNA

Briefs

Dr. Tariq criticizes PTI leaders' meeting with Aajakia

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Tariq Fazal Chaudhry on Thursday said that the recent meeting of Zulfi Bukhari and the sons of Imran Khan with Arif Aajakia does not fall within the scope of normal political activity. In a statement on X, he said the activities of Zulfi Bukhari and PTI founder's sons reflect a clear political agenda, with national interests allegedly sidelined for personal and political purposes. He added that meetings with controversial and anti-Pakistan figures like Aajakia appear to be part of a carefully orchestrated plan rather than routine political engagement. The minister warned that certain elements are attempting to create a negative perception of Pakistan at the global level to sustain their political relevance. He stressed that, at a time when the country needs unity, stability, and responsible leadership, such actions weaken the national narrative. "Is this the same politics that was promised under the slogan of 'change'?" he questioned. "Or is it conduct where national dignity can be compromised to gain power at any cost?" He said that the people of Pakistan fully understand who stands with the country and who pursues personal interests.—APP

34 suspects held during grand search operations

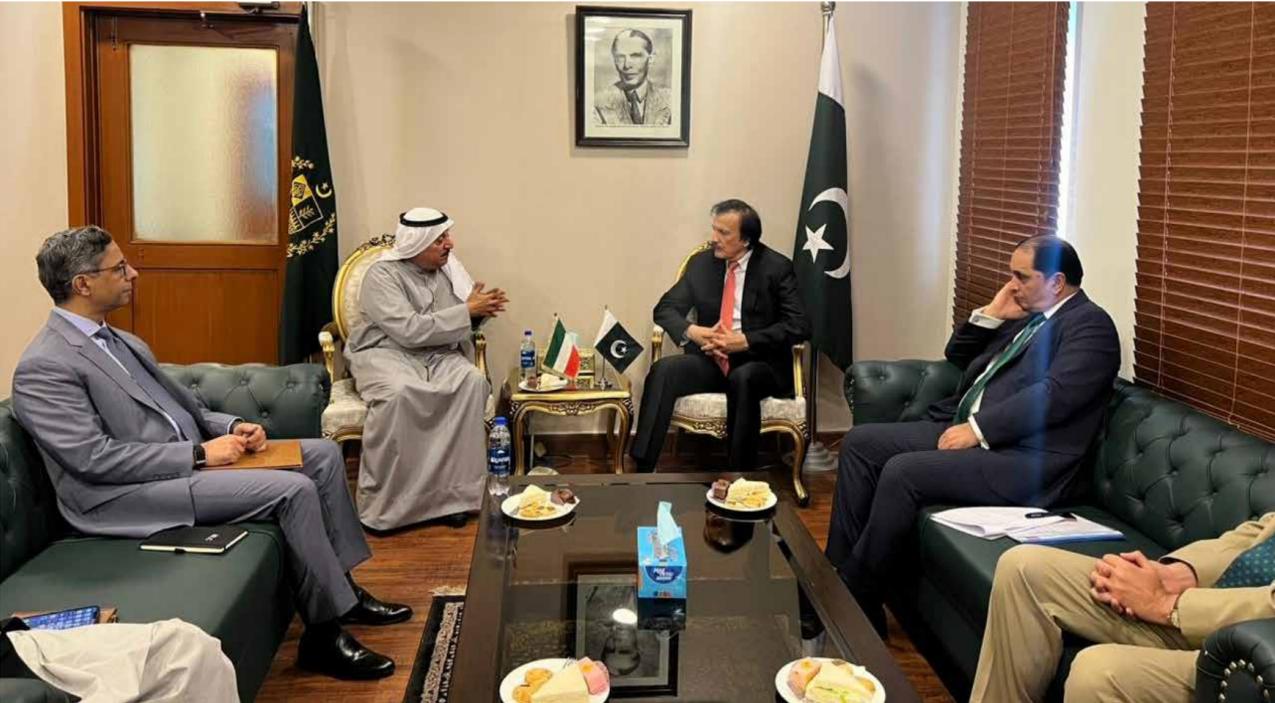
ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police conducted grand combing and search operations, checking 328 individuals in various areas of the federal capital as part of an ongoing crackdown against criminal elements and illegal residents. An official told on Thursday that the operations were carried out in the jurisdictions of Golra, Lohi Bher, Humak, Kirpa, Phulgran, Aabpara and Ramna police stations under the supervision of zonal Superintendents of Police. He said that lady police officials also took part in the search operations to ensure effective checking. He said during the operations, 328 individuals and 175 households were checked, while 43 shops were also inspected. He added that 210 motorcycles and 77 vehicles were checked during the drive, while 34 suspicious individuals, 12 motorcycles and one vehicle were shifted to relevant police stations for further verification. The official said the operations were conducted on the special directions of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi to eliminate crime and ensure the safety of citizens across the district. He urged citizens to cooperate with police during checking and immediately report any suspicious activity.—APP

SSP directs swift redressal of complaints

RAWALPINDI: SSP Investigation, Nasir Ali Khan urged the police officials for swift response to public complaints. He held an open court at Police Lines Headquarters on Thursday where he listened to public complaints and issued directions to concerned officers for their prompt resolution. During the session, citizens presented various issues, upon which the SSP directed officials to ensure legal action on marked applications within the stipulated timeframe. He emphasized that negligence in resolving public grievances would not be tolerated. Nasir Ali said that effective and timely service delivery at police stations would be ensured at all times, adding that all possible measures were being taken to facilitate citizens in line with the vision of the Punjab government. He reiterated that protection of life and property of the public remained the top priority of the police. Meanwhile, the SSP instructed officers to strictly follow timelines and maintain transparency in handling complaints to strengthen public trust in the policing system.—APP

SAPM, Kuwaiti envoy discuss ways to enhance bilateral coop

Haroon Akhtar reiterated Pakistan's commitment to further strengthening trade, investment, and export relations with Kuwait. He also highlighted that the Prime Minister's vision is to connect Pakistan more closely with Gulf countries and promote shared prosperity



ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) for Industries and Production, Haroon Akhtar Khan on Thursday met with Ambassador of Kuwait to Pakistan Nasser Abdulrahman Jassim Al-Mutairi and discussed bilateral relations and avenues for enhanced cooperation in diverse fields. The meeting was attended by Secretary for Industries and Production Capt (r) Saif Anjum, Secretary Commerce and Trade Jawad Paul, and Director General (DG) National Logistics Corporation (NLC) Major General Farrukh Shehzad Rao, a news release said. During the meet-

ing, Haroon Akhtar Khan emphasized that Kuwait was a brotherly country and Pakistan shared strong and longstanding relations with it. He highlighted that under the leadership of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, Pakistan was actively working day and night to promote peace in the region amid challenging geopolitical circumstances. He further informed that the Prime Minister has constituted special committees to enhance food exports to Gulf countries, underscoring Pakistan's desire to expand business-to-business linkages and explore new investment opportunities

between the two countries. Haroon Akhtar noted that Pakistan offered a vast market for Kuwait and is rich in natural resources and natural beauty. He reiterated Pakistan's commitment to further strengthening trade, investment, and export relations with Kuwait. He also highlighted that the Prime Minister's vision is to connect Pakistan more closely with Gulf countries and promote shared prosperity. Ambassador Nasser Abdulrahman Jassim Al-Mutairi appreciated the support extended by the people of Pakistan during difficult times and expressed gratitude for their solidarity. He reaffirmed Kuwait's inter-

est in enhancing cooperation with Pakistan in key sectors, including food, information technology, and trade. Secretary Industries Saif Anjum highlighted that there was significant potential for collaboration in mobile phone manufacturing and other industrial sectors. DG NLC Major General Farrukh Shehzad Rao emphasized the opportunities for expanding cooperation in logistics, cargo, and transportation between the two countries. Both sides expressed their commitment to further strengthening bilateral relations and exploring new avenues of cooperation.—DNA

Water management, population critical for developing countries

ISLAMABAD: Dr Jose A. Puppim De Oliveira, a renowned Brazilian climate expert and the Chair in Climate Change Governance and Global Development at the Global Development Institute, University of Manchester, has said that water resource management and population explosion are critical emerging challenges for developing countries. He was speaking at a special ceremony hosted jointly by Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) and the Institute of Urbanism, said a press release issued on Thursday. "With 2030 approaching, many countries remain uncertain about achieving SDG targets," he said, suggesting that timelines or implementation mechanisms may require adjustments. Dr. Oliveira, who is also a Coordinating Lead Author of Chapter 4 ("How to Accelerate Change") of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on Climate Change and Cities (SRCities), stressed the need for stronger collaboration between Pakistani institutions and global climate research networks, while lauding the role of Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in the review process of upcoming IPCC reports and implementation-oriented climate initiatives. Highlighting opportunities for collaboration, Dr. Oliveira said the IPCC review process involves practi-

tioners from government institutions, academia, and think tanks, and encouraged SDPI to participate in the review cycle leading up to the next major IPCC reporting phase expected in March 2027. He added that such engagement could also create opportunities to present research findings at the United Nations General Assembly. Stressing the need to strengthen coordination between federal and provincial departments in Pakistan to ensure that climate policy recommendations translate into practical implementation, he said interaction among multiple stakeholders improves institutional learning and enhances policy effectiveness. Referring to research cooperation prospects, Dr. Oliveira noted that the Urban Institute at the University of Manchester currently focuses on Africa. He said there is a strong potential for expanding its work to Pakistan, particularly in areas such as urban governance, climate finance for cities, waste management, and sectoral mitigation strategies. Sharing international experiences, he said Brazil is expected to operationalize its carbon market next year and has already established a national mechanism for carbon credit exchange with China and other partners. He also highlighted Brazil's efforts in forest conservation financing and its progress in developing an online Sus-

tainable Development Goals (SDGs) tracking and self-reporting system. He said his interest in engaging with Pakistan grew after meeting Pakistani delegates at COP30 in Brazil and through collaboration with Pakistani researchers, working on topics related to IPCC reports. SDPI Executive Director Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri welcomed the visiting scholar and outlined SDPI's role as one of Pakistan's premier policy think tanks, working across climate change, economy, and health sectors while supporting government policymaking through technical engagement. He said that SDPI also served on the advisory committee for COP29 and contributes to several technical bodies of the Government of Pakistan. Speaking on the occasion, SDPI Research Fellow Dr Kashif Salik highlighted that climate change impacts on urban areas are intensifying as migration toward cities continues to accelerate, placing additional pressure on infrastructure and public services. He stressed that while migration cannot be avoided, it can be managed through effective policies. Earlier, Dr Ejaz Ahmed urged the visiting professor to identify avenues through which Pakistan-related research initiatives could be further scaled up through international academic collaboration.—DNA

Kashmiri leaders' sentences condemned

The press conference concluded with an expression of solidarity with detained Kashmiri leaders and a reaffirmation of Pakistan's commitment to supporting their cause at all levels.

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs, Gilgit Baltistan and SAFRON Engr Amir Muqam on Thursday strongly condemned the sentencing of prominent Kashmiri leader Asiya Andrabi to life imprisonment, along with 30-year jail terms awarded to her associates Fahmida Sofi and Nahida Nasreen, terming the move a "grave injustice" and a violation of fundamental human rights. Addressing a joint press conference organized by the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) in Islamabad, Federal Minister Engineer Amir Muqam said the verdicts reflect political victimization and an attempt to suppress dissent in Jammu and Kashmir. He alleged that judicial mechanisms are being used as tools to sustain what he described as "illegal policies,"

raising serious concerns about the impartiality of the system. Highlighting the human rights situation in the region, Engr Amir Muqam claimed that thousands of Kashmiris have suffered over the decades. He cited figures indicating that more than 96,000 people have been killed since 1989, while tens of thousands have been injured, widowed, or subjected to violence. He stressed that these statistics represent profound human tragedies affecting countless families. Referring to developments following August 5, 2019, Amir Muqam criticized India's revocation of the region's special constitutional status, stating that it led to widespread restrictions on communication, movement, and freedom of expression. He said these measures have further exacerbated the human-

itarian situation. Engr Amir Muqam reiterated Pakistan's continued political and diplomatic support for the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination. He noted that Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar have consistently raised the issue at international forums, including the United Nations. He urged the international community, particularly organizations such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, to take immediate notice of human rights violations and push for the release of political prisoners. Describing the Kashmir issue as both a humanitarian crisis and a threat to regional stability, Engr Amir Muqam

warned that tensions between nuclear-armed neighbors could escalate if the dispute remains unresolved. He called for a peaceful resolution in line with United Nations resolutions and the aspirations of the Kashmiri people, including the holding of a free and impartial plebiscite. APHC Convener Ghulam Muhammad Safi and Madam Shamim Shawl also spoke on the occasion and rejected the verdict outright, describing it as part of a broader pattern of repression in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJ&K). The press conference concluded with an expression of solidarity with detained Kashmiri leaders and a reaffirmation of Pakistan's commitment to supporting their cause at all levels.—APP

Strict supervision, transparency during SSC exams

RAWALPINDI: Commissioner Rawalpindi, Engineer Amir Khattak chaired a review meeting on Thursday regarding the upcoming Matric (First Annual) 2026 examinations organized by the Rawalpindi Education Board. He emphasized that providing students with a peaceful environment and ensuring transparency in the examination process is the administration's foremost responsibility. Also the chairman of the Board, the commissioner directed that all Deputy Commissioners, Add'l Deputy Commissioners, Assistant Commissioners, Assistant divisional heads should visit examination centres within their jurisdictions to assess arrangements and monitor the performance of supervisory staff. The Commissioner stressed that any irregularity reported during the exams should be acted upon immediately, with FIRs registered against responsible individuals. He said that students must enter the exam halls confident that their hard work will not be compromised. Strict measures will be taken to prevent cheating and unauthorised interventions. Teachers assigned to examination duties must maintain attendance, with backup panels prepared to address any emergency. Non-compliance will result in strict disciplinary action.—APP

Gunfight leaves robber dead, accomplice escapes

RAWALPINDI: A suspected robber was killed while his accomplice managed to escape after an exchange of fire with the Dolphin Force in the Sadiqabad police limits here on the late night of Wednesday, the police spokesman said. According to details, two motorcyclists were robbing citizens at gunpoint when a Dolphin team reached the spot. Upon seeing the police, the suspects opened fire, prompting retaliatory firing by the police party. During the encounter, one robber sustained critical injuries and was shifted to hospital, where he later succumbed to his injuries, while his accomplice fled the scene. The deceased was identified as Haseeb, a record-holder allegedly involved in dozens of cases of robbery and illegal weapons. Police recovered three snatched mobile phones, weapons, and the motorcycle used in the crime from his possession. Two of the recovered mobile phones were reportedly snatched earlier from a citizen within the New Town area, while one was taken during the ongoing robbery attempt.—APP

Schools to reopen from April 01

RAWALPINDI: Strict implementation of the Punjab government's directives regarding school holidays is underway across Rawalpindi, Chief Executive Officer CEO Education Yasin Baloch said on Thursday. He stated that all public and private educational institutions had been clearly instructed to comply with the notified schedule of holidays, adding that no violation would be tolerated under any circumstances. The educational institutions were put on online classes amid developing regional situation that has drawn a converse effect on petroleum products' prices. The government strictly ordered all educational institutions to follow the SOPs devised by it. Monitoring teams have been constituted to ensure adherence to the orders, and surprise visits are being conducted in different areas of the district. Yasin Baloch warned that strict action would be taken against institutions found violating the government's instructions. He urged school administrations to act responsibly and prioritize the safety and well-being of students. Meanwhile, the Punjab government has recently announced reopening of regular in-person classes from April 1, terminating the online mechanism of classes. The government dismissed rumors of an extension of holidays or a shift to online classes till April 15.—DNA

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CPEC under Fire

MUHAMMAD FAZEEL

WHEN the U.S. left Afghanistan there were billions of weapons they left behind them but they did not disappear. Rather, they have now been sponsoring insurgent groups, destabilizing Pakistan and jeopardizing such big projects as CPEC. Was it an accident—was it a deep plan that had far-reaching results? The evacuation of the United States in Afghanistan in 2021 ended a 20-year period of military presence but brought about a lot of controversy due to the tremendous number of military gear abandoned. It was estimated that some 7.2 billion dollars in weaponry, vehicles, and hi-tech systems had still been left in the country and the consequences of this move were crucial issues to consider. Dominating discourses claim that the U.S did not intentionally drop these weapons and that their loss was accidental. But a deeper analysis will show a more intricate situation. After the Afghanistan security forces broke down so fast in August 2021, a large share of the deserted weaponry landed in the hands of the Taliban. Although part of the equipment was destroyed or rendered useless, a lot of the equipment survived or was repaired. This flow of hi-tech U.S. guns and ammunition has improved the ability of non-state and insurgent groups, such as the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA). According to UN Security Council monitoring reports issued in January 2025, these groups have at least four joint training and facilitation camps in southern Afghanistan, especially in the Walikot and Shorabak districts, where they train in weapons handling, explosives training, small-unit tactics, cross-border logistics coordination, and planning synchronized attacks in Pakistan. The spillover effect of these developments has been manifest in the particular China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). At



tacks on CPEC projects and Chinese nationals in Pakistan have been increasing dramatically since 2021, which underscores the security broadening of the discarded arsenal. However, as the official briefs indicate, at least 14 cases were aimed at the Chinese citizens, and the results were fatalities and major disturbances. These attacks, mostly executed by organizations like the BLA and TTP, do not only put much pressure on the internal security set up of Pakistan but also endanger the development of key economic projects. Since CPEC is one of the pointers of the Belt and Road Initiative created by China, its prosperity is largely reliant on a consistent security climate. Access to sophisticated weapons is arguably empowering these militant groups and allowing them to make more complex and deadly raids.

This situation can be discussed in terms of realism and great power competition. Though transfer of arms to insurgent groups was intentionally done by the United States is far-fetched, it is also not enough to consider the result as an accident. Another more subtle meaning implies that the resulting destabilization can be indirectly consistent with the larger strategic interests. The development of sophisticated weaponry limits the spread of the economic and geopolitical power of China, especially the CPEC-related regions.

To sum up, the American retreat in Afghanistan and dumping of hi-tech military machinery have come with very serious strategic implications. Although it was technically an accident, the post-factum indicates that the spread of such weapons might have been indirectly used to pursue more geopolitical interests. By keeping large arsenals unguarded, the United States allowed such organizations as the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) to increase their operational powers, hence creating chaos in Pakistan. This has had a direct effect on key economic projects and especially the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which has affected its security climate and slackened its speed. Strategically, the result is in agreement with interests aimed at limiting the economic and geopolitical growth of China within the region.

Energy Insecurity and Crime Risks in the Shadow of Middle East Conflicts

Prof Dr Shujaul Mulk Khan



It is within this environment that the risk of crime begins to grow. While poverty alone does not cause crime, it can create conditions where certain types of criminal activity become more likely. For instance, when people struggle to meet their basic needs, some may turn to theft, black-market activities, or informal...

IN today's interconnected world, events in one region can quickly ripple across the globe. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Middle East - a region rich in oil and gas, yet often marked by political tension and conflict. As disputes involving countries like United States, Israel, Iran, and Lebanon intensify, the world faces a growing concern: energy insecurity. While the immediate focus is often on fuel shortages and rising prices, a deeper and less visible consequence emerges - an increased risk of crime and social instability. The Middle East plays a central role in the global energy system. A large share of the world's oil supply originates from this region, and much of it passes through critical routes such as the Strait of Hormuz. When conflict threatens these routes or damages energy infrastructure, the effects are felt far beyond regional borders. Oil prices rise, supply chains tighten, and uncertainty spreads across global markets. These disruptions are not just economic headlines - they directly affect everyday life. When energy prices surge, the cost of living rises almost immediately. Transportation becomes more expensive, food prices increase, and businesses struggle to manage higher operating costs. For many households, especially in developing countries, this creates financial strain. Families may find it harder to afford basic necessities, leading to frustration and anxiety. Over time, this economic pressure can weaken social stability. It is within this environment that the risk of crime begins to grow. While poverty alone does not cause crime, it can create conditions where certain types

of criminal activity become more likely. For instance, when people struggle to meet their basic needs, some may turn to theft, black-market activities, or informal work to survive. Rising inequality can also deepen resentment, further straining community relationships. In this sense, energy insecurity acts as a multiplier of existing vulnerabilities rather than a direct cause of crime.

Another important factor is the impact on government capacity. During an energy crisis, governments often face mounting pressure to control prices, provide subsidies, and maintain public services. This can stretch already limited resources, particularly in countries with fragile economies. If governments are unable to respond effectively, public trust may decline, and law enforcement systems can become overstretched. In such situations, maintaining order becomes more challenging, increasing the likelihood of unrest and criminal activity. Energy shortages can also give rise to illegal markets. In many parts of the world, when fuel becomes scarce or expensive, black markets emerge. These markets are often controlled by organized groups that profit from smuggling, illegal refining, or theft of energy resources. Such activities not only increase crime but also undermine the formal economy and reduce government revenue. In conflict-affected regions, these illicit networks can even finance armed groups, further fueling instability.

However, it is important to avoid oversimplification. Not every country facing an energy crisis experiences a surge in crime. The outcome depends on several key factors, including the strength of insti-

tutions, the availability of social safety nets, and the effectiveness of governance. Countries with strong economic systems and responsive governments are better equipped to manage the pressures of rising energy costs. In contrast, nations with weak institutions and high levels of inequality are more vulnerable to the destabilizing effects of energy insecurity. Looking ahead, the issue also raises broader questions about the structure of the global energy system. Continued reliance on fossil fuels creates ongoing risks - especially from politically unstable regions. Each new conflict exposes the fragility of global supply chains and highlights the need for diversification. Investing in renewable energy sources and reducing dependence on a single region can help build resilience and reduce the likelihood of future crises.

In conclusion, energy insecurity in the context of Middle East conflicts is not just an economic issue - it is a complex challenge with social and security dimensions. While it does not directly cause crime, it creates conditions that can increase crime risks by intensifying economic hardship, weakening governance, and encouraging illicit activities. Understanding this chain of effects is essential for policymakers and societies alike. By addressing energy vulnerability and strengthening social and institutional resilience, it is possible to reduce not only economic risks but also the broader threats to stability and security. In summery let's say 'Energy insecurity does not directly cause crime, but it creates the economic and social conditions in which crime can thrive.'

USA-Iran War: Oil, Deception, and Illusions

Qamar Bashir



From Iran's perspective, these are not negotiation points but conditions of capitulation. Accepting even a fraction would dismantle its deterrence capability, undermine sovereignty, and expose it to future vulnerabilities. Consequently, Iran has rejected these proposals outright and presented its own counter-framework: guarantees against future attacks, recognition of its right under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to pursue peaceful nuclear enrichment under International Atomic Energy Agency supervision, preservation of its ballistic missile program...

THE unfolding conflict involving the United States, Israel, and Iran has entered a phase where perception and reality are dangerously misaligned. Publicly, the language of mediation, ceasefire, and diplomacy dominates official statements. Privately and on the battlefield, however, the tempo of war continues to intensify. What appears to be a pause for peace is, in fact, a calculated window—used by all sides to reposition militarily, economically, and strategically for what could become a far more devastating phase of conflict.

At the core of this crisis lies a deep distrust of U.S.-led diplomacy. Iran's skepticism is not theoretical; it is rooted in recent experience. During earlier rounds of negotiations in mid-2025 and again in early 2026, diplomatic engagement coincided with military escalations. To Tehran, this pattern suggests that negotiations are being used as a tactical cover—buying time for force buildup rather than genuinely seeking peace. This perception has shaped Iran's current posture: resistant, cautious, and unwilling to accept any framework that resembles surrender. The United States, under Donald J. Trump, has reportedly advanced a comprehensive mediation framework—often described as a 15-point proposal. These demands include dismantling Iran's nuclear facilities, surrendering enriched uranium stockpiles, halting its ballistic missile program, ending support for regional allies such as Hezbollah and other groups, accepting intrusive international inspections, and aligning its regional policies with U.S. and Israeli security interests. Additional expectations reportedly extend to granting oversight of critical waterways such as the Strait of Hormuz and contributing toward war-related compensation.

From Iran's perspective, these are not negotiation points but conditions of capitulation. Accepting even a fraction would dismantle its deterrence capability, undermine sovereignty, and expose it to future vulnerabilities. Consequently, Iran has rejected these proposals outright and presented its own counter-framework: guarantees against future attacks, recognition of its right under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to pursue peaceful nuclear enrichment under International Atomic Energy Agency supervision, preservation of its ballistic missile program, refusal to abandon regional alliances, and compensation for war damages. This stark divergence has rendered the mediation process effectively a non-starter. Countries such as Pakistan, Oman, Turkey, and Egypt have attempted to bridge the gap, but their efforts are constrained by the fundamental incompatibility of the positions. Meanwhile, Israel has used the current operational window to intensify its campaign against Iranian targets. Its objective appears clear: degrade Iran's military infrastructure, energy facilities, and command networks as much as possible before any ceasefire takes hold. Iran, in response, has escalated its missile and drone operations with increasing effectiveness. Despite Israel's advanced defense systems—Iron Dome, David's Sling, and Arrow—there have been instances where Iranian projectiles have penetrated

these layers, causing damage in key urban and industrial areas.

The asymmetry of geography and scale is critical here. Israel's small territorial footprint makes it particularly vulnerable to sustained bombardment. In contrast, Iran's vast size, large population of approximately 85-90 million, and extensive military reserves—including the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and hundreds of thousands of trained personnel—position it for prolonged resistance. Historical precedents reinforce this reality: even non-state actors such as Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon have withstood sustained campaigns. A state-level adversary like Iran presents a far more complex challenge.

For the United States, the situation is increasingly precarious. With an estimated 40,000 to 50,000 troops deployed across the Middle East, supported by carrier strike groups and amphibious forces, the logistical burden is immense. These forces depend on regional bases and supply lines for fuel, food, and operational continuity. Iran has explicitly warned that any entity supporting these supply chains could become a target, raising concerns about the sustainability of prolonged deployment. The economic dimension of the war is equally significant—and perhaps even more consequential. The partial disruption of the Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly 20% of global oil supply flows, has triggered volatility in energy markets. Oil prices have surged, driving inflation across major economies. In the United States, rising gasoline prices are translating into higher living costs, increased transportation expenses, and broader economic anxiety.

For Middle Eastern economies, the impact is even more severe. Countries that rely heavily on oil exports are facing declining revenues due to disrupted production, damaged infrastructure, and soaring shipping insurance costs. This financial strain is directly affecting their ability to honor previously pledged investments in the United States—commitments that reportedly approached \$3 trillion. These investments, once seen as pillars of economic partnership, are now under threat as regional governments prioritize domestic stability over external commitments. This shift has broader implications. The erosion of financial flows from the Gulf to the United States weakens a key channel of economic interdependence. At the same time, trust in U.S. security guarantees is diminishing. Many regional actors now question whether U.S. military presence serves their interests or primarily protects Israel. This perception is reshaping alliances and recalibrating geopolitical alignments. On the global stage, the United States is encountering increasing isolation. European allies, while historically aligned with Washington, have shown reluctance to fully support the current conflict. Many have emphasized diplomacy and restraint, wary of being drawn into a prolonged war with uncertain outcomes. This divergence reflects a broader shift toward multipolarity, where alignment with U.S. policy is no longer automatic.

Domestically, the pressure is mounting. Public opinion in the United States is shifting as the economic costs of the war become more visible. Rising inflation, job market un-

certainty, and fiscal strain are fueling dissatisfaction. Media narratives are increasingly questioning the justification and objectives of the conflict. Calls for de-escalation are growing louder, creating a challenging environment for policymakers. Adding to this complexity are concerns about market behavior during the conflict. Reports of unusually large oil futures trades occurring shortly before major policy announcements have raised questions about information asymmetry and market integrity. While such movements may reflect anticipatory trading by sophisticated investors, they contribute to a perception that economic interests are intertwined with geopolitical decisions. The composition of the U.S. negotiating team has also become a point of contention. Iran has expressed reservations about individuals perceived as closely aligned with Israeli interests, arguing that their presence undermines the credibility of mediation efforts. Adjustments, including greater involvement of senior officials such as Vice President JD Vance, have been considered to address these concerns. However, rebuilding trust remains a formidable challenge.

Taken together, these dynamics create a powerful matrix of pressure on U.S. policy. Economically, the war is straining both domestic and international systems. Diplomatically, it is isolating Washington from traditional allies. Strategically, it is entangling U.S. forces in a complex and potentially prolonged conflict. Politically, it is eroding public support. At the same time, Iran appears prepared for a long war. Its strategy is not to seek immediate ceasefire but to endure, escalate selectively, and leverage its geographic and strategic advantages. By threatening key chokepoints and maintaining pressure on adversaries, Iran is positioning itself as a resilient actor capable of imposing significant costs. The risk, however, extends far beyond the immediate participants. A prolonged conflict could trigger a global economic downturn, disrupt supply chains, and exacerbate inflation worldwide. Energy shortages, rising prices, and financial instability could push vulnerable economies into recession and deepen global inequality.

In this context, the current mediation efforts resemble less a pathway to peace and more a strategic pause—one that masks ongoing preparation for further escalation. The illusion of diplomacy cannot indefinitely conceal the realities of war. If a genuine resolution is to emerge, it will require a fundamental shift: from maximalist demands to realistic compromise, from strategic maneuvering to genuine engagement, and from unilateral pressure to mutual recognition of sovereignty and security concerns. Until then, the world remains caught in a dangerous paradox—where the language of peace coexists with the machinery of war, and where every pause may simply be the prelude to a more devastating confrontation.

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

Briefs

US-Iran 'talks' under way, says Dar

FROM PAGE 01
US President Donald Trump on Sunday, confirmed by the White House. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also announced that Pakistan was ready to host talks between the US and Iran, a move acknowledged by President Trump, who reposted the statement on his Truth Social account. Subsequently, Pakistan delivered a US proposal to Iran, a senior Iranian source told Reuters on Wednesday. The source did not reveal details of the proposal or confirm if it was the 15-point US framework reported by media outlets. Turkey is also reportedly helping explore avenues to end the war, with either Pakistan or Turkey under consideration as the venue for talks, the source said. In a latest development, Iran has rejected the US proposal, insisting it will end the ongoing "imposed war" on its own terms and timeline, a senior political-security official told Press TV. The official compared the latest overture with two previous rounds of negotiations in spring and winter 2025, which were accompanied by US military operations, framing Tehran's response as consistent with its longstanding caution.

US proposal to end war...

FROM PAGE 01
Pakistan are actively trying to help "establish common ground between Iran and the United States and reduce differences." According to the official, either Turkey or Pakistan could potentially serve as a venue for future discussions. Pakistan had delivered the US proposal to Iran, and Islamabad has publicly offered to host direct or indirect talks. Turkey has also been involved in passing messages between the two sides to encourage de-escalation. Iran's position comes amid conflicting signals from Washington. US President Donald Trump has claimed that Iran is eager for a deal, while Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has repeatedly stated that Tehran has no intention of holding talks under the current circumstances and intends to continue its policy of resistance.

PM Shehbaz highlights...

FROM PAGE 01
Pakistan, which has been engaged in a conflict with the Afghan Taliban, has also suffered from fuel disruptions caused by the Iran war, which was launched by the US-Israeli on February 28. According to international media reports, Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Asim Munir recently held a telephonic conversation with US President Donald Trump, with the White House also confirming the contact. Senior Pakistani officials have reportedly been facilitating communication between Tehran and key US interlocutors, including Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner.

Prime Minister...

FROM PAGE 01
mediation efforts to end the ongoing hostilities in the Middle East. He then briefed the Malaysian Prime Minister on the latest diplomatic efforts, including his discussions with leaders of brotherly Gulf countries and Iran, to bring the U.S. and Iran to the negotiating table. While appreciating the Prime Minister for his outstanding leadership, the Malaysian Prime Minister also apprised him of his own conversations with various world leaders, where-in he had also emphasized upon the immediate need to end the Middle East war. He offered Malaysia's full support to Pakistan's peace efforts. The Prime Minister thanked the Malaysian Prime Minister and assured him that Pakistan would continue its sincere and genuine efforts in de-escalating the prevailing situation in the region. Both leaders agreed to remain in touch.

Govt to launch Islamabad school sports year next month

The decision was taken during a high-level meeting chaired by Federal Secretary Inter-Provincial Coordination (IPC) Mohyuddin Wani, with participation from key education authorities and national sports federations

OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: In a landmark move to mainstream sports within the education system, the federal government has decided to make sports activities mandatory across all public and private schools, madrassahs, and non-formal education institutions in Islamabad, while announcing the launch of the "Islamabad School Sports Year" from April. The decision was taken during a high-level meeting chaired by Federal Secretary Inter-Provincial Coordination (IPC) Mohyuddin Wani, with participation from key education authorities and national sports federations. The initiative aims to integrate physical activity with academic life and promote a healthier, more active youth population. It was agreed that the first week of April will mark the simultaneous commencement of the new academic year and the Islamabad School Sports Year, setting the tone for structured, year-round sports engagement in educational institutions. Under the flagship program, "Khelega Is-



lamabad - Taleem ke Saath, Maidan Mein Saath," the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB), in collaboration with various sports federations, will host an Islamabad Sports Orientation Gala. The event will focus on primary and middle school students, offering interactive sessions, live demonstrations, and hands-on participation across multiple sports.

Students will be granted free access to PSB sports facilities and will benefit from structured coaching programs conducted by certified trainers. A comprehensive talent identification mechanism will also be introduced to spot and nurture promising athletes at an early age. The program features a wide range of sports, including cricket,

hockey, football, tennis, padel, athletics, cycling, rock climbing, rugby, chess, and martial arts such as judo and taekwondo—ensuring broad-based participation across traditional and emerging disciplines. According to the phased implementation plan, April will see the launch of the Sports Orientation Gala, followed by regular coaching and school-level activities from May to August. Inter-school competitions will take place from September to December, culminating in the Islamabad School Games scheduled between January and March. Mohyuddin Wani emphasized that the initiative strongly promotes inclusion, ensuring participation of madrassah students, encouraging gender equality, and extending outreach to underserved communities across the federal capital. The initiative has received endorsement from key education bodies, including the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education and the Inter Board Committee of Chairmen, who termed it a significant step toward aligning education with physical development and youth engagement.

Export of sports goods increase by 13.26%

The growth in exports is largely attributed to consistent government policies aimed at promoting export-oriented industries, along with incentives, facilitation measures, and improved access to international markets

ISLAMABAD: The exports of sports goods from the country did increase by 13.26 percent during the first eight months of the current fiscal year (2025-26) as compared to the corresponding period of last year. The country exported sports goods worth \$282.69 million during July-February (2025-26) as against \$249.59 million in July-February (2024-25), according to official data of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) available with APP. The growth in exports is largely attributed to consistent government policies aimed at promoting export-oriented industries, along with incentives, facilitation measures, and improved access to international markets. Enhanced focus on product quality, compliance with international

standards, and innovation has further strengthened the position of Pakistani sports goods globally. Among sports products, exports of footballs rose significantly by 18.98 percent, increasing from \$147.17 million last year to \$175.09 million during the current year. The strong performance of football exports reflects Pakistan's established reputation for producing high-quality, hand-stitched balls that meet international specifications. However, exports of gloves declined by 9.19 percent, falling from \$43.37 million last year to \$39.38 million during the current year, the PBS data revealed. The decline is attributed to shifting demand patterns and increased competition in international markets. Likewise, exports of all other sports goods increased by 15.51 percent

to \$68.22 million from \$59.06 million last year, indicating diversification in the product base and growing acceptance of Pakistani products abroad. Meanwhile, on a year-on-year basis, sports goods exports increased by 6.60 percent in February 2026 compared to the same month last year. The exports were recorded at \$33.25 million in February 2026 against \$31.19 million in February 2025. During the month, exports of footballs and other sports products increased by 9.43 percent and 13.35 percent, respectively, while gloves exports decreased by 13.22 percent. On a month-on-month basis, sports goods exports decreased by 20.15 percent in February 2026 compared to \$41.64 million in January 2026, mainly due to seasonal trends and shipment adjustments, according to PBS data. - APP

Khan's son shares stage with BNM leader at UN HRC event

ISLAMABAD: Kasim Khan, son of former Prime Minister Imran Khan, participated in a side event of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, where he reportedly shared the stage with Dr. Naseem Baloch, a leader of the Baloch National Movement (BNM). The videos and information circulating on social media showed that Kasim Khan addressed the event and spoke about the human rights situation in Pakistan. In his remarks, he particularly highlighted the detention of his father, Imran Khan, according to the media reports. This development has sparked fresh discussions on social media regarding Kasim Khan's activities and associations. Observers noted that this is not the first time his interactions with certain controversial figures have come under scrutiny as earlier he met Arif Ajakia. Some analysts have pointed out that the participation of the son of a former prime minister in international forums alongside such elements, and taking positions critical of Pakistan. APP

Over 90 countries to gather in Kyrgyzstan for sixth World Nomad Games

BISHKEK: Kyrgyzstan is preparing to host the sixth World Nomad Games from August 31 to September 6, with the opening ceremony to be held in the capital city of Bishkek and competitions continuing in the Issyk-Kul region. According to organizers, invitations have been sent to 100 countries, with more than 50 already confirming participation. In total, over 90 countries and around 400 foreign media representatives are expected to attend. The program will include 43 sports, alongside large-scale cultural events, exhibitions, scientific conferences and forums. The World Nomad Games were initiated by Kyrgyzstan following the Bishkek Declaration adopted in 2012 at a summit of Turkic-speaking states involving Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Turkey. Based on this initiative, the first World Nomad Games were held from September 9 to 14, 2014, in Kyrgyzstan. 583 athletes from 19 countries competed in 14 sports. The first three editions were held in Kyrgyzstan in 2014, 2016 and 2018, bringing together up to 80 countries and significantly expanding the number of disciplines and participants. The Games later evolved into a global platform. Turkey hosted the fourth edition in 2022, gathering representatives from 102 countries, while the fifth Games took place in Kazakhstan in 2024 with 2,800 athletes from 89 countries. Notably, women's categories were introduced into the competition program. The event combines traditional sports such as equestrian competitions, wrestling and intellectual games with a broad cultural program, including ethnographic exhibitions, national cuisine, art performances and academic conferences. The World Nomad Games have received international recognition, including acknowledgment by the United Nations as an effective tool for intercultural dialogue. The initiative is supported by international sports federations and cultural institutions, included in the global sustainable development agenda, and inscribed on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. - APP

Russia says Bushehr plant...

FROM PAGE 01
situation that is categorically unacceptable to Russia. Moscow stressed that the US and Israel must understand the gravity of the situation as clearly as Russia does. The Foreign Ministry demanded that those responsible for launching this reckless, irresponsible, and unprovoked attack on Iran come to their senses and immediately put an end to their aggression. This includes halting all strikes on Iran's nuclear energy infrastructure, which is covered by the IAEA Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement, as well as on facilities located in its immediate vicinity. Russia also called on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the United Nations, and their leadership to take a clear, unequivocal position and resolute action to prevent any further attacks of this kind.

PTI Senator Murad Saeed...

FROM PAGE 01
In mid-February, he submitted his resignation from the Senate seat in a letter addressed to the party chairman. In the letter, also posted on the party's X handle, Saeed said, "This parliament, founded on illegitimacy, has become complicit in every attempt to turn the gravest insult to the people's mandate into the nation's destiny, where even after taking an oath on the constitution, its authority has been distorted." Saeed further said lawmakers demanding basic rights for the "elected and real prime minister" were themselves being confined for protesting, adding, "I hereby resign as a protest." The May 9, 2023, events refer to the violent protests that broke out in several parts of the country following the arrest of the PTI founder Imran Khan and saw attacks on public properties and military installations, including Corps Commander's House Lahore, also known as Jinnah House.

Asian countries line up...

FROM PAGE 01
But in recent weeks, a host of Asian countries have been lining up, according to various sources including media and Russia. "Demand is high, particularly for alternative destinations. As a result, a point may come when it becomes difficult to meet additional demand," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in response to a question about Russian oil demand. A fifth of global oil production has effectively been blocked from reaching the market due to the US-Israeli war on Iran which has halted traffic through the Strait of Hormuz. Russia has benefited from high oil prices and a 30-day sanctions waiver from the United States for purchases of Russian oil at sea. Oil revenues and natural gas sales generate around a quarter of the country's state funds. Russia's ability to boost oil exports is, however, constrained, in part by Ukrainian drone attacks which have effectively shut down at least 40% of the country's oil-exporting capacity.

Japan starts release of state-held oil to stabilize supplies amid Iran war

TOKYO: The Japanese government on Thursday started releasing state-held oil to stabilize supplies amid the ongoing US-Israeli war with Iran, as part of the largest-ever drawdown of reserves stockpiled in the country. The release of oil equivalent to 30 days of domestic demand, or around 8.5 million kiloliters, is set to conclude by the end of April and follows the freeing up of 15 days' worth held by the private sector, which commenced last week. According to Japan's Kyodo News Agency, there is growing concern about an oil supply shortage in Japan, which relies on the Middle East for over 90% of its crude oil imports, as Tehran has effectively blocked the Strait of Hormuz - a vital waterway for global energy supplies - following the attacks on Iran launched by the US and Israel on Feb. 28. To deal with the energy supply disruption, the Japanese government decided to release about 80 million barrels of oil, equivalent to 45 days' worth of domestic consumption and 1.8 times the amount released after the massive earthquake and tsunami in 2011 that devastated Japan's northeast. The average retail price of gasoline in Japan rose to a record-high 190.80 yen per liter in mid-March, with the government resuming state subsidies to bring down the price. - APP



LAHORE: Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif, Chairman PCB Mohsin Naqvi and others enjoying the PSL match between Lahore Qalandars and Hyderabad Kingsmen. - DNA

President Lee Jae Myung urges cooperation on energy-saving efforts

"The government does not plan to adjust electricity rates for now, but keeping them at the current level could significantly widen KEPCO's losses," Lee said. He warned that greater reliance on electricity over petroleum-based products could further deepen KEPCO's financial burden and ultimately add pressure on government finances

SEOUL: President Lee Jae Myung on Thursday urged the nation to cooperate on energy-saving efforts as the prolonged war in the Middle East has disrupted global energy markets, but pledged no change in electricity prices. Lee made the remarks during an emergency economic response meeting, as the government is set to impose another round of a fuel price cap to help protect the nation's economy from impacts from the U.S.-Israel war with Iran. "(I) urge gas stations to actively cooperate in setting prices in line with the intended purpose of the oil price cap system," Lee said. "Taking advantage of a national crisis to seek unfair profits through practices such as collusion and hoarding will not be tolerated and the government will continue to respond strictly under a zero-tolerance principle," Lee said. Lee said the government will not raise electricity bills for now, but emphasized the need to conserve electricity, which is supplied by the



state-run Korea Electric Power Corp. (KEPCO). The government does not plan to adjust electricity rates for now, but keeping them at the

current level could significantly widen KEPCO's losses," Lee said. He warned that greater reliance on electricity over petroleum-based products could further deepen KEPCO's financial burden and ultimately add pressure on government finances. KEPCO has accumulated about 206 trillion won (US\$136.9 billion) in debt after supplying electricity below production costs, even as global energy prices surged between 2021 and 2023 following the Russia-Ukraine War. As part of an energy-saving campaign, Lee urged the public sector to actively adopt a five-day vehicle license plate rotation system and encouraged citizens to use public transportation. He also instructed officials to draw up a detailed supplementary budget to prepare for the broader economic impact of a prolonged conflict, as the ruling Democratic Party plans to submit the extra budget bill to the National Assembly next Tuesday. - Agencies

President of Tajikistan to pay state visit to Uzbekistan

ASTANA: President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon will pay a state visit to Uzbekistan on March 26-27, at the invitation of President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Qazinform News Agency learnt from UzA. High-level talks and the inaugural meeting of the Supreme Interstate Council, chaired by the leaders of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, will be held as part of the program. Issues concerning strengthening friendship, good neighborliness, strategic partnership, and alliance between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan will be on the agenda. Particular attention will be paid to strengthening political dialogue, expanding trade, economic and interregional cooperation, deepening industrial cooperation, improving transport connectivity, ensuring water and energy security, and continuing extensive cultural and humanitarian exchanges. The presidents are expected to focus on current issues on the international and regional agenda, as well as on cooperation within multilateral frameworks. Several new joint projects will be launched, and a significant package of bilateral documents will be signed to strengthen multifaceted cooperation. - Agencies

Briefs

At least 28
civilians
killed in
Sudan drone
strikes

KHARTOUM: Two drone strikes on Sudan's Darfur and Kordofan regions killed at least 28 civilians, health workers told AFP Thursday. One strike hit a market in North Darfur state's Saraf Omra town on Wednesday, killing "22 people, including an infant, and injuring 17 more," one health worker at the local clinic told AFP. Another strike, also on Wednesday, set fire to a truck traveling on a North Kordofan road. "Six bodies arrived at the hospital yesterday, three of them charred, in addition to ten wounded," a medical source at the local hospital in El-Rahad told AFP, blaming the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces for the attack.—APP

KPRA
declares
Friday as
working day

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA) has announced that, in light of the ongoing financial year closing and the critical importance of revenue-related operations during the final quarter, Friday will be observed as a normal working day for essential staff of the Authority. According to an official order issued by the KPRA Headquarters, the decision has been taken to ensure uninterrupted progress of key financial and administrative activities, which are vital at this crucial stage of the fiscal cycle. The last quarter of the financial year is considered particularly significant for revenue collection, reconciliation, and reporting, necessitating enhanced operational readiness and staff availability. The Director General Ms. Irum Naz, has directed all concerned officers and officials categorized as essential staff to strictly comply with the order and ensure their (attendance) on Fridays as per regular working hours.—APP

Rupee gains
01 paisa
against US
Dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Thursday appreciated by 01 paisa against the US Dollar in interbank trading and closed at Rs279.20 compared to the previous day's closing of Rs 279.21. According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs 279.50 and Rs 280.25, respectively. The price of the Euro against the rupee decreased by Rs 1.37 to close at Rs 322.43 from the previous day's close of Rs 323.80, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese Yen remained unchanged and closed at Rs 1.75, whereas the exchange rate of the British Pound witnessed a decrease of Rs 1.66 and closed at Rs 372.39 compared to the previous day's Rs 374.05. The exchange rate of the Emirati remained stagnant at Rs 76.02 while the Saudi Riyal surged by 02 paisa to close at Rs 74.42.—APP

Gold prices
plunge by
Rs11,000 per
tola

ISLAMABAD: The price of 24 karat per tola gold decreased by Rs11,000 on Thursday and was sold at Rs468,262 on Thursday compared to its sale at Rs479,262 on the last trading day. All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association reported the price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs9,430 to Rs401,459 from Rs410,889 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold went down by Rs8,644 to Rs368,017 from Rs376,661. The price of per tola silver decreased by Rs340 to Rs7,484, whereas that of ten gram silver went down by Rs291 to Rs6,416. The price of gold in the international market decreased by \$110 to \$4,455 from \$4,565 whereas that of silver declined by \$3.40 to \$70.00, the Association reported.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Sardar Tahir Mehmood President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry is holding a meeting with Chief Commissioner Inland Revenue Ms. Aisha Farooq at Regional Tax Office Islamabad. Ms. Maria Sharif Commissioner, Ms. Rabia Yasir Durrani, Commissioner, Assad Lateef SO to Chief Commissioner, acting President Traders Welfare Association Jinnah Super Market Faseeh Ullah Khan, Vice President Chaudhry Ashraf, General Secretary Abdul Rehman Siddiqui, Additional General Secretary Zohaib Ashraf Malik and other are also present.

Russia vows to arrest
Internet shutdown protesters

Russia's interior ministry on Thursday issued a warning against taking part in "unauthorized public events," citing an "increase" in calls for rallies. Russia's interior ministry on Thursday issued a warning against taking part in "unauthorized public events," citing an "increase" in calls for rallies.

MOSCOW: Russia on Thursday said it would arrest anybody who protests mass Internet blackouts, as Moscow deals with bubbling public discontent against widespread switch-offs. The Russian capital on Wednesday officially lifted three weeks of restrictions on mobile Internet access in Moscow — a measure the Kremlin had called "necessary" for security — but connection remains poor across many parts of the city. Russian regions have been switch-

ing off mobile Internet services for months in what they say is a measure to thwart Ukrainian counter-attacks with drones that connect to local data providers. Russia's interior ministry on Thursday issued a warning against taking part in "unauthorized public events," citing an "increase" in calls for rallies. "All attempts to hold such events will be immediately suppressed, and their organizers and participants will be detained," it said in a statement.

Russian authorities have long banned street demonstrations. Organizers are required to get permission from local authorities in advance for any public gatherings, with the requests virtually always rejected. Since sending troops into Ukraine, Russia has hardened its rules against public signs of dissent, outlawing criticism of the Kremlin and the Russian army with strict military censorship laws. Officials in the southern city of Krasnodar initially gave approval

for a public protest against the Internet blackouts this weekend, before revoking the permission. Other Russian cities have similarly rejected attempts to stage authorized public rallies. The Internet outages come alongside restrictions on the popular WhatsApp and Telegram messengers — which have been barely usable without a VPN that masks traffic in recent months. Moscow is pushing Russians to embrace the state-backed Max messenger platform.

Critics say the measures are an attempt by the Kremlin to ramp up online control and surveillance. The mass switch-off in Moscow had frustrated locals and businesses, with taxi and delivery services thwarted and even payment terminals in shops stopping working. Sales of paper maps, pagers and walkie-talkies had jumped amid the outage, sales data showed.—Agencies

N Korea, Belarus
sign 'friendship'
treaty during
Lukashenko visit

SEOUL: North Korea and Belarus's strongmen leaders signed a "friendship and cooperation" treaty on Thursday after Kim Jong Un gave a lavish welcome to President Alexander Lukashenko on his maiden visit. Besides supporting Russia's war against Ukraine — around 2,000 North Korean soldiers are thought to have died — both nations are under Western sanctions and are accused of gross human rights violations. The two men met last year in China. "In the modern realities of global transformation — at a time when the world's major powers openly ignore and violate the norms of international law — independent countries must cooperate more closely and consolidate their efforts aimed at protecting their sovereignty and improving the well-being of their citizens," Belarusian state news agency Belta quoted Lukashenko as saying. "We oppose the illegitimate pressure on Belarus from the West and express our support and understanding for the measures taken by the leadership of Belarus aimed at ensuring social and political stability and economic development," Belta quoted Kim as saying. Earlier Belta showed Kim and Lukashenko hugging at a lavish welcome program on Wednesday at the start of the two-day visit involving an artillery salute and goose-stepping soldiers before a large flag-waving crowd. Lukashenko visited the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun — where Kim's embalmed father and grandfather lie in state — to pay his respects, flanked by top North Korean officials, the Korean Central News Agency reported. Lukashenko, 71, who has ruled Belarus since 1994 and has swung firmly behind Moscow since the start of the Ukraine war in 2022, also laid a bouquet on behalf of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Belarus and North Korea are part of a push driven by Chinese President Xi Jinping and Putin to create what they call a "multipolar world" to challenge Western hegemony. They have both provided Moscow assistance in its Ukraine war, with Minsk serving as a launchpad for the invasion and Moscow stationing tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus. South Korean and Western intelligence agencies have estimated that the North has sent thousands of soldiers to Russia, primarily to the Kursk region, along with artillery shells, missiles and rocket systems. Russia and North Korea signed a strategic partnership agreement in 2024 that obliges either side to provide "military and other assistance" should the other be attacked. Analysts say North Korea is receiving financial aid, military technology, food and energy supplies from Russia, helping Pyongyang reduce its reliance on its long-time backer China. US President Donald Trump has sought to build ties with Belarus in his second term, easing sanctions and welcoming it to his "Board of Peace." Trump met Kim three times in his first term.—DNA

China warns US
against building
ammunition
facility in
Philippines

BEIJING: China warned the United States on Thursday against bringing "conflict and the chaos of war" to the Asia-Pacific, after Washington and its allies said they would weigh building a weapons base in the Philippines. A US-led intergovernmental defense group agreed last week to assess funding for a new ammunition assembly and production line in the Philippines, according to a joint statement. The decision was made by the 16 members of the Partnership for Indo-Pacific Industrial Resilience (PIPIR), which also includes Britain, Australia, Japan, South Korea and the Philippines. China's foreign ministry warned on Thursday that a potential ammunition facility would destabilize the region and "backfire." "The US and its allies should earnestly respect the common aspirations of regional countries... and refrain from introducing bloc confrontation, conflict and the chaos of war into the Asia-Pacific," ministry spokesman Lin Jian told a news conference. "If the relevant country is willing to be a powder keg and ammunition depot, it will only backfire on itself," he said, when asked about the potential new facility. Beijing and Manila have clashed frequently in recent years over disputed territories in the South China Sea. China claims nearly the entirety of the crucial waterway, despite an international ruling that its assertion has no legal basis. Lin added on Thursday that Beijing would "firmly safeguard its territorial sovereignty and security interests.—APP

G7 meeting to
focus on global
governance reform

DUBAI: The upcoming G7 foreign ministers' meeting, scheduled for March 26-27, will feature structured sessions with a strong emphasis on international security, reconstruction efforts and reform of global governance systems, according to a French diplomat. The meeting will open with what officials have described as a foundational discussion on the "reform of world governance," setting the tone for the broader agenda. The ministerial gathering will be organized into six working sessions with the first three including not only G7 members but also invited partners — Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Brazil, India, and Ukraine — before moving to G7-only discussions for the final three sessions. "The G7 ministerial meeting will consist of six sessions over two days," the French diplomat confirmed, noting the structure is designed to balance inclusive dialogue with internal coordination among G7 members. The first session will focus on reforming global governance systems, including the efficiency of peacekeeping missions and efforts to "rationalize humanitarian aid logistics to reduce costs and improve efficiency." The second session will address reconstruction challenges across multiple regions, with a major focus on the restoration of the Chernobyl confinement arch. The diplomat said: "As we reach the 40th anniversary of the Chernobyl explosion, we will work on our capacity of repairing this arch." The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development will play a significant role, with the presentation of a comprehensive cost assessment for the first time, with estimates reaching "hundreds of millions at least," he added. The same session will also examine efforts to combat captagon drug trafficking in Syria and the broader Middle East, as well as initiatives to promote regional economic integration. The diplomat stressed "a tremendous need for reconstruction in the region." On March 27, with the arrival of US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, discussions will continue with a session dedicated to horizontal threats and sovereignty. This includes the launch of a G7 task force aimed at building a coordinated network of harbors to counter narco-trafficking. Additional initiatives include the upcoming Caribbean regional security conference in Martinique in July, which will focus on narco-trafficking, as well as the fifth "No Money for Terror" conference scheduled for May 19. The agenda will also include discussions on critical mineral security, involving U.S. and Canadian initiatives. The final three sessions, exclusively for G7 members, will address some of the most sensitive geopolitical issues. Session four will focus on Ukraine, covering energy, economic, and military support, as well as sustained pressure on Russia. It is expected the Ukrainian foreign minister will take part, and the discussion will also revisit the Chernobyl arch project and broader energy resilience support. Session five will address Iran, including nuclear and ballistic programs, maritime security and freedom of navigation. The final session will cover global peace and security challenges across multiple regions, including the Indo-Pacific, Sudan, Haiti, Gaza, Venezuela and Cuba. The French diplomat emphasized the importance of flexibility in diplomatic engagement, saying: "We favor... as much as we can, free exchanges and informal exchanges, which is in the spirit of the G7." Journalists will not have access to working sessions but will be able to follow proceedings from a dedicated press center. The French presidency is expected to hold two press conferences, scheduled for Thursday at 6:45 p.m. and Friday at 4 p.m. Both will be live-streamed on the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs' social media channels. Among the expected outcomes are the creation of a coordination committee for peacekeeping missions and the launch of a G7 task force targeting narco-trafficking through maritime port networks. Regional follow-up conferences are also planned, including security meetings in the Caribbean and on captagon trafficking in the Middle East. The fifth "No Money for Terror" conference will take place on May 19, focusing on disrupting financial flows to terrorist organizations. Further political coordination is expected through informal meetings in September during the UN General Assembly and in November in Marseille, as well as ahead of the G7 leaders' summit scheduled in Evian from June 15 to 17, 2026. The French diplomat framed the agenda as one aimed at delivering "concrete results" across security, reconstruction and governance reform, while reinforcing the G7's tradition of both formal coordination and informal diplomacy.—DNA

SECP licenses first provincial
govt-owned life insurer

The Punjab Government, through this company, intends to efficiently manage its social health insurance programs. As per the business proposal, PLIC will work towards Insured-Pakistan, particularly the Insured Punjab objective, thus increasing the insurance penetration in Pakistan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan has granted a license to M/s Punjab Life Insurance Company Limited (PLIC), marking the establishment of Pakistan's first provincial government-owned life insurance company. The Punjab Government, through this company, intends to efficiently manage its social health insurance programs. As per the business proposal, PLIC will work towards Insured-Pa-

kistan, particularly the Insured Punjab objective, thus increasing the insurance penetration in Pakistan. The Company will also provide innovative financial protection and savings solutions to the underserved segments, including the salaried class, small business owners, farmers, and daily wage workers. It will help expand coverage to low-income and vulnerable groups through sustainable insurance products. In addition, the PLIC plans to develop pension-related solutions and annuity products over time. It will also introduce digital insurance products and work closely with the public

sector institutions in Punjab to expand outreach and improve service delivery. SECP has actively facilitated this initiative as part of its broader efforts to develop Pakistan's insurance sector. The company will operate under SECP's regulatory framework, ensuring compliance with financial soundness, corporate governance, and policyholder protection requirements. With this addition, the total number of life insurers in Pakistan has increased to 13. This reflects steady growth in the sector and supports the expansion of long-term, protection-oriented insurance products across the country.

Aid groups
plead for
more cash
to help the
displaced

WASHINGTON: International humanitarian aid groups pleaded for cash on Wednesday as the Middle East war creates new challenges for already depleted resources. The UN refugee agency UNHCR estimates that 3.2 million people in Iran and 1 million people in Lebanon have been displaced since the conflict began on Feb. 28. In Lebanon alone it needs an additional \$61 million to support 600,000 people over the next three months. The agency, which axed 30 percent of its staff last year because of funding cuts, issued an urgent appeal for donations. "The drop in global humanitarian funding is having a major impact on humanitarian actors at the very moment as needs are rising sharply," it said.

"These reductions mean we are operating with far fewer people and resources at a time when displacement is growing. "The UN World Food Program, whose funding was cut by a third last year, warned that nearly 45 million more people could face acute hunger if the war did not end by the middle of the year and oil prices stayed above \$100 a barrel. "If this conflict continues, it will send shockwaves across the globe, and families who already cannot afford their next meal will be hit the hardest," the program's chief operating officer Carl Skau said. "Without an adequately funded humanitarian response, it could spell catastrophe for millions already on the edge." Aid workers have criticized the cost of the war, after the US spent \$11.3 billion in the first week alone.—APP

Two dead,
3 wounded
as missile
intercepted in
Abu Dhabi

ABU DHABI: Abu Dhabi authorities reported two dead after debris from a missile fell in Sweihan street on Thursday. "The incident has resulted in the deaths of two individuals of Pakistani and Indian nationality, and in injuries ranging from serious to moderate sustained by three individuals of Emirati, Jordanian and Indian nationality, three injuries, and damage to a number of cars," the Abu Dhabi Media Office said in a post on X. The defense ministry successfully intercepted a ballistic missile by air defence systems in Abu Dhabi.—APP

GCC members
want to
be involved in
all Iran war
talks

DUBAI: The Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) on Thursday accused Iran of driving regional escalation and called for an immediate halt to attacks targeting energy infrastructure across the Gulf, while urging that Gulf states be included in any diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis. In a series of statements, Jaseem Mohamed Al-Budaiwi said Iran was responsible for the latest escalation and warned that its actions posed a direct threat to regional stability. He said Iranian attacks had targeted oil refineries in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE and Kuwait, describing the strikes as "systematic" and aimed at critical energy facilities. "We emphasize the necessity of involving the GCC countries in any talks or agreements to resolve this crisis, in a way that contributes to strengthening their security and stability," Al-Budaiwi said in a televised speech, adding that while Gulf states have the right to self-defence, they favour diplomacy. "The international community must send a unified message to Iran to stop its attacks," he said, urging coordinated global pressure to prevent further escalation. The Secretary-General also rejected any post-conflict arrangements that would seek to redraw the map of the region, warning against attempts to alter geopolitical boundaries once the crisis subsides. Al-Budaiwi further accused Iran of demanding payments from vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz, a critical global shipping lane through which a significant share of the world's oil supplies passes.—APP

Briefs

UK authorises military to board Russian shadow fleet tankers

DNA

LONDON: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on Wednesday he has given the military permission to board and detain Russian ships his government alleges are part of a network of vessels that enables Moscow to export oil despite Western sanctions. The decision comes as other European nations have stepped up efforts to disrupt Russia's so-called shadow fleet of tankers used by Moscow to fund its four-year war against Ukraine. Starmer said he approved more aggressive action against the vessels because Russian President Vladimir Putin was likely "rubbing his hands" at the sharp rise in oil prices driven by the US-Israel war against Iran. "That's why we're going after his shadow fleet even harder, not just keeping Britain safe but starving Putin's war machine of the dirty profits that fund his barbaric campaign in Ukraine," Starmer said in a statement. Downing Street said British military and law enforcement officials have been preparing to board Russian vessels that do not surrender, are armed, or use high-tech pervasive surveillance to evade capture. Once the ships are boarded, Downing Street said criminal proceedings may be brought against the owners, operators and crew, for breaches of sanctions legislation. Russia's reliance on the shadow fleet has allowed it to keep exporting oil without complying with Western restrictions imposed after its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

273 million children out of school: UNESCO

DNA

PARIS: The number of children and young people out of school worldwide has climbed for the seventh consecutive year, reaching 273 million, according to a new report from the UN education agency, UNESCO. The 2026 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report finds that one in six school-age children are excluded from education, while only two in three complete secondary school. Progress has slowed across most regions since 2015, with conflict and population growth among the main drivers. "Progress in keeping children in school has slowed across almost every region," the report notes, with sub-Saharan Africa particularly affected. In conflict zones, the situation is even more acute, with millions more children out of school than official figures capture.

ASEAN CONNECTION



ISLAMABAD: H.E Kamal Ahmed, High Commissioner of Brunei hosted an Eid Milan get-together at his residence. HEADS of Missions of ASEAN countries i.e Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and the Philippines attended. Dean of the African Group Mohammad Karmoune Ambassador of Morocco and High Commissioner of Sri Lanka Fred Senevirathne also attended the event. – DNA

FCCP rules Muslim men may marry Ahl-e-kitab women

The ruling came in a case involving Maria Bibi, a resident of Lahore, whose conversion to Islam and subsequent marriage to a man named Shehryar was declared valid

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Constitutional Court has ruled that Muslim men are religiously permitted to marry women from ahl-e-kitab (people of the book), while underage marriages, though punishable under law, do not automatically become void. According to the detailed judgment issued on March 26, the court clarified that the Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 does not explicitly declare underage marriages invalid but only prescribes criminal penalties. therefore, a marriage

involving minors cannot be considered void solely on the basis of age. The ruling came in a case involving Maria Bibi, a resident of Lahore, whose conversion to Islam and subsequent marriage to a man named Shehryar was declared valid. The court noted that Maria had embraced Islam prior to marriage and that her declaration of conversion was available on record. The court further observed that in habeas corpus petitions, detailed exami-

nation of the girl's age or verification of documents issued by religious authorities such as dar-ul-ifta cannot be undertaken, as such cases fall within a limited jurisdiction.

It was also stated in the judgment that the FCCP is the final forum for constitutional interpretation, and all courts, including the Supreme Court of Pakistan, are bound by its decisions. The court added that it is not obligated to follow supreme court rulings if they are found to be inconsistent

with the constitution or the law. According to the case background, Maria Bibi had converted to Islam and married of her own free will. Her father had initially registered a kidnapping case, which was later dismissed. Maria told the court that she had not been abducted and had entered into the marriage voluntarily. Her father subsequently filed habeas corpus petitions on the basis of her age, which were dismissed by various courts, including the federal constitutional court. – APP

Italy police warn reptiles being used by crooks

The "possession of exotic and particularly dangerous animals in criminal contexts is a phenomenon of significant social concern", it said.

DNA

MILAN: Police in Bari carrying out a raid in an apartment block found "exotic and dangerous animals" in a secret basement room which had been transformed into a clandestine reptile house. The find included two green anacondas, each about five metres (16 feet) long and weighing around 60 kg and a spectacled caiman measuring over 1.5 meters long.

"The spectacled caiman ... is a wild predator with extremely powerful jaws and potentially aggressive behavior" and posed "a real threat to public safety", according to a police statement. There was also an Asian water monitor, a lizard "of considerable size equipped with claws and a potentially dangerous bite", it said. Police also seized a yellow anaconda, a Bolivian anaconda, four Burmese pythons, approximately three meters long each, and four boa constrictors.

The reptiles were kept by "a man with multiple criminal convictions, who is currently untraceable," the statement said. The "possession of exotic and particularly dangerous animals in criminal contexts is a phenomenon of significant social concern", it said. "In several cases, these animals are used as tools of intimidation or as a display of criminal power in the area," it added.

PSX slips as doubts grow over Middle East peace

KSE-100 Index registers intraday low of 155,373.13, dropping 2,940.31 points, or 1.86%

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Stock Exchange's benchmark KSE-100 Index traded between a high of 157,591.23, down 722.21 points, or 0.47%, and a low of 155,373.13, down 2,940.31 points, or 1.86%, compared to the previous close of 158,313.44. "It's the negative sentiment that the peace proposal is rejected by Iran, signalling continued hostility," said AAH Soomro, an independent investment and economic analyst. "It's a pure sentiment-driven market thus far. Economy is edgy but nudging forward," he added. Oil prices steadied this week as investors still held out hope for a deal, with Brent just above \$100 and WTI around \$90, though the virtual closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which around 20% of global oil and gas passes, continued to cast a shadow over markets. – APP

Info minister assails PTI

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Information Minister Attaullah Tarar on Thursday assailed the PTI, stating the party's "attempts" at disrespecting the country's dignity under the guise of political disagreement were "unacceptable". The comments come a day after Kasim Khan, the son of incarcerated PTI founder Imran Khan, raised his father's case at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), saying that the former prime minister's treatment by authorities violated international human rights conventions as well as commitments made under the GSP+ framework. Addressing a press conference on Thursday, the minister held that "while it was every political party's right to engage in criticism, the country's dignity should not be put at stake". He noted that an "unfortunate development" was seen in Geneva a day earlier, referring to Kasim's speech at the UNHRC. "No political leader is bigger than Pakistan," Tarar said, assailing the PTI for not putting "national interest first". "The mockery of the country by the political opposition is unacceptable," he said.



"Every country globally considers Pakistan relevant, while on the other hand, a political party which functions as a cult [...] and engages in anti-state propaganda," Tarar said. The minister also recalled that the PTI had attempted to "sabotage" the country's affairs before.

He said it was the same party which "wrote letters to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and appealed that Pakistan should not be given a bailout package in 2022". "They thought their leader was bigger than Pakistan," he said, adding that the party leadership had also attempted to cast doubt over Pakistan's GSP+ status in 2024. Speaking about the issue of the former premier's sons' visas, the minister said, "We decided that we will welcome the sons of Imran Ahmed Niazi to Pakistan with an open heart, but make use of the National Identity Card for Overseas Pakistanis (Nicop)". "Why did we do that? Because you should come here as Pakistani citizens," he said. "If you are a Pakistani, then would it not be better for you to use your Nicop, rather than making up stories on how they might be arrested," he said. "We said we would welcome you, but we were aware of your nefarious designs," he added. Referring to Kasim's speech, the minister maintained that "it was not a one-off incident – wish he had done it without a paper in his hand, however, but that is okay, they are kids". "Someone must have written it for him," he added. Tarar, in response to a question, also said that the opposition PTI did not "exist" as a political party in the parliament.

High-level meeting stresses national consensus

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari on Thursday chaired a high-level meeting that stressed the importance of national consensus and institutional coordination in view of emerging regional challenges arising from the ongoing US-Israel war on Iran. According to a handout by the President's Secretariat, the meeting was held at the Aiwan-i-Sadr in Islamabad. It was attended by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir. According to the handout, the broader regional situation also came under discussion, including its implications for Pakistan's security, economic outlook and food security. The meeting emphasised the need for a coordinated national response, noting that policy decisions must prioritise stability while safeguarding the interests of the public. "The meeting underscored the importance of maintaining national consensus and strengthening institutional coordination in view

of emerging regional challenges. It was agreed that economic management, energy planning, food security and broader security considerations must remain closely aligned to meet this challenging situation," the handout stated. It said the meeting reviewed the evolving economic and energy situation in the backdrop of oil supply constraints and hike in petroleum prices, alongside regional security developments. The meeting also reviewed the "impact of fluctuations in global oil and gas supplies and prices on Pakistan's economy, with particular focus on managing inflationary pressures and ensuring energy security", the handout said. "The ministers for finance and petroleum briefed the meeting on ongoing measures to stabilise petroleum prices, manage the effects of rising fuel costs on other sectors of the economy and enforce fiscal discipline through austerity measures to reduce expenditure pressures," it added. The meeting also emphasised the need for public awareness to reduce fuel consumption, encourage the use of public transportation and promote shared ride systems.

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