



Islamabad POST

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AKDN's Aga Khan marks inaugural visit to Canada

Detailed News On Page-08

Govt keen to develop its infrastructure

Detailed News On Page-03



Finance minister chairs a high powered meeting

Detailed News On Page-08



Middle East crisis

Germany says Russia providing exact intel to Iran

US-Israeli strikes hit heavy water reactor in central Iran

DNA

MOSCOW: German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl stated that Russia is helping Iran identify potential strike targets. This aligns with earlier US intelligence reports (from early March) indicating Moscow has shared information on American warships, aircraft, and other military assets in the region to aid Iranian retaliatory strikes. US officials described it as the first clear sign of direct Russian involvement in the conflict, though they noted no evidence that Russia is directing specific Iranian actions. Iran's Foreign Minister has publicly confirmed ongoing military cooperation with Russia as "not new" and not secret. China has expressed support for Pakistan's efforts to act as a mediator between the US and Iran. Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif recently discussed de-escalation with a Chinese envoy, as Islamabad positions itself as a backchannel for conveying messages. Beijing described Pakistan's role as "commendable" and stated it backs "all efforts" to ease tensions, de-escalate, and restore dialogue. Analysts note China's strong economic ties to both Iran and Pakistan make this alignment strategically comfortable for Beijing. Casualties in Iran Surpass 1,900 Iran's Health Ministry and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) report that more than 1,900 people have been killed in Iran since US-Israeli strikes began on February 28, 2026, with tens of thousands injured. Independent tallies (e.g., HRANA) put the total higher when including military and unclassified deaths, while US/Israeli estimates focus more on Iranian military losses. The conflict has also caused deaths in Israel, among US forces (at least 13 confirmed), and in the broader region, with millions displaced. German FM on Potential Direct US-Iran Talks in Islamabad Germany's Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl described reports of direct US-Iran communication as "encouraging" and said he expects or has heard signs of possible direct Washington-Tehran talks, potentially hosted in Islamabad (Pakistan) in the coming period.

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Pakistan can play greater diplomatic role'

DNA

WASHINGTON: As tensions surrounding Iran once again test regional diplomacy, Pakistan is emerging in Washington's policy conversations as a potential intermediary — a shift that signals a broader reassessment of its strategic utility beyond the traditional security framework. At an hour-long virtual briefing held on Thursday evening by the Congressional Pakistan Caucus, Congressman Tom Suozzi suggested that Islamabad's geographic position, demographic weight and cross-regional ties give it space to play a more active mediatory role. "And we see from this negotiation with Iran right now, and the role that it's playing, Pakistan can play more and more of a role in international affairs as a mediator," said Suozzi, the Democratic co-chair of the caucus. He described Pakistan as "a very, very important neutral party, with friends on both sides." The remarks come amid renewed diplomatic maneuvering around Iran, where Washington has relied on regional actors to maintain communication channels. Pakistan's leadership has signaled willingness to facilitate dialogue if both sides desire it. Suozzi noted that Pakistan has the fifth-largest population in the world and could soon become the largest Muslim-majority nation, which would further enhance its global significance.

Continued on Page 06

PM Shehbaz slams attack on Kuwait

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif received a telephone call from Crown Prince of the State of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al Khaled Al Hamad Al Sabah on Friday and assured him that Pakistan would continue to play a constructive role for bringing peace and stability in the region. During their warm and cordial conversation, the prime minister reiterated Pakistan's strong condemnation of the attacks on Kuwait, in these challenging times. He also offered condolences on the loss of precious lives and prayed for recovery of the injured.

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ISLAMABAD: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi met with Ambassador of Chian to Pakistan Jiang Zaidong during his visit to the Chinese embassy, on Friday. — DNA

Good news

PM Shehbaz rejects summary to hike petrol, diesel prices, again

Prices of petrol and diesel should be Rs544 and Rs790 per litre respectively, but govt shouldering burden, says premier

FAIAZ CHAUDHRY

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has rejected a summary to hike petrol and diesel prices once again despite a surge in global oil rates. He made the announcement during an address to the nation, saying that he had received a summary to increase the price of petrol by Rs56 per litre and that of HSD by Rs203 per litre. "However, I have rejected this summary," he said. The premier began his address by speaking about the ongoing war in the Middle East, saying that the government was trying its best to cushion the effects of the skyrocketing prices of oil while also making efforts for the restoration of peace in the region through diplomacy. "Pakistan is making sincere and full-fledged mediatory efforts on the diplomatic front for an end to this war, so that the region and brotherly Muslim countries no longer face the destructive and negative consequences of this war," he said. The PM further said the purpose of these efforts was to pave the way for lasting peace through "collective wisdom and consultation". "Pakistan's diplomatic efforts are not merely an international diplomatic responsibility, but they are also purely for the will of Gold and the benefit of ummah," he said.

Zaidong, Naqvi agree on Special Protection Unit

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi met with Chinese Ambassador Jiang Zaidong. Upon arrival at the Chinese Embassy in the Diplomatic Enclave, the ambassador warmly received the Interior Minister. During the meeting, discussions were held on counter-terrorism, security cooperation, police exchange programs, and other important matters. The overall regional situation also came under discussion. It was decided to organize a business conference to address the security concerns faced by Chinese investors in Pakistan. In the first phase, meetings will be held with the Chinese business community currently present in Pakistan. In the second phase, engagements will take place with investors interested in investing in Pakistan.

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Briefs

US currency to bear Trump signatures

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: US paper currency will bear President Donald Trump's signature starting this summer, the first time a sitting president has signed American money, the Treasury Department said. The redesigned notes, planned to mark the 250th anniversary of American independence, will also, for the first time in 165 years, drop the signature of the US treasurer, who reports to the Treasury Secretary and oversees the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, the US Mint and other Treasury functions. The first \$100 bills with Trump's signature and that of US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent will be printed in June, followed by other bills in subsequent months. The new bills may take several weeks to circulate through banks.

Suozzi lauds Pakistan role to defuse tensions

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Pakistan Caucus in the US Congress, Tom Suozzi says Pakistan is bearing the burden of saving the world from terrorism alone, which should be acknowledged. Addressing a joint press conference along with Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States Rizwan Saeed Shaikh, he expressed a strong desire for robust Pakistan-US ties and called for increased American investment in Pakistan.

Holiday Notice

The offices of daily Islamabad POST shall remain closed on Saturday on account of weekly off therefore there will be no newspaper on Sunday. — Editor

China denies

Report says Chipmaker supplying Iran

Beijing remains a key partner of Tehran but does not announce military support in war triggered by US-Israeli strikes

NEWS DESK

BEIJING: China's foreign ministry accused the media of publishing "false information" on Friday following a report that said the country's top semiconductor firm has sent chipmaking tools to Iran. The report, which cited information from two unidentified senior officials in US President Donald Trump's administration, said contract chipmaker SMIC "began sending the tools to Iran roughly a year ago". A US official was quoted in the report as saying they had "no reason to believe that any of this has stopped". China is a key partner of Iran but has not announced military assistance to Tehran in the war triggered by US-Israeli strikes on February 28, repeatedly calling for a ceasefire. The chipmaker, Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation (SMIC), did not respond to an AFP request for comment on Friday.

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Talks to yield results, says Wang Yi

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Initiating peace talks in the war on Iran "is no easy task," but it would be "conducive to restoring normal navigation through the Strait of Hormuz," Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said during a call with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on Friday. The two "agreed to jointly promote a ceasefire and cessation of hostilities and the resumption of peace talks, to ensure the safety of non-military targets and waterways," according to a

Continued on Page 06

Blasts near Pak embassy in Tehran

All Pakistani diplomats safe, though shaken by blasts, says senior diplomats

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Explosions were reported near the Embassy of Pakistan and the residence of the ambassador in Tehran, as the Iranian capital endured its 28th consecutive day of aerial bombardment, diplomatic sources confirmed on Friday. All Pakistani diplomats were reported safe, though shaken by the blasts. The incident comes as Islamabad, along with Turkey and Egypt, continues shuttle diplomacy

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Targeted subsidy plans afoot

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Centre and provinces have agreed to expedite efforts to roll out a targeted subsidy framework for petroleum products using technological solutions amid a surge in global oil prices. The development came as Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb chaired a high-level consultative meeting on the petroleum products situation today at the Finance Division, said a statement issued by the finance ministry on Friday. The meeting commenced with a detailed presentation by the Petroleum Division on the current status of petroleum products' availability in the country,

Continued on Page 06

IHC to hear Imran Khan, Bushra's pleas on 31st

An accountability court in Islamabad had sentenced Imran and Bushra to 14 and seven years in prison, respectively, on Jan 17, 2025, in the £190m graft case, also known as the Al-Qadir Trust case

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Friday fixed the hearing for PTI founder Imran Khan and his spouse Bushra Bibi's petitions against their conviction in the £190 million Al-Qadir Trust corruption case on March 31. According to the cause list issued by the IHC registrar's office, a division bench — comprising IHC Chief Justice Sardar Muhammad Sarfraz Dogar and Justice Muhammad Asif — will hear the pleas seeking suspension of Imran and his spouse's sentences on March 31. An accountability court in Islamabad had sentenced Imran and Bushra to 14 and seven years in prison, respectively, on Jan 17, 2025, in the £190m graft case, also known as the Al-Qadir Trust case. At the last hearing of the case, held on March 11, the IHC imposed a fine of Rs100,000 on the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) for employing "delaying tactics" in the case. However, a later written order did not include any direction regarding the imposition of a fine.

Continued on Page 06

SC to hear PTI review petition

APP

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan will take up on March 31 a review petition filed by the founder of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) concerning his right of defense in a defamation case instituted by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. A fresh three-member bench has been constituted to hear the case, headed by Justice Hashim Khan Kakar and comprising Justice Mian Gul Hassan Aurangzeb and Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim. According to the Registrar's Office, Justice Mian Gul Hassan Aurangzeb has been included in the bench in place of Justice Ayesha Malik.

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KPRA initiates enforcement activities

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA) has initiated enforcement activities in the hospitality sector in Peshawar Region.

In pursuance of the directions of the Additional Collector, a team headed by the Deputy Collector (Non-Corporate) conducted visits to the business premises of two restaurants on Friday, where discrepancies in their tax declarations, including instances of misreporting, were identified and formally pointed out.

The KPRA team issued on spot show cause notices as well as sealing intimation notices in accordance with the relevant provisions of the KP Sales Tax on Services Act, 2022.

The management of the concerned businesses was clearly informed that KPRA shall not permit any entity to continue operations where amounts collected from customers in the name of tax are not duly reported and deposited into the government treasury.

A comprehensive enforcement plan has been devised under which record confiscation, strict monitoring, penalty imposition, and sealing actions shall be undertaken in accordance with the law.—APP

Flying coach, pickup, motorcycle collided in Gambat

KOHAT: A tragic road accident occurred near Bili Tang Chowk in Gambat Tehsil on Friday when a flying coach, pickup and motorcycle collided, leaving one person dead and seven others injured, including women and children. According to Rescue 1122 Kohat, medical teams rushed to the scene immediately after receiving the alert and provided first aid to the injured before shifting them to Alkhidmat Hospital. Two of the injured, reported to be in critical condition, were later referred to District Headquarters Hospital Kohat's KDA facility for specialized treatment. The deceased was identified as Mohsin, and injured included two female and Rizwan, Abdul Rehman Shah, Gul Afzal, Rafi, and Waheed Gul. The body of the deceased was shifted to RHC Bili Tang Hospital for necessary medico-legal formalities. Rescue 1122 spokesperson Jawad Afridi confirmed the swift response and said the teams ensured timely medical assistance to minimize casualties.—APP

Ban on drone use extended in Punjab

LAHORE: Section 144 has been extended across Punjab, under which there is complete ban on outdoor flying of drones in the province. The Punjab Home Department has maintained a complete ban on outdoor drone flying across the province, and the ban on drone flying has been extended for 30 days. The Punjab government imposed a ban on the use of drones in view of security concerns, with limited use of small drones allowed during events inside halls. The responsibility for the safe use of drones at internal events will fall on the organisers, with law enforcement and intelligence agencies exempted from the ban.—APP

Gilani calls Pakistan's mediation diplomatic success

To another query regarding the purchase of a Rs 90 million vehicle for the Senate chairman, he clarified that the car was acquired during the 2024-25 fiscal year in accordance with the law, along with other vehicles for Senate offices, and termed the criticism only propaganda

DNA

LAHORE: Senate Chairman Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani has urged all political parties to unite for sovereignty, integrity, democracy, and economic stability of the country, stressing the need to avoid point scoring amid the current situation. He was speaking to the media after inaugurating the 11th three-day Pakistan Footwear Material and Machinery Show 2026 at the Expo Centre on Friday. He said Pakistan was playing the role of a mediator between Iran and the United States, and termed it a diplomatic success for the country. He noted that global attention was currently focused on Pakistan and expressed hope that the country would succeed in fostering reconciliation between the two nations. Responding to a question, Gilani said that the issue of releasing the PTI founder was a matter related to the judiciary. He stated that despite being a nuclear power, Pakistan demonstrated responsibility during the Pakistan-India conflict. To another query regarding the purchase of a Rs 90 million vehicle for the Senate chairman, he clarified that the car was acquired during the 2024-25 fiscal year in accordance with the law, along with other vehicles for Senate offices, and termed the criticism only propaganda. Earlier, addressing the ceremony, Yusuf Raza Gilani highlighted the growing importance and global potential of Pakistan's footwear industry. He congratulated the Pakistan Footwear Manufacturers Association (PFMA) and the organising team for bringing together international and local stakeholders on one platform and appreciated the leadership of Rashid Islam and Ahmed Fawad Farooq in promoting industry's growth and partnerships. He said that the footwear sector plays

a vital role in Pakistan's manufacturing economy, supporting thousands of workers and businesses. He noted that Pakistan exports footwear to over 60 countries, generating around \$176 million annually, reflecting increasing global confidence in Pakistani products. He further stated that Pakistan ranked the sixth largest footwear producing country in the world, which provided a strong base to expand its presence in international markets. He added that such exhibitions create opportunities for technology transfer, improved production practices, and long-term business collaborations. Reaffirming the Senate's commitment, Gilani said that the upper house recognises the importance of a strong manufacturing sector and remains dedicated to promoting industrial growth, export diversification, investment facilitation, and employment generation. He stressed the need for coordination among Parliament, the executive, and industry to unlock the country's economic potential. The Senate chairman also stressed the importance of investing in youth, noting that over 60 per cent of Pakistan's population comprises young people. He urged industries to work closely with training institutions and universities to develop a skilled workforce. Concluding his address, he extended best wishes to the organisers and participants for a successful exhibition. Pakistan Footwear Manufacturers Association Chairman Rashid Islam, speaking at the event, said Pakistan was the sixth largest shoe-producing country in the world and holds vast potential for further growth. He added that the 11th edition of the exhibition reflected the confidence of local and international companies in Pakistan's footwear industry. He said the exhibition



provided a strong platform for global companies, trade organisations, and the local industry to build partnerships, explore business opportunities, and promote modern technology and innovation. He also urged the government to formally recognise the footwear industry as a key industrial sector and reduce customs duties on raw materials, particularly to facilitate exporters in competing in international markets. A representative of the Guangdong Footwear Manufacturers and Shoes Materials Association said Chinese participation in the Pakistan Footwear Material

and Machinery Show 2026 had surged to nearly 100 exhibitors, reflecting growing confidence in Pakistan's market. He noted that the number of Chinese companies increased from around 10 in 2023 to over 60 in 2025, showing rapid expansion and strong business interest. He appreciated the Government of Pakistan for supporting China-Pakistan economic cooperation, stating that initiatives under CPEC and a favorable business environment have encouraged foreign investors. He also praised the Pakistan Footwear Manufacturers Association (PFMA) for organis-

ing the exhibition and providing an effective platform for international collaboration. Highlighting industry trends, he said the global footwear sector is moving towards green and intelligent development, adding that Pakistan is emerging as a key market in South Asia. He expressed hope that the exhibition would promote deeper cooperation between China and Pakistan in areas such as technology, raw materials, and market expansion. Convener PFMA Munsur Ahsan shared that the three-day exhibition, organized by the association, will continue from March 27 to March 29,

2026, with participation from over 100 international companies along with local manufacturers, material suppliers, machinery experts, and key stakeholders. At the end of the ceremony, shields were presented to distinguished guests. Prominent attendees included Rashid Islam, Munsur Ahsan, Chief Organizer Ahmed Fawad Farooq, Chinese representative President Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry Faheem-ur-Rehman Sehgal, as well as representatives of the footwear industry, international exhibitors, trade bodies, and members of the business community.

Kundi briefed on PID Peshawar's functions

He further said that PID offices in Peshawar and Dera Ismail Khan should be equipped with modern facilities, and the establishment of an effective media cell there should also be considered

PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, was given a detailed departmental briefing by the Press Information Department (PID) Peshawar at the Governor House here Friday. The briefing was attended by DG PID Peshawar Tahira Syeda and Deputy Director Romana Asad Khan. During the briefing, the Governor was informed about departmental responsibilities and duties related

to challenges in digital media, strategic communication, media relations, public narrative, outreach and stakeholder engagement, digital and social media management, crisis communication, and internal coordination. The briefing also highlighted the promotion of government initiatives, strengthening of the state narrative, and effective narrative building through news as well as research

articles. On this occasion, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi said that PID carries an important responsibility in promoting the state narrative, therefore it is essential to align it with modern requirements. He further said that PID offices in Peshawar and Dera Ismail Khan should be equipped with modern facilities, and the establishment of an effective media cell there should also be considered.—APP

Weekly inflation rises by 0.97pc

ISLAMABAD: The weekly inflation, measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), increased by 0.97 percent for the combined consumption group during the week ended on March 26, 2026, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday. According to the PBS data, the SPI for the week under review was recorded at 345.45 points, up from 342.13 points last week. On a year-on-year basis, the SPI registered an increase of 8.24 percent. The weekly SPI with base year 2015-16 = 100 covers 17 urban centres and 51 essential items for all expenditure groups. The SPI for the lowest consumption group (up to Rs 17,732) increased by 0.97 percent to 329.39 points from 326.22 points in the previous week. The SPI for consumption groups of Rs 17,733-22,888; Rs 22,889-29,517; Rs 29,518-44,175; and above Rs 44,175 increased by 1.09 percent, 0.86 percent, 0.79 percent and 0.94 percent, respectively. During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 23 (45.10 percent) items increased, 06 (11.76 percent) items decreased and 22 (43.14 percent) items remained stable. Major commodities registering a week-on-week increase included Onions (18.10 percent), Tomatoes (11.38 percent), LPG (10.05 percent), Chicken (8.70 percent), Potatoes (8.11 percent), Electricity Charges for Q1 (6.11 percent), Eggs (3.54 percent), Garlic (3.23 percent), Mutton (2.55 percent), Beef (1.52 percent), Georgette (0.38 percent) and Firewood (0.34 percent). On the other hand, commodities witnessing a decrease included Bananas (4.50 percent), Wheat Flour (1.00 percent), Sugar (0.29 percent), Gur (0.20 percent) and Pulse Moong and Rice IRRI-6/9 (0.17 percent) each. On a year-on-year basis, major increases were observed in the prices of LPG (34.73 percent), Diesel (29.94 percent), Gas Charges for Q1 (29.85 percent), Wheat Flour (25.76 percent), Petrol (25.75 percent), Onions (25.07 percent), Chillies Powder (15.20 percent), Beef (13.08 percent), Mutton (12.41 percent), Powdered Milk (10.10 percent), Rice Basmati Broken (6.51 percent) and Gur (6.31 percent). Commodities witnessing a year-on-year decline included Potatoes (45.71 percent), Pulse Gram (17.54 percent), Eggs (13.63 percent), Garlic (12.92 percent), Salt Powder (12.55 percent), Chicken (11.94 percent), Pulse Masoor (11.62 percent) and Sugar (11.34 percent). —DNA

Advanced cancer patients to get free treatment: Salman

LAHORE: Punjab Health Minister Khawaja Salman Rafique has announced that level three and level four cancer patients will receive free treatment at the 915-bed Nawaz Sharif Institute of Cancer Treatment and Research (NSICT&R) in Lahore, currently under construction at a cost of approximately Rs 75 billion. The minister made this announcement during a visit to the site on Friday, accompanied by Chairman Board and former Chief Secretary Punjab Captain (ret'd) Zahid Saeed and Secretary Health Azmat Mahmood. Officials briefed them on the master

plan of the institute. Khawaja Salman Rafique stated that the Punjab government is building the NSICT&R as the first fully government-run cancer hospital in Pakistan. He added that Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif is closely monitoring the project, with construction ongoing around the clock. "No patient will be denied treatment. Insha Allah, even level three and level four cancer patients will receive care free of charge," the minister said. The institute will feature pediatric oncology, operation theatres, ten radiation therapy bunkers, an ICU, a

30-bed emergency ward, a waiting hall with 24 beds, a bone marrow center, cancer care clinic, doctors' residences, and a mosque in its first phase. The second phase will include a 300-bed building and a parking plaza. Facilities such as radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and endoscopy will be available from the start. Patients from other provinces, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh, will also be treated free of cost. The minister emphasized that the institute is a national project, not just for Punjab, ensuring access to cancer treatment for all socio-economic groups.—APP

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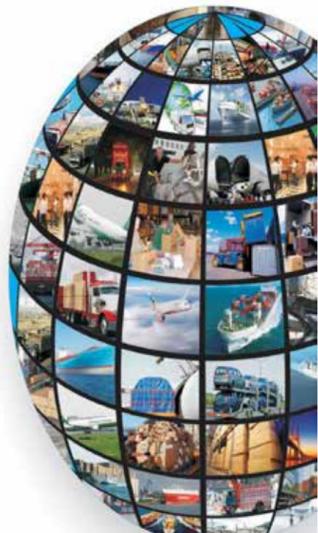






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Wheat scandal exposes massive corruption in Sindh

Irregularities, theft and mismanagement raise serious concerns over food security and governance

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: A major corruption scandal involving large-scale theft, mismanagement, and illegal sale of wheat has surfaced in Sindh, raising serious concerns about transparency and governance within the provincial Food Department and TCP facilities. According to reports, thousands of wheat bags worth over Rs5 billion have been embezzled through an organized network operating within government storage

centers. Sources revealed that officials, including TCP in-charge, supervisors, and Sindh Food Department inspectors, allegedly collaborated in a systematic scheme where trucks loaded with sand were brought into warehouses at night. Wheat bags were tampered with by mixing sand to maintain weight, while the original grain was siphoned off and sold in the open market. This practice reportedly created a significant discrepancy between official records and actual stock. Further

investigations uncovered that in Bhoolari, Jamshoro, over 64,000 wheat bags valued at more than Rs644.8 million went missing from a government warehouse. The irregularity was detected during an inspection of 52 out of 66 warehouses across the province. Officials fear that similar practices may be ongoing in other storage facilities. Authorities have issued show-cause notices to 45 officers, suspended 22, and dismissed 9 from service. However, observers argue that these actions

may not be sufficient, as key figures behind the alleged corruption remain beyond accountability. Some officials are also reported to have secured transfers to evade investigation. Despite repeated complaints by journalists, there has been no significant response from agencies such as the FIA and Anti-Corruption Establishment, intensifying calls for an independent judicial inquiry. Attempts to contact TCP officials for comment went unanswered. Meanwhile, wheat harvesting has begun across

Sindh, but farmers are facing difficulties due to a shortage of gunny bags and delayed procurement policies. Allegations persist that distribution of bags is being manipulated to favor select individuals. The Sindh government has announced the start of its wheat procurement campaign from April 1st, while claims of Rs84 billion subsidy remain unclear in terms of distribution and beneficiaries. Experts warn that failure to address these issues promptly could lead to further financial losses and a potential flour crisis in the province.

National Days and Armed Forces Days**MARCH**

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

Turkish Airlines.....8494949

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

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

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

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

**Islamabad Metropolitan**

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

Water Tank

- Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Governance reform key to eco transformation: Ahsan

He emphasized that governance was the most visible face of the state, experienced directly at provincial, district, tehsil and union council levels rather than through constitutional structures

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Friday said strengthening governance is vital to restoring public trust, improving service delivery and enabling Pakistan to transition from economic stagnation to sustainable growth and transformation. Speaking at a launch of the SDPI's Endline Evaluation Report of the Sub-National Governance Programme, he said citizens' growing trust deficit stems from weak governance, as people assess the state through everyday services such as functioning schools, healthcare facilities, infrastructure and responsive local administration. He emphasized that governance was the most visible face of the state, experienced directly at provincial, district, tehsil and union council levels rather than through constitutional structures. He noted that persistent gaps in service delivery had contributed to a growing trust deficit, as citizens increasingly judge the state by its ability to meet everyday needs. Ahsan said governance is not an abstract concept for ordinary citizens but a practical reality reflected in functioning schools, accessible healthcare, reliable infrastructure and responsive local administration.

He said citizens experience the state through service delivery at provincial, district, tehsil and union council levels, underscoring that sub-national governance is where the state ultimately succeeds or fails. The minister observed that Pakistan currently stands at a critical juncture after navigating economic turbulence and achieving relative macroeconomic stability. However, he cautioned that stability alone was insufficient, describing it as merely a "runway" that must be utilized for economic take-off through improved governance, investment and export growth under the "Uraan Pakistan" initiative. He stressed that governance was the defining factor distinguishing stagnation from transformation, adding that the gap between policy ambition and citizen impact, as well as between announcements and delivery, could only be bridged up through effective governance systems. Without modern institutions, efficient procedures and strong local frameworks, he said, the country cannot realize its vision of becoming a \$1 trillion economy by 2035. Ahsan Iqbal said the traditional model of governance is no longer viable, warning that silo-based approaches, weak coordination, excessive centralization

and inconsistent reforms would continue to impede progress. He reiterated that Pakistan's primary challenge was lying in converting its potential into performance through institutional strength, accountability and continuity. Discussing structural reforms, he termed the 18th Amendment a landmark achievement that enhanced provincial autonomy but acknowledged that its promise remains incomplete due to inadequate devolution to local governments. As a result, he said, key sectors such as education, health and municipal services have become overly centralized at the provincial level, limiting their responsiveness to local needs. He emphasized that effective governance required decision-making authority to be closer to citizens, noting that issues in districts and remote areas cannot be efficiently addressed through centralized systems. He called for empowered local governments with clear administrative authority, adequate fiscal resources and accountability mechanisms to ensure citizen-centric service delivery. Outlining reform priorities, the minister highlighted the need for evidence-based and outcome-oriented planning, performance-driven budgeting, transparent pub-

lic financial management and enhanced resource mobilization. He cautioned against reducing development spending, stating that such cuts could lead to higher long-term costs and undermine growth prospects. He also stressed the importance of sustainability in development initiatives, pointing out that many externally funded projects fail to deliver lasting benefits due to lack of integration into government systems. He said the Planning Commission has introduced measures to ensure all projects incorporate sustainability mechanisms. Ahsan Iqbal underscored that governance reform was a shared responsibility, requiring collaboration among government institutions, think tanks, development partners, civil society and academia. He appreciated the contributions of SDPI, UNDP, FCDO and provincial governments in advancing evidence-based policymaking. The minister called for a shift from rhetoric to implementation, urging stakeholders to institutionalize reforms and prioritize performance over presentation. He reaffirmed that Pakistan's progress depends on strong institutions, consistent reforms and a governance system that delivers efficiently and equitably to its citizens.

Chinese embassy continues public welfare initiative

GWADAR: During this Ramadan, the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan, assisted by China Overseas Ports Holding Company (Pvt.) Ltd. (COPHC), provided charity iftar meals on successive days for a total of more than 2,400 local residents in Gwadar. It marks the continuation of this public welfare initiative by the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan over the years. "Chinese enterprises operating at Gwadar Port will remain committed to fulfilling their social responsibilities and make greater contributions to improving the well-being of the local people," COPHC reaffirmed.—APP

President extends felicitation to Balen Shah

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari on Friday extended warm felicitation to Balen Shah on assuming office as Prime Minister of Nepal after a historic victory. In a statement, the president said that it was encouraging to see youth-led leadership shaping the region. "Pakistan values its enduring ties with Nepal and looks forward to deeper cooperation in all sectors," he added.—DNA

IESCO notifies power suspension programme

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) on Friday issued a power suspension programme for Saturday, in various areas of its region due to necessary maintenance and routine development work. According to an IESCO spokesperson, electricity supply will remain suspended in Rawalpindi City Circle from 7:00 am to 12:00 pm in Benazir Bhutto Hospital, Tehmasamabad, Dk. Humam Dad, RIC and Rahimabad feeder areas. Meanwhile, under the GSO Circle, power supply will remain disrupted from 8:00 am to 06:00 pm in 132-KV Chakwal- Bhagwal- Talagang and 132KV Kahuta City- Palandri transmission lines.—APP



RAWALPINDI: An elderly vendor strings fresh flower garlands at his small roadside setup in Banni Chowk, hoping to attract customers with the vibrant display.

Marri slams IK's son over irresponsible remarks on GSP plus

ISLAMABAD: Central Information Secretary of Pakistan Peoples Party, Shazia Marri Friday strongly criticized the son of former prime minister Imran Khan for giving an "irresponsible and regrettable" remarks regarding Pakistan's European Union GSP Plus status. In a statement, Marri said that treating a sensitive issue like GSP Plus in a casual or non-serious manner was against Pakistan's national interest. She said that such statements could adversely affect the country's exports and undermine its global reputation at a time when economic stability remains a top priority. "National inter-

est and the livelihoods of millions cannot be sacrificed for political point-scoring," she emphasized, saying that GSP Plus is closely tied to Pakistan's trade advantages and employment across multiple sectors. Recalling past political messaging, Marri said that during difficult times, President Asif Ali Zardari had promoted unity through the slogan "Pakistan Khappay," urging national cohesion. "Making such statements today for personal political gains is highly condemnable," she added. She also criticized individuals issuing statements from abroad, calling it unfortunate that those not

residing in Pakistan were making remarks that could harm the country's credibility. "We and our children live here; the country's reputation means everything to us," she said. Marri said that family members of the founding chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf should face Pakistan's legal system and courts instead of engaging in external confrontations. Accusing PTI of prioritizing an individual over national interest, she said the party was harming both Pakistan's political environment and its international standing. She said that the nation would not forgive those who conspire with external elements against Pakistan's interests.—APP

Attempts to sabotage country's GSP Plus status unacceptable: Tahir

ISLAMABAD: President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Sardar Tahir Mehmood, has strongly condemned attempts by certain elements to sabotage Pakistan's economy by conspiring to have the country's GSP Plus status withdrawn, terming such moves as an assault on the national economic interests. Talking to different groups of visiting businessmen here on Friday, he said that the GSP Plus status granted by the European Union is vital for Pakistan's exports and economic stability. He regretted that some elements are trying to harm the country's economy on one pretext or another, adding that such conspiracies against national interests are highly unfortunate. Sardar Tahir Mehmood categorically stated that such elements will not be allowed to succeed in their designs. He stressed that protecting the state and safeguarding national economic interests is the foremost responsibility of every patriotic citizen. He said that Pakistan's economic progress requires unity, commitment and collective efforts from all segments of society. Every citizen must play his due role in putting the economy on the path of development and prosperity, he added. The ICCI President further remarked that no matter how many conspiracies are hatched, Pakistan will continue to remain strong and resilient. He emphasized that no political party or leader is bigger than the country and that national interest must always take precedence over personal or political agendas. He also reaffirmed that the business community stands firmly with the government in efforts aimed at strengthening the economy. The private sector, he said, is fully determined to work hand in hand with the government to promote trade, investment and economic stability for the prosperity of the country.—APP

COMSATS ranks first in Mathematics in subject rankings

ISLAMABAD: COMSATS University Islamabad (CUI) has been ranked first in Pakistan in Mathematics (global rank 111) and secured placements across multiple disciplines in the QS World University Rankings by Subject 2026. The University is ranked globally in several subject areas, including Engineering & Technology (221), Computer Science (180), Economics (201-250), Physics (251-300), Environmental Sciences (301-350), and Accounting and Finance (301-375). In Economics, COMSATS shares the 201-250 band with Lahore University of Management Sciences, while in Environmental Sciences it appears in the same range as National University of Sciences and Technology and Quaid-i-Azam University. Rector CUI, Prof. Dr. Raheel Qamar said that "Achieving top national position in Mathematics and maintaining visibility across multiple disciplines reflects a deliberate shift towards high-impact research and measurable academic performance. Our focus is not only on rankings, but on building depth in core scientific areas where Pakistan can compete globally." The QS Subject rankings assess universities worldwide based on academic reputation, employer reputation, research citations, and international research networks. COMSATS University Islamabad is a leading public sector university of the Ministry of Science and Technology with seven campuses across Pakistan, known for its focus on science, technology, and innovation-driven education.—DNA

Pakistan's export to China rise 28% in Jan-Feb

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's exports to China recorded a robust 27.68 percent year-on-year increase in the first two months of 2026, underscoring deepening trade ties and strong demand from South China's industrial and food-processing hubs, China Economic Net reported quoting General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China (GACC). According GACC data, Pakistan's exports reached \$566.75 million during January-February 2026, compared with \$443.88 million in the same period of 2025. The growth was largely fueled by rising shipments to five key southern provinces: Guangdong, Guangxi, Fujian, Hunan, and Hainan, which collectively serve as major gateways and consumption centers for Pakistani goods. Muhammad Imran, Trade and Investment Counsellor at Pakistan's Consulate in Guangzhou, told China Economic Net that in South China, food and agriculture imports surged by 28.9 percent to \$8.9 million, while mineral and mining imports climbed 23 percent to \$96.3 million. In contrast, textile and clothing imports declined by 25.9 percent to \$35.8 million, reflecting shifting global demand and structural challenges. Imran highlighted that South China's expanding food processing industry has significantly boosted demand for Pakistani agricultural products. Provinces such as Guangdong, Guangxi, and Fujian have seen continued growth in fruit processing and beverage manufacturing, driving imports of rice, sesame seeds, and spices. Improved logistics infrastructure, particularly at ports in Shenzhen, Guangzhou, and Xiamen, has further strengthened Pakistan's position, with around 65 percent of its agricultural exports to China entering through these southern gateways. "The mineral sector also played a critical role in export growth. Guangdong's expanding copper processing capacity driven by demand from electric vehicles and power infrastructure has increased imports of Pakistani copper and related materials. Similarly, Guangxi's strategic location and industrial base have made it a key destination for mineral imports, while strong demand from green energy and electronics industries in Guangdong and Fujian continues to support sustained growth," he added. Analysts note that with continued infrastructure improvements and industrial demand in South China, Pakistan's export momentum is likely to remain strong in the coming months.—DNA

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) conducted the digital balloting for the second batch of its flagship Graduate Engineer Trainee (GET) Placement Program, selecting 1,700 fresh engineering graduates for six-month industry training across the country. The ceremony was held at the PEC Regional Office Lahore, where Chairman PEC Engr. Waseem Nazir inaugurated the process, while senior officials from PEC Headquarters and PEC Governing Body members joined online. A total of 5,300 candidates applied online for the program, out of which 3,982 were shortlisted after screening, and 1,700 were finally selected through a transparent digital balloting mechanism. PEC officials highlighted that the program is being

implemented through dedicated online portals for both employers and engineers, with partnerships established with leading public and private sector organizations nationwide to provide structured training opportunities. Out of the total placements, 300 seats were exclusively allocated for engineering graduates from Balochistan, all of which have been filled by candidates from the province. The remaining 1,400 candidates were selected from Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, and Gilgit-Baltistan. Chairman Engr. Waseem Nazir stated that the dedicated allocation for Balochistan graduates has been introduced to expand opportunities for the province's youth, address longstanding socio-economic disparities, and promote their effective mainstreaming into the national engineering workforce. Addressing the ceremony, Chairman

PEC Engr. Waseem Nazir described the GET program as a transformative initiative aimed at equipping young engineers with practical, industry-oriented skills. He said PEC remains committed to ensuring merit, transparency, and equal opportunity across all regions, adding that the inclusion of a full quota for Balochistan reflects the Council's resolve to create a more balanced and inclusive professional landscape. He further emphasized that investing in fresh graduates will strengthen Pakistan's engineering capacity and support sustainable national development. The GET program is a fully PEC-funded, six-month "house job" style initiative, including five months of field exposure and one month of skill development, with a monthly stipend of PKR 50,000 and a jointly issued certificate with QR code verification upon successful completion.

Briefs

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's contributions remembered

ISLAMABAD: The 128th death anniversary of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was observed on Friday, with people paying tribute across various media platforms, remembering him as a visionary reformist and educationist who championed modern education and social progress. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) stands as a towering figure of vision, courage, and reform in the 19th century. At a time of uncertainty and decline, he dreamed of a progressive future for his community, driven by knowledge, reason, and modern education. His mission was clear to awaken minds and lead society towards intellectual and social advancement. With unwavering determination, he dedicated his life to the educational uplift of the people. From humble beginnings as a clerk in the East India Company to serving as a sub-judge, Sir Syed never lost sight of his true calling: empowering minds through learning. He became a pioneer in laying the intellectual foundation of Muslim modernization in South Asia. His greatest legacy, the Aligarh Movement, was not just an initiative it was a revolution in thought. By establishing institutions like the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College and founding the Scientific Society, he inspired generations to embrace modern education. His efforts turned Aligarh into a beacon of enlightenment and reform. Sir Syed's vision extended far beyond one institution; he sought to spread education to every corner of the land. Through the Mohammedan Educational Conference, he mobilized communities and ignited a passion for learning. Even after his passing on March 27, 1898, his legacy continues to shine as a symbol of progress, unity and intellectual awakening. Sir Syed is hailed as the father of the Two Nation Theory and one of the founding fathers of Pakistan, along with Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Allama Iqbal. On his 128th death anniversary, people across the country paid rich tributes and shared his teachings, honoring his enduring legacy and the path he laid for future generations.—APP

Tourists rush grips KP in 3 days of Eid

ISLAMABAD: Director General of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority, Muhammad Usman Mehsud, on Friday highlighted a remarkable increase in tourist activity during Eid-ul-Fitr, as more than 262,000 visitors explored scenic destinations across the province, with Swat Valley remaining the leading attraction and drawing 186,000 tourists. Talking to a local news channel, DG said Khyber Pakhtunkhwa witnessed a massive tourism boom during the Eid holidays, with scenic destinations across the province drawing unprecedented crowds despite travel challenges. Swat Valley remained the top destination, followed by Galyat and Chitral, as families and tourists flocked to enjoy the festive break in cooler, picturesque areas. They credited the surge to proactive government measures, including the establishment of helplines, improved visitor facilitation and efforts to keep hotel accommodation and car rental rates affordable, making travel more accessible for a wider number of people during the holidays, he added. He further mentioned that interestingly, the record influx came even as the country faced a petrol crisis, highlighting the strong public enthusiasm for travel, as thousands continued to pour into tourist hotspots, turning the three days of Eid into one of the busiest periods for tourism in the province.

Responding to a query, he said that under the directives of the Chief Minister, the government has placed special focus on improving tourism-related road infrastructure to ensure safer and smoother access to key destinations across the province.—APP



ISLAMABAD: People visiting historical place Shah Allah Ditta caves, in the Federal Capital.

Haroon calls for unified efforts to fast-track SMEs financing

“SMEDA must play a proactive role in engaging stakeholders and facilitating linkages that enable entrepreneurs to access financing and scale their businesses,” he said

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) for Industries and Production, Haroon Akhtar Khan on Friday called for a coordinated national effort to significantly enhance access to finance for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), in line with the SME Development vision of the prime minister. Chairing a high-level meeting on SME financing, he emphasized the need for stronger collaboration among federal and provincial governments, financial institutions and development stakeholders, said a news release. The SAPM directed the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) to lead efforts in building partnerships that accelerate credit access for SMEs across Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir. “SMEDA must play a pro-

active role in engaging stakeholders and facilitating linkages that enable entrepreneurs to access financing and scale their businesses,” he said. “It should form a working group to synchronize efforts through training and connectivity,” he added. Lauding the Punjab government's initiatives under the Asaan Karobar Finance Scheme, he asked other provinces to replicate the financing model and increase the number of beneficiaries in the country. Haroon said other banks also were doing a commendable job by providing finance to SMEs through various mechanisms. CEO SMEDA Nadia Jahangir Seth highlighted her organization's role in promoting access to finance which is an important pillar of its Business Plan and expressed resolve to expedite efforts to improve the SME finance ecosystem. “We will intensify collaboration with provincial governments, the Pakistan Banks Association and other partners

to facilitate SME access to credit for business growth,” she said, adding that special focus would be placed on designing inclusive programmes and training for entrepreneurs in under-served areas. Earlier, the Punjab Small Industries Corporation (PSIC) gave a presentation on CM Punjab's Asaan Karobar Finance Scheme under which a record Rs100 billion have been disbursed among entrepreneurs in less than one year. Officials said the scheme, which has been launched through the Bank of Punjab, had proved a success. They said more than 110,000 people were beneficiaries and almost 50pc of borrowers were from low-income groups. A representative of the State Bank of Pakistan provided an overview of the current financing landscape, noting progress in some regions while highlighting gaps in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. He underscored the need for target-

ed interventions to expand financial inclusion in these areas. He said Sindh Bank had a portfolio of Rs10 billion in SME financing but unfortunately there was no significant scheme in KP and Balochistan. He said the Bank of Philippines and Bangladesh have commended Pakistan's SME financing facilities and expressed desire to study the models and replicate in their countries. Bank of Punjab senior officer Asif Riaz suggested that SMEDA should join the SME Forum to participate in collaborative efforts. Representatives of provincial governments, Sindh Bank, Bank of Khyber, National Bank of Pakistan, HBL and other stakeholders were also present. The meeting concluded with a shared resolve to fast-track joint initiatives, strengthen institutional coordination and create a more inclusive and accessible financing ecosystem for SMEs across Pakistan.

HealthAI sees China playing larger role

DNA

ISLAMABAD: China could play a larger role in the global governance of healthcare artificial intelligence (AI) as HealthAI works toward opening an office in the country, its chief executive Ricardo Baptista Leite said. Speaking with China Economic Net (CEN) in an exclusive interview, Ricardo said the Geneva-based organisation was working with local authorities to establish a presence in China and would like to see a Chinese entity join its international network on health AI governance. “We would love to welcome a Chinese entity to the Global Regulatory Network,” Ricardo said. He also pointed to HealthAI's recent cooperation with Tsinghua University, which contributed a China chapter to the

organisation's latest global landscape report on AI governance in health Ricardo said China's development and deployment of health technology could serve as an “inspiring example” for low- and middle-income countries. Countries with fewer legacy medical systems have more flexibility to rethink healthcare delivery, prevention and health promotion using AI, he added. HealthAI's network currently includes ten members, among them Britain, Singapore, India, Zambia and Brazil. The group plans to expand annually and would welcome countries such as Pakistan to join, though Islamabad has not formally expressed interest, Ricardo said. Pakistan's medical AI sector remains at an early stage, with scattered pilots and limited institutional adoption, according to Dr Muhammad Shahbaz, president of the China-Pakistan Medical Association, in an early March interview with CEN, reflecting many of the capacity and infrastructure constraints highlighted by HealthAI. Ricardo said broader adoption of medical AI in developing countries faces persistent hurdles, including fragmented regulation, limited technical capacity, underuse of health data, funding uncertainties, and weak post-market surveillance for adaptive AI systems. However, Ricardo identified trust as the central barrier to adoption. “Without trust, people will not adopt the technology,” he said, calling for stronger regulatory frameworks and closer collaboration between governments and developers.

A cultural perspective on 75 Years of China-Pak friendship

DNA

ISLAMABAD: As China and Pakistan celebrate 75 years of diplomatic relations, the narrative of this friendship is often told through infrastructure projects and economic corridors, says a report carried by China Economic Net on Friday. Yet, for Dr. Abdul Ghafoor Lone, a professional archaeologist and Director of the Islamabad Museum at the Department of Archaeology and Museums (DOAM), the true foundation of this bond lies buried beneath millennia of history. It is a relationship etched in stone, painted on pottery and woven into the very fabric of their shared heritage - an eternal friendship that continues to be rediscovered, one artifact at a time. “The Islamabad Museum, as well as all museums in Pakistan exhibiting Gandhara art, are the key witnesses

to this undeniable claim that we have eternal friendship, with deep relations and contacts stretching back thousands of years,” Dr. Abdul Ghafoor said in an exclusive interview. “The Islamabad Museum houses a unique collection that physically embodies this ancient connection. Among the rare artifacts are Gandharan stone relief panels and toilet trays adorned with a distinctly Chinese motif: the dragon. This artistic fusion is complemented by a two-way trade. “Besides this, the Islamabad Museum has a good collection of porcelain pottery from China, probably dating back to the 14th century,” he added. Cultural exchanges were further cemented by the spread of Buddhism. When Buddhism expanded into China in the 4th century, it left a lasting imprint on the landscape of northern Pakistan, with numerous rock carvings depicting Chinese graphics and engravings

found especially in Gilgit and Swat. While the artifacts tell a story of continuity, many of them have remained hidden from the public eye for decades. That changed in 2023 when a major Gandhara exhibition traveled from Pakistan to Beijing's Palace Museum. The exhibition, featuring 173 artifacts from seven Pakistani museums, marked a watershed moment in cultural diplomacy. Dr. Abdul Ghafoor, who oversaw the selection of artifacts for the landmark event, recalled the significance of the moment. Among the pieces chosen was a stunning 2nd-3rd century Buddha relic that had been locked away in storage for 17 years. He described Gandhara art as a “cultural and spiritual bridge” between the two nations - a sentiment that resonated deeply with the thousands of visitors who flocked to see the relics in Beijing. Such opportunities have since multiplied.

SSP orders crackdown on POs

ISLAMABAD: Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations Qazi Ali Raza directed police officers to intensify crackdown against proclaimed offenders, car and motorcycle thieves, and organised criminal gangs across the federal capital. An official told APP on Friday that the SSP chaired a meeting to review crime control and security arrangements, which was attended by zonal SPs, SDPOs and SHOs. SSP Qazi reviewed the performance of all officers in detail and reprimanded those showing unsatisfactory performance, while appreciating effective policing measures. Qazi Ali Raza issued clear directions to adopt effective strategies for crime prevention and ensure strict and indiscriminate action against proclaimed offenders, active criminal gangs, drug peddlers and illegal weapon holders. SSP Qazi also ordered strict action against land grabbers and those involved in display of weapons, directing officers to ensure visible policing across the city. He said all patrolling units had been directed to remain active in the field, while SHOs were instructed to further strengthen night patrolling and ensure presence of police vehicles on roads. SSP Qazi emphasized the importance of community policing and directed officers to ensure prompt response to public complaints and facilitate citizens.—APP

Meteorologist predicts rains to continue

ISLAMABAD: Chief Meteorologist of the Pakistan Meteorological Department, Dr. Zaheer Ahmed Baber, on Friday predicted that the rains are expected to continue until March 30, bringing intermittent showers across various regions. While speaking to a private news channel, Dr. Zaheer Ahmed Baber urged citizens to exercise extra caution, warning that April is expected to be warmer and drier, while light to heavy rain is predicted until March 30. He added that April is expected to be significantly warmer and drier, marking a clear transition from the ongoing rainy period and signaling the start of a hotter spell across the country. He further warned that the monsoon season is likely to begin by mid-June and urged citizens to adopt precautionary measures to stay safe amid changing weather conditions. The Chief meteorologist also noted that the hot and dry weather is expected to continue through April and May, lasting until mid-June when the monsoon season is likely to begin, urging citizens to remain cautious during this period.—APP

CDA strengthens urban forestry

Our QR code system and numbering of every tree ensures accountability and helps us act promptly against defaulters,” DG Tarar said, reaffirming CDA's commitment to creating a greener, healthier, and sustainable capital city.

ISLAMABAD: In a significant move toward smarter urban management, the Capital Development Authority is leveraging modern technology in its plantation campaign, ensuring that QR-coded trees are continuously tracked and protected, contributing both to ecological sustainability and the city's beautification. Capital Development Authority (CDA) DG Environment Awais Tarar, while speaking to a private news channel, highlighted the authority's innovative approach to urban forestry, emphasizing the use of QR code technology for smart tree monitoring. He stated that each tree planted across the capital city was digitally tagged and regularly tracked to ensure its survival and growth. “This system allows us to maintain detailed records of every tree and monitor their health, making urban forestry management more efficient and transparent,” he added. DG Tarar further shared that the Chairman of CDA has issued strict directives to strengthen the tree protection framework. These include not only the adoption of technology-driven monitoring but also strict enforcement against any illegal cutting or felling of trees. The chairman has emphasized that preserving urban greenery is a top priority and all stakeholders, including field staff and citizens, must cooperate to maintain the city's green cover. He also mentioned that CDA has launched awareness campaigns in coordination with local authorities to educate the public about the importance of tree protection. “The chairman has instructed that any violations, including unauthorized cutting or damage to trees, will be met with immediate legal action. Our QR code system and numbering of every tree ensures accountability and helps us act promptly against defaulters,” DG Tarar said, reaffirming CDA's commitment to creating a greener, healthier, and sustainable capital city.—DNA

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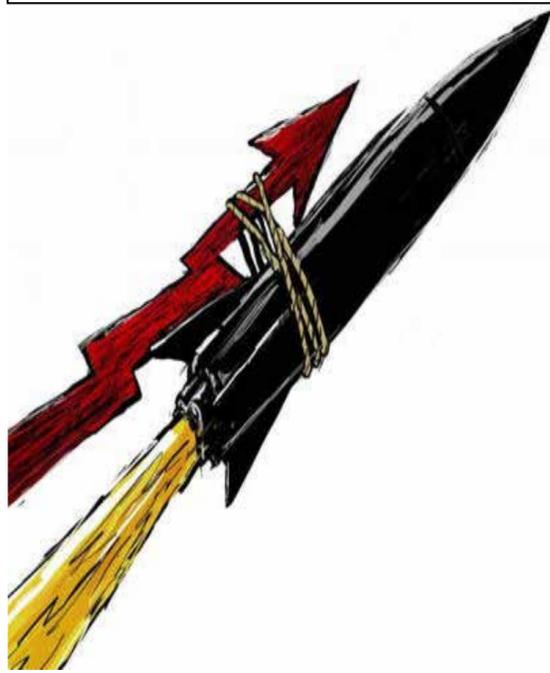
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Nations waking up to the importance of localization

KHALED ABOU ZAHR

FIVE years ago, a major maritime route was blocked and trade was obstructed. The news cycle is too swift for most of us to remember it. Yet, from March 23 to March 29, 2021, the Ever Given cargo ship obstructed the Suez Canal. While this only lasted a little over six days, it created a blockage in global supply chains that had tremendous economic consequences. Lloyd's List estimated at the time that the value of goods delayed each hour was \$400 million, meaning that the obstruction disrupted \$9.6 billion of goods daily. Ferdinand de Lesseps' achievement of developing the Suez Canal was rendered useless, with ships forced to take the much longer and more costly route around the Cape of Good Hope, adding about 10 to 14 days to their journey and costing millions of dollars in extra fuel. Just a year earlier, another major event caused a huge disruption to global supply chains: the COVID-19 pandemic. In hindsight, this was the first crisis to show how vulnerable every country has become in our globalized world. Nations' dependency on resources, manufactured goods and essential products such as pharmaceuticals and even food were highlighted. COVID-19 was the first crisis to show how vulnerable every country has become in our globalized world. This is why today, as the Iranian regime blocks the Strait of Hormuz – and most probably because of these other recent disruptions – the world is reacting in a much more constructive way. The Iranian regime has been threatening to close the Strait of Hormuz for decades. Despite the pain this has caused, the world has not collapsed like many experts predicted when analyzing the threat. The interconnections of globalization have forced some trade-offs for Tehran. There are also other energy sources, as well as the fact that Saudi Arabia has already developed an oil pipeline that bypasses the strait. This is a prime example of using technology and infrastructure investments to manage the risks to global supply chains. The Ever Given unwillingly blocked one of the world's major maritime routes for all merchandise. Today, the mullahs are willingly blocking a maritime route for energy. They are two sides of the same coin. Beyond crises, there are also some structural imbalances. Rare earth elements are a prime example. Today, the majority of rare-earths are mined in China and more than 80 percent are processed there, with smaller contributions from countries like the US, Australia and Myanmar. This concentration, similar to the materials and equipment used in the renewable energy industry, highlights a clear vulnerability in supply. Moreover, just like oil, these elements play a central role in the global economy and, more precisely, the supply chain for advanced technologies.



It is all about resilience and sustainability and the main goal is to avoid any disruption to several industries. From electric vehicle motors and wind turbines to smartphones and defense systems, there is a significant need for these elements. The disruption of this entire sector can be foreseen in potential export restrictions or new environmental regulations – not necessarily for geopolitical reasons, but simply that mining bottlenecks might occur.

So, the private sector in the US is looking for solutions to bridge this gap. Examples include increasing the recycling of rare earth elements from electronics and developing alternative materials. These could be short- to medium-term solutions. But for the long-term, we are noticing research into advanced extraction methods and the deployment of digital supply chain platforms that track and optimize sourcing across multiple regions. It is all about resilience and sustainability and the main goal is to avoid any disruption to several industries.

Even if it was not for what many describe as the end of globalization, nations have realized that localization is increasingly important. The sequencing of major events and global competition is encouraging countries across the world to rely ever more on sources closer to home and to develop new substitutes. If we also look at it from a "green" perspective, sourcing raw materials locally makes sense. Looking at the pyramid of needs, it is very clear that, before rare-earths or even energy, food is a priority. All over the world, and particularly in the Gulf, we have been witnessing large investments to guarantee food security and reduce dependencies. One of these innovations is controlled-environment agriculture, such as vertical farming, which has been gaining importance in the UAE and Saudi Arabia. While still in its early stages, the goal is to create year-round production while using minimal water. Hydroponics and aquaponics systems are also expanding, producing vegetables and fish with high efficiency and low land use. Then there are enhancements to traditional farming, such as precision agriculture – employing artificial intelligence, drones and smart sensors to optimize crop yields in arid environments. Lastly, investments in desert farming techniques, like salt-tolerant crops and greenhouse cultivation, are also growing.

It is also important to mention Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies, which are transforming supply chains by enabling localization. The use of smart technology, AI, robotics, cloud computing and additive manufacturing, to name a few, is helping create smart and efficient operations. These tools enable real-time monitoring, automation, data-driven decision-making and flexible production, transforming industries and supply chains into more resilient and adaptive systems. If we go back to the mother or even grandmother of all disruptions in modern history, we realize how fast the COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted global supply chains through factory shutdowns, congestion at ports, export bans and transport bottlenecks, imposing massive economic costs. The supply chain shocks alone reduced worldwide trade and industrial production, while driving inflation higher. This, in turn, caused a drop in global gross domestic product. These disruptions amplified the trillions in lost output and heightened inequality. One of the key sectors to be impacted was pharmaceuticals. Due to the industry's heavy reliance on China and India, its vulnerabilities were highlighted, especially with regard to active ingredients. The shortages of essential drugs and medications at a time of increased demand highlighted the need to transform the entire supply chain.

Power, Pause, and Pivot: A War Rewritten

Qamar Bashir



Pakistan's role has not been limited to facilitating dialogue. In a move that underscores both the fragility and importance of ongoing talks, Islamabad reportedly urged Washington to restrain Israel from targeting Iran's foreign minister. The reasoning was stark and pragmatic: eliminate the diplomatic channel, and negotiations collapse instantly. This intervention reflects Pakistan's growing stature as a stabilizing force—one capable of understanding both the military calculus and the diplomatic necessity of preserving interlocutors during wartime

THE clock has been reset, but the tension has not. In a dramatic turn of events, Donald Trump has extended the deadline for potential U.S. strikes on Iran's energy infrastructure to April 6, 2026, granting a critical 10-day window for diplomacy to prevail over destruction. What was initially framed as a five-day tactical pause has now evolved into a high-stakes diplomatic interlude—one that may determine whether the region descends into a broader war or steps back from the brink. At the center of this unfolding drama stands an unlikely but increasingly pivotal actor: Pakistan. Quietly but assertively, Pakistan has emerged as a key mediator between Washington and Tehran, joined by regional players such as Egypt and Turkey. Their mission is as delicate as it is urgent—bring two deeply mistrustful adversaries to the negotiating table before military escalation becomes irreversible.

The extension itself did not come in a vacuum. It followed signals—subtle yet significant—that Iran may be willing to explore an "off-ramp" from the conflict. According to U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff, a 15-point framework has been conveyed to Tehran through backchannels, outlining a possible pathway toward de-escalation. While Iranian officials have publicly maintained a posture of defiance, behind the scenes there are indications of cautious engagement. The hesitation, however, is rooted in history. Tehran's leadership remains deeply skeptical, fearing that diplomacy could once again be used as a prelude to military action—a pattern they believe has repeated itself in past engagements. Pakistan's role has not been limited to facilitating dialogue. In a move that underscores both the fragility and importance of ongoing talks, Islamabad reportedly urged Washington to restrain Israel from targeting Iran's foreign minister. The reasoning was stark and pragmatic: eliminate the diplomatic channel, and negotiations collapse instantly. This intervention reflects Pakistan's growing stature as a stabilizing force—one capable of understanding both the military calculus and the diplomatic necessity of preserving interlocutors during wartime. Simultaneously, a curious and controversial narrative has emerged from Washington. President Trump hinted at receiving a "precious gift" from Iran—later described as oil shipments allegedly en route to the United States under a Pakistani flag. While this claim remains unverified, its strategic implication is profound. If true, it could signal a covert willingness by Iran to soften its stance and engage economically even as public rhetoric remains uncompromising. Whether symbolic or substantive, such gestures suggest that beneath the surface hostility lies a complex web of negotiation, signaling, and strategic ambiguity. Markets, as always, have reacted swiftly. The announcement of the deadline extension came minutes after a sharp downturn in global equities, highlighting the deep interconnection between geopolitics and financial stability. Oil prices, already volatile, hovered above \$100 per barrel amid fears surrounding the Strait of Hor-

muz—through which nearly one-fifth of the world's oil supply flows. Any disruption here reverberates instantly across global markets. Ironically, while supply remains abundant due to sanctions relief on Russian and Iranian exports, much of it is effectively "trapped" by insecurity in transit routes. This paradox—plenty of oil but constrained delivery—has created a market environment driven more by fear than fundamentals. Yet beyond diplomacy and economics lies a more profound transformation—one that this conflict has brought into sharp relief. The war between the United States and Iran is not merely a geopolitical contest; it is a technological and doctrinal inflection point. The traditional architecture of military power—aircraft carriers, fighter jets, tanks, and heavy artillery—appears increasingly inadequate against the realities of 21st-century warfare.

Iran, despite lacking the conventional superiority of its adversaries, has demonstrated a capacity to challenge them through asymmetric means. Its arsenal of ballistic missiles, drones, and unmanned systems has extended its reach far beyond its borders, reportedly capable of striking targets thousands of kilometers away, including strategic installations such as Diego Garcia. This shift from platform-based dominance to precision-strike capability represents a fundamental reordering of military hierarchies. Even more striking is the hypothetical scenario often discussed in strategic circles: what if the United States were to seize control of Iran's key energy nodes—particularly Kharg Island and the Strait of Hormuz itself? On paper, such a move would appear decisive, effectively placing Iran's lifeline under external control. In reality, however, the outcome could prove far less consequential than conventional doctrine suggests. Iran's doctrine of asymmetric warfare is designed precisely to neutralize such scenarios. Even if American forces were to physically occupy Kharg Island or secure maritime dominance over Hormuz, those positions would remain under constant threat. Iran possesses thousands of short-range missiles, loitering munitions, and cost-effective drones—many reportedly concealed in hardened underground facilities, dispersed across vast terrain, and engineered for survivability against even the most advanced bunker-busting munitions. These systems do not require air superiority or naval parity; they rely on saturation, precision, and persistence. In such an environment, any occupying force would face a relentless cycle of attrition. Fixed installations on Kharg Island could be repeatedly targeted, supply lines disrupted, and naval assets harassed by swarms of unmanned systems. Commercial shipping—particularly vulnerable oil tankers—would remain exposed, making sustained control of the waterway economically and militarily burdensome. The very objective of securing energy flow could be undermined by the continuous threat environment created by these decentralized strike capabilities. This explains a paradox observed throughout the conflict: despite repeated claims by the United States and

Israel of degrading Iran's missile and drone infrastructure, Iran continues to respond with sustained intensity and operational reach. The resilience lies not in singular high-value assets, but in the distributed nature of its arsenal—difficult to locate, harder to eliminate, and capable of rapid regeneration. The implications are far-reaching. In this emerging paradigm, power is no longer defined solely by the size of fleets or the sophistication of aircraft, but by the accuracy, scalability, and survivability of missile systems and autonomous platforms. Even heavily defended naval assets become vulnerable when confronted with swarms of low-cost, high-precision projectiles. This reality has reportedly forced U.S. naval deployments to maintain greater distances from contested zones, altering long-standing doctrines of forward presence and deterrence.

The conflict also echoes lessons observed in regional dynamics involving Pakistan, where advancements in indigenous missile technology have reshaped deterrence equations. Precision, range, and reliability have become the new currency of power, enabling smaller or economically constrained nations to level the strategic playing field against traditionally dominant forces. What emerges, therefore, is not simply a contest between nations, but between eras. The industrial-age war machine, forged in the crucible of the two World Wars, is confronting a digital-age battlefield defined by speed, precision, and decentralization. In this new landscape, asymmetry is not a weakness—it is an advantage.

Amid these shifting sands, Pakistan's diplomatic initiative acquires added significance. It is not merely mediating a ceasefire; it is attempting to bridge two fundamentally different worldviews—one rooted in conventional dominance, the other in asymmetric resilience. The success or failure of this effort will have implications far beyond the immediate conflict, shaping perceptions of power, negotiation, and legitimacy in an increasingly multipolar world. As April 6 approaches, the world watches with cautious anticipation. The extended deadline is both an opportunity and a warning. If diplomacy succeeds, it could mark the beginning of a new framework for conflict resolution—one that acknowledges the limits of force in an age of distributed power. If it fails, the consequences could be swift and severe, potentially triggering a chain reaction that engulfs the broader region. For now, the pause holds. Negotiators continue their delicate work behind closed doors. Markets oscillate between hope and fear. And the battlefield, though momentarily silent, remains poised on a knife's edge. In this narrow window of time, the future of not just a conflict, but of warfare itself, hangs in the balance.

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

Who's Hosting the Peace Table?

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



Yet, as in the familial settings of old, where one relative's prominence could stir unease in another, Pakistan's emerging role has not been received with equanimity by all. In India, a country of considerable size and ambition, this development has provoked a visible discomfort. Sections of its political class and media have reacted with unusual candour, directing criticism...

IN the civilizational tapestry of South Asia, customs and traditions have long held a place of quiet authority, shaping not merely social conduct but also the emotional grammar of life itself. No joy was deemed complete without the rituals that sanctified it, and no sorrow was fully expressed without the conventions that gave it form. Among these traditions, marriage stood as the most elaborate of all social occasions—an arena not only of celebration but also of reconciliation. Old grievances were set aside, estranged relatives were drawn back into the fold, and hearts, however reluctantly, were persuaded to soften in the face of collective happiness. Yet beneath the surface of such harmony, there often lingered subtle tensions, the unspoken rivalries of kinship that found expression in curious ways. It was not uncommon, for instance, that even the arrangement of a wedding feast could become a matter of delicate contention. If the paternal uncle assumed the role of hosting, the maternal uncle might feel slighted; if the maternal aunt took charge, the paternal aunt might quietly resent her exclusion. Such grievances, though seemingly trivial, were deeply rooted in a sense of belonging and recognition. The lament, "Had I any standing in this house, I would have been asked," was not merely a complaint but a reflection of an emotional economy in which honour and participation were intimately intertwined. With the passage of time, many of these customs have faded into the background, softened by the forces of modernity and the changing rhythms of life. Urbanization, education, and a more pragmatic outlook have gradually eroded the rigidities of tradition. Yet, in certain quarters of the region, echoes of these old patterns persist, sometimes in altered forms but often with the same underlying impulses. It is in this cultural context that one may find an illuminating metaphor for the conduct of nations. For just as families once vied for recognition in moments of celebration, so too do states seek acknowledgment and influence in the theatre of international affairs. The recent tensions in the Gulf have provided a telling ex-

ample of this dynamic, revealing not only the anxieties of a troubled region but also the contrasting approaches of its neighbouring powers. At a time when the world watches the Gulf with deep concern, fearing the escalation of conflict and its far-reaching consequences, Pakistan has once again articulated its long-standing commitment to peace and reconciliation. Rather than aligning itself with any camp of confrontation, it has urged all parties to seek dialogue and restraint. This posture is not born of expediency alone but is rooted in a consistent diplomatic philosophy that views stability as a shared responsibility and peace as a collective good. What is particularly noteworthy is the response that this approach has elicited. The parties involved in the tension, recognising Pakistan's balanced stance and its history of engagement, have shown a willingness to reach out and explore avenues of mediation. With the notable exception of Israel, Pakistan enjoys relations of varying degrees of warmth and trust with the principal actors in the region. This trust, painstakingly built over decades, has now translated into a moment of diplomatic relevance, placing Pakistan at the centre of international attention. This is not without precedent. Pakistan's role in facilitating the process that eventually led to the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan stands as a recent example of its capacity to act as a bridge in complex geopolitical situations. Such contributions, though often understated, have reinforced its image as a state that prefers conciliation over confrontation, and dialogue over discord. Yet, as in the familial settings of old, where one relative's prominence could stir unease in another, Pakistan's emerging role has not been received with equanimity by all. In India, a country of considerable size and ambition, this development has provoked a visible discomfort. Sections of its political class and media have reacted with unusual candour, directing criticism towards their own leadership. According to them, the Indian Prime Minister Modi did nothing but forcefully hug world leaders.

Such reactions, though couched in the language of domestic critique, betray a deeper sentiment—a sense of having been left out of an important moment. The analogy to the wedding feast is difficult to ignore. There is, in the tone of some of these commentaries, an echo of that familiar grievance; that one was neither consulted nor accorded the recognition one believed oneself to deserve. Yet, in the realm of international relations, as in life, participation cannot be demanded merely by virtue of size or aspiration; it must be earned through consistent conduct and credible engagement. India's recent posture, marked at times by conflicting signals and selective alignments, has complicated its ability to present itself as a neutral or trusted interlocutor. Expressions of concern that appear disproportionate or insincere risk being perceived as performative rather than principled. In contrast, Pakistan's measured and interest-free approach has found resonance precisely because it is seen as aligned with the broader desire for de-escalation.

It would, however, be a mistake to interpret this moment in purely competitive terms. The pursuit of peace is not a zero-sum game, nor is diplomatic relevance a finite resource to be hoarded. The challenges facing the Gulf—and indeed the wider world—are too grave to be reduced to questions of prestige or rivalry. What is required is a collective commitment to dialogue, a willingness to rise above narrow considerations, and an understanding that stability in one region contributes to stability in all. In the final analysis, the lesson is both simple and profound. Whether in the intimate sphere of family or the vast arena of global politics, recognition flows not from assertion alone but from conduct that inspires trust. Just as the most respected member of a household is often the one who unites rather than divides, so too is the most valued state the one that brings others together in moments of uncertainty. In choosing the path of reconciliation, Pakistan has reaffirmed a principle that is as old as the traditions from which it draws its metaphor; that true honour lies not in being seen, but in being relied upon.

Briefs

Germany says Russia providing...

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He stressed that Washington should clarify its intentions while hoping diplomacy gets a chance. This fits with Pakistan's emerging role as a potential venue for negotiations amid back-channel activity. German officials, including Defence Minister Boris Pistorius and Chancellor Friedrich Merz, have criticized the lack of a clear US strategy or exit plan, called the war an "economic catastrophe" for global markets (especially energy and shipping), and ruled out direct German military involvement. The conflict continues to disrupt oil flows, raise global prices, and raise fears of wider escalation. These reports come from a fast-moving situation with competing claims from all sides. Casualty figures vary by source, and diplomatic signals remain fluid.

Pakistan can play greater...

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Demographics, he implied, are translating into diplomatic weight. Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States, Rizwan Sheikh, framed the country's potential role as rooted in its long-standing multi-directional diplomacy. "Yes, Pakistan actually has been uniquely placed for this role, because we have good terms with the United States. We have good neighbourly relations with Iran, and fraternal ties with the Gulf countries," the ambassador said. He added that Pakistan stood ready to assist if both sides sought its help. "We would only be too honored if we are trusted by both sides to be a facilitator. Ultimately, the decision will have to be taken by the parties, but as a trusted partner, Pakistan will try to facilitate."

IHC to hear Imran, Bushra's...

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The court had directed the anti-graft body to come prepared on the next date of hearing, with the defence team pushing for a swift resolution. The defence team had urged the court to dispose of the petition early, requesting a decision before the Eid vacations. The appeals and suspension pleas have faced numerous procedural hurdles. The IHC registrar's office had previously raised objections to the petitions, citing issues such as unsigned pages and the absence of a certificate confirming the case wasn't being heard elsewhere. On February 26, the high court had cleared these objections and scheduled the March 11 hearing after defence lawyers pressed for an early date, highlighting Imran's eye condition.

SC to hear PTI review petition

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Previously, a three-member bench led by Justice Ayesha Malik had been hearing the matter. It is pertinent to mention that the PTI founder had approached the apex court after a trial court struck down his right of defense in the case. Earlier, a three-member bench headed by Justice Mansoor Ali Shah had dismissed his plea. Subsequently, the PTI founder filed a review petition against that decision, which is now scheduled for hearing on March 31.

Zaidong, Naqvi...

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Interior Minister Moishan Naqvi stated that a 'Special Protection Unit' is being established to ensure the security of foreign nationals. The unit will specifically ensure the safety of Chinese citizens in Islamabad. Personnel of the Special Protection Unit will also be trained in the Chinese language as part of their training.

G7 demands end to attacks on civilians in Iran war

The G7 members are the United States, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan, along with the European Union. US-Israeli airstrikes on Friday damaged two major steel plants in Iran, Iranian media reports said

DNA

VAUX-DE-CERNAY, France: The foreign ministers of the G7 group of nations called on Friday for an immediate stop to attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure in the Iran war. In a joint statement agreed on the second day of a G7 meeting in France — this year's host country — the ministers said they had underscored the importance of minimizing the impact of the conflict on regional partners, civilian populations and critical infrastructure. "We focused on the value of diverse partnerships, coordination, and supporting initiatives, including to mitigate global economic shocks such as disruptions to economic, energy, fertilizer and commercial supply chains, which have direct impacts on our citizens," they said in the statement seen by Reuters. The ministers also reiterated the need to restore safe and toll-free freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz. The G7 members are the United States, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan, along with the European Union. US-Israeli airstrikes on Friday damaged two major steel plants in Iran, Iranian media reports said. "Minutes ago, the American-Zionist enemy targeted the Khuzestan Steel (in southwest

Iran) and Mobarakeh Steel factories in Isfahan (central Iran) in two separate attacks," the Fars news agency said, with state broadcaster IRIB also reporting the strikes. "Rescue forces have immediately arrived at the scene of the incident," Fars wrote. The news agency added that initial information suggested an "electrical substation and an alloy steel production line" were targeted at Mobarakeh Steel complex, while a warehouse was hit at the Khuzestan Steel Factory. Steel is a strategically important material essential for industrial and military production, including of missiles, drones and ships. Earlier, Israel's military said its attacks on Friday targeted sites "in the heart of Tehran" where ballistic missiles and other weapons are produced. It said it also hit missile launchers and storage sites in western Iran. Three migrants dead as boat capsizes off Greek island of Gavdos : Three migrants drowned when their wooden boat overturned off Greece's southernmost island of Gavdos on Tuesday and the coast guard is still searching for people reported missing. The people on board moved rapidly to one side of the boat as a vessel from the European Union border agency Frontex approached the boat, the coast guard said, causing it to capsize. "Their movement to

the left side resulted in water inflow and its overturning. Immediately the Frontex vessel's crew launched life cushions ... and a lifeboat," the coast guard said in a statement. Fifty-five people have been rescued, including one who is injured and in hospital on the nearby island of Crete. Survivors said more people were in the boat when it capsized about 15 nautical miles (28 km) off Gavdos, a coast guard officer said. Four vessels and a Frontex aircraft were looking for survivors. Greece was on the front line of a 2015-16 migration crisis when more than a million people from the Middle East and Africa crossed into Europe. Numbers have fallen since but Crete and Gavdos, the two Aegean islands nearest the African coast, have seen a steep rise in migrant boats, mainly from Libya, reaching their shores over the past year. Deadly accidents remain common. The European Commission said on Tuesday that Greece, Cyprus, Spain and Italy will be eligible for help in dealing with migratory pressures under a new EU mechanism when the bloc's pact on migration and asylum comes into force in the middle of next year. More than 370,000 children have been forced from their homes in Lebanon in just three weeks, as intensified Israeli strikes

and mass evacuation orders trigger one of the fastest and largest population displacements in the country's history, UN officials said on Friday. Israel has launched heavy air strikes and a ground assault on Lebanon in parallel with the war in Iran, after Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah militia fired into Israel in solidarity with Tehran on March 2. Israeli forces have told Lebanese to leave their homes across around 15 percent of the country including the entire south. Meanwhile, UNICEF's country representative Marcoluigi Corsi said the scale of displacement was "staggering," with 19,000 children uprooted daily, many for the second or third time since previous escalations just 15 months ago. "The mental and emotional exhaustion weighing on the children of Lebanon is just devastating," Corsi said remotely from Beirut. "There is no safe place for people to go." At least 121 children have been killed and 399 injured since the latest escalation began, according to UNICEF. Many civilians now face cramped and unsafe living conditions in more than 660 collective shelters, mostly schools. The use of schools as shelters has interrupted education for more than 150,000 students, refugee agency UNHCR's Lebanon representative Karolina Lindholm Billing said.

Report says Chipmaker supplying...

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"What I can tell you is that recently, some media have been on releasing some news that seems right but instead is wrong," Lin said. He added that, "after verification", such reports were "all" found to be "false information" but did not elaborate. China condemned the US-Israeli killing of Iranian supreme leader Ali Khomeini but has also said it "does not go along" with Tehran's strikes on Gulf states hosting US bases. Beijing's top diplomat Wang Yi told his Iranian counterpart Abbas Araghchi in a phone call this week that he hoped "all parties can seize every opportunity and window for peace and start the peace talks process".

Talks to yield results, says Wang Yi

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summary of the call released by the Chinese ministry. China supports Pakistan's role as a mediator, Wang told Dar. Meanwhile, in a social media post on X, Dar said the two "reaffirmed the need to restore peace and stability in the Middle East and the wider region". "We agreed to support all efforts aimed at ensuring an immediate end to hostilities, resumption of peace talks, protection of non-combatants, security of shipping lanes, and adherence to the United Nations Charter," he said. "FM Wang Yi conveyed China's appreciation and support to Pakistan for its ongoing efforts in this regard," Dar said. He added that, during the call, they also agreed to continue our endeavours for the resolution of all disputes through dialogue and diplomacy.

PM Shehbaz slams attack on Kuwait

FROM PAGE 01
The prime minister also apprised the Kuwaiti leadership of Pakistan's sincere diplomatic efforts to bring an end to the war in the Middle East. While expressing deep appreciation of the prime minister's leadership, the Crown Prince of Kuwait fully endorsed Pakistan's efforts for mediation between Iran and the U.S. He also thanked the prime minister for Pakistan's support to Kuwait in the current crisis. He thanked the prime minister for his recent letter of solidarity addressed to the Kuwaiti leadership and also expressed his desire to visit Pakistan, as soon as the situation improves.

Blasts near Pak embassy in Tehran

FROM PAGE 01
efforts aimed at securing a ceasefire between the United States and Iran. The explosions occurred around 8pm on Thursday in areas close to both the embassy and the ambassador's residence in Tehran's Pasdaran district. Sources indicated that an Iranian military base located opposite the Pakistani Embassy may have been the target. A senior diplomat told Geo News that although the explosions were loud, the embassy and residences of the staff remained intact. He said that diplomatic staff in the area were shaken by the incident.

Targeted subsidy plans afoot

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it said, adding that the participants noted with satisfaction that the fuel supply situation remains stable and adequate across the country. "The Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication also gave a comprehensive presentation on proposed technological solutions to facilitate a targeted subsidy mechanism for petroleum products, with a focus on transparency and efficient delivery," said the statement. The provincial leadership shared their views on the prevailing situation and policy options.

Qalandars subdue Kingsmen in one-sides PSL 11 Opener

LAHORE, Mar 27 (AP-P): The defending Champions Lahore Qalandars (LQ) were too good to lose against Hyderabad Houston Kingsmen (HHK) as they beat the newcomers HHK by 69 runs in the opening match of the 11th edition of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) at the Gaddafi stadium here late Thursday night. Chasing a target of 200 set by Lahore Qalandars, as Shaheen Shah Afridi decided to bat first after winning the toss, Hyderabad Kingsmen were reduced to 130-10 in 20 overs after their batting line-up capitulated under pressure. Chase was never easy as no batter could build a big partnership with 25 being the highest partnership of 25 (16) for the first wicket while Marnus Labuschagne 26 (22) was the highest scorer for the Kingsmen.

No other batter impressed with the bat as Saim Ayub could score 17 (13) only. In the post-match press conference, Kingsmen captain Marnus admitted the superiority of the Qalandars in all areas of the game, adding that Qalandars are the defending champions and they were deserving winners. However, he promised to come back strong in their second game on Sunday. Haris Rauf was the most impressive of the bowlers for LQ as he bowled with speed and precision and claimed two wickets for 22 runs off four overs. Sikandar Raza and Ubaid Shah also picked a brace for 27 runs each off their quota. Shaheen Shah Afridi and Mustafizur Rahman picked one wicket each. Last two batters Akif Javed and Mohammad Ali were run out. Earlier, Fakhar Zaman carried his good from with the

bat from the ICC Men's T20 World Cup as he scored 53 (39) and notched up a commanding 84 (50) runs partnership for the first wickets and this partnership set the tone for the rest of the innings for Qalandars when they went on to reach 199-6 off 20 overs. Qalandars lost four wickets in quick succession as they scored some 50 runs in the next seven overs but wicket-keeper batter Hasibullah Khan's unbeaten 40 (28) and Sikandar Raza's cameo 24 (10) powered Qalandars to a big total. It was Shaheen Afridi's two 6s off two balls which leapfrogged Lahore to 199-6. Australian Riley Meredith and Hassan Khan bagged a brace for 39 and 30 runs off four overs each while Mohammad Ali picked one wicket for 50 runs off three overs. — Agencies

Pakistan 14 & under boys team selected

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tennis Federation (PTF) has conducted trials for the selection of the Pakistan 14 and under Boys Team here at the PTF Tennis Complex. The trials were held from March 25 to 27, where a total of 9 top-ranked junior players were invited to participate based on their national rankings, said a press release. The following players have been selected to represent Pakistan in the ITF World Junior Tennis Tour, scheduled to be held in Kuching, Malaysia, from 26th April to 3rd May 2026: Muhammad Shayam Afridi, Rashid Ali Bachani, Muhammad Junaid Khan, Muhammad Muaz-Reserve. The President PTF, Secretary General PTF, and the entire PTF Management congratulated the selected players on their achievement and extended their best wishes for success in the upcoming international event. — APP

PSL 11 ticket refund process to begin from March 30

Ticket refund process expected to be completed within 15 working days, say organisers

DNA

LAHORE: DThe refund process for tickets of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) season 11 will begin on March 30, tournament organisers announced on Wednesday. The ticket holders who purchased their PSL 11 tickets online will receive refunds automatically through the original payment method used at the time of booking, which is applicable to all transactions made via debit and credit cards, as well as digital payment platforms. The refund process, slated to commence on March 30, is expected to be completed within 15 working days. However, the exact timeline may vary slightly depending on the customers' respective banks or payment service providers. The league's management further asserted that the ticket holders are not required to initiate the refund, but those experiencing delays beyond the stipulated period may contact their bank or payment platform for further assistance. For the unversed, the tickets' refund came in the light of the Pakistan Cricket Board's (PCB) decision to hold the historic PSL 11 behind closed doors in Karachi and Lahore to align with officially announced national resource conservation efforts. According to the updated itinerary, the tournament will comprise 44 matches played over 39 days, with each city hosting 22 fixtures. The opening match between the Hyderabad Kingsmen and Lahore Qalandars remains unchanged.

Pakistan's exports to China rise 28% in Jan-Feb 2026

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's exports to China recorded a robust 27.68 percent year-on-year increase in the first two months of 2026, underscoring deepening trade ties and strong demand from South China's industrial and food-processing hubs, as per data from the General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China (GACC). According to GACC data, Pakistan's exports reached \$566.75 million during January-February 2026, compared with \$443.88 million in the same period of 2025. The growth was largely fueled by rising shipments to five key southern provinces: Guangdong, Guangxi, Fujian, Hunan, and Hainan, which collectively serve as major gateways and consumption centers for Pakistani goods, CEN reported. Muhammad Imran, Trade and Investment Counsellor at Pakistan's Consulate in Guangzhou, told China Economic Net that in South China, food and agriculture imports surged by 28.9 percent to \$8.9 million, while mineral and mining imports climbed 23 percent to \$96.3 million. In contrast, textile and clothing imports declined by 25.9 percent to \$35.8 million, reflecting shifting global demand and structural challenges. Imran highlighted that South China's expanding food processing industry has significantly boosted demand for Pakistani agricultural products. Provinces such as Guangdong, Guangxi, and Fujian have seen continued growth in fruit processing and beverage manufacturing, driving imports of rice, sesame seeds, and spices. Improved logistics infrastructure, particularly at ports in Shenzhen, Guangzhou, and Xiamen, has further strengthened Pakistan's position. — APP

IOC approves rule limiting women's Olympic events to biological females

Committee introduces mandatory SRY gene screening beginning with 2028 Los Angeles Olympics

KARACHI: The International Olympic Committee on Thursday approved a new policy restricting eligibility for the women's category at the Olympic Games to biological females, introducing mandatory SRY gene screening beginning with the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. The decision, endorsed by the IOC Executive Board, will apply from the LA28 Games onward and will not be applied retroactively, said the organisation. Under the policy, eligibility for any female category event at the Olympics or other IOC competitions, including both individual and team sports, will be determined through a one-time genetic test for the SRY gene, a segment of DNA typically found on the Y chromosome and associated with male sex development. The IOC said athletes who test negative for the SRY gene will be permanently eligible to compete in the women's category. The screening, which can be conducted via saliva, cheek swab or blood sample, is intended to be carried out once in an athlete's lifetime unless there is reason to question the result. Athletes who test positive for the SRY gene will not be eligible for women's events at IOC competitions, with limited exceptions for those diagnosed with rare conditions such as Complete Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (CAIS)

or certain differences in sex development that do not confer performance advantages linked to testosterone. Those athletes will remain eligible to compete in other categories, including men's events, mixed competitions in designated male slots, or open categories where applicable. IOC President Kirsty Coventry said the policy is grounded in scientific evidence and aims to ensure fairness and safety in elite competition. "As a former athlete, I passionately believe in the rights of all Olympians to take part in fair competition," Coventry said. "It would not be fair for biological males to compete in the female category, and in some sports it would simply not be safe." She added that athletes must be treated with dignity and respect, with proper education, counselling and medical support provided throughout the process. The IOC said the policy follows a review conducted between September 2024 and March 2026, including consultations with medical, legal and ethical experts, as well as feedback from more than 1,100 athletes worldwide. A working group established in 2025 concluded that male sex provides performance advantages in sports involving strength, power and endurance, and recommended biological sex as the basis for eligibility in women's competition. The group also identified SRY gene screening as the most accurate and least intrusive method currently available. The policy is intended for adoption by international federations and other sports governing bodies when setting eligibility rules for IOC events. It replaces previous IOC guidance on gender identity and sex variations. — APP

FAO warns of severe global food security risks

"Temporality matters a lot right now, and the clock is ticking very hard," he said, stressing that swift solutions were essential to avoid deeper global repercussions

UNITED NATIONS: The intensifying conflict in the Persian Gulf has triggered one of the most rapid and severe disruptions to global commodity flows in recent history, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) warned on Thursday. The accelerating crisis is already undermining global food security, raising concerns for farmers, consumers and migrant workers worldwide, FAO Chief Economist Máximo Torero told UN-based reporters via video-link that the situation has placed extraordinary pressure on agricultural production systems. "Temporality matters a lot right now, and the clock is ticking very hard," he said, stressing that swift solutions were essential to avoid deeper global repercussions. Since the war erupted, tanker traffic in the

Strait of Hormuz has declined by more than 90 per cent, Torero said. Normally, 35 per cent of global crude oil flows — 20 million barrels — along with 30 per cent of fertilizer trade, and a fifth of liquefied natural gas passes through the critical maritime corridor each day. As a result, farmers are facing "a double shock" brought on by rising prices for fertilizer and fuel, both key for agricultural production. If a solution is found soon, markets could stabilise within roughly three months, but the picture changes if disruptions continue. "The medium-term scenario of a three-month blockade will affect all farmers globally, and then we will have different elements that could impact mostly in the next season," he said, pointing to reduced crop yields and substitutions.

The situation could also spark competition from the biofuel sector, particularly if oil prices rise above \$100 a barrel. Although farmers would benefit, "it will be bad for consumers because prices will increase." In the short term, priority must be on countries such as Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, where rice harvests are happening now. African nations that depend on fertilizer imports are also vulnerable, he said, although "big exporters" like Argentina, Brazil and the United States will also be affected. Regarding the Gulf, Torero noted that food prices are already "skyrocketing" in Iran. Although the country produces roughly 70 per cent of its own supply, the rest is imported. Meanwhile, "huge importers of food" such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates will face challenges because no

vessels are going to the region. Gulf countries also host millions of migrant workers from South Asia and East Africa. Remittances sent to their homelands could decline if the conflict continues. To mitigate the crisis, Torero stressed the need to find alternative maritime routes in the short term. "We need to provide emergency balance of payment support to import-dependent nations before planting windows," he added. In the medium term, countries must diversify fertilizer import sources, strengthen regional reserve sharing and avoid export restrictions, while increasing resilience will be critical in the long term. "We need to treat food systems with the same strategic importance as energy and transport sectors, investing accordingly to minimize those shocks," he concluded. — Agencies

Briefs

Nepal's youngest PM takes oath

KATMANDU, Nepal: Nepal's youngest prime minister took the oath of office Friday after his party won a landslide victory in elections earlier this month and following a youth-led uprising that toppled the government in September.

Balendra Shah was appointed the prime minister by President Ram Chandra Paudel Friday after his Rastriya Swatantra Party won nearly two-thirds of the seats in the House of Representatives, the lower chamber of parliament, in the March 5 polls. Shah, the 35-year-old political outsider widely known as Balen, will lead a government tasked with navigating deep public frustration with Nepal's established parties, who were widely blamed by voters for corruption and chronic political instability.

Religion and astrology play a big role in Nepal, which is more than 80 percent Hindu and where people begin new work, get married and hold religious rituals according to auspicious times.

Shah was born in the capital Katmandu but his family comes from the Hindu-dominated Terai region of Nepal, near the border with India.—APP

More than 1,900 dead in Iran since US-Israel strikes

JERUSALEM: More than 1,900 people have been killed and at least 20,000 injured in Iran since the start of US and Israeli attacks, said Maria Martinez of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) on Friday, citing figures provided by the Iranian Red Crescent. Martinez said the Iranian Red Crescent continues to serve as the only nationwide humanitarian organization operating across the country amidst the escalating conflict. Israel's military said it carried out strikes on targets in Tehran early Friday, nearly a month into the Middle East war. A brief military statement said Israeli forces "completed a wide-scale wave of strikes targeting infrastructure of the Iranian terror regime in the heart of Tehran." The military said in a separate statement that it had also struck "ballistic missiles and aerial defense systems production sites across Iran." It reported hitting missile launchers and storage sites in western Iran, as well as missile production sites in the capital. Iran has been under heavy bombardment since February 28, when the US and Israel launched their campaign. Israel said on Thursday that it had "blown up and eliminated" the Revolutionary Guards' naval commander, Alireza Tangsiri, and several senior officers. US President Donald Trump has in recent days repeatedly claimed progress in talks with Iran, even as Tehran denied any formal negotiations were taking place.—APP

Gold price decreases by Rs 1,000 per tola

ISLAMABAD: The price of 24 karat per tola gold decreased by Rs1,000 on Friday and was sold at Rs467,262 compared to its sale at Rs468,262 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 Rs858 to Rs400,601 from Rs401,459 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold went down by Rs787 to Rs367,230 from Rs368,017. The price of per tola silver decreased by Rs30 to Rs7,454, whereas that of ten gram silver went down by Rs26 to Rs6,390. The price of gold in the international market decreased by \$10 to \$4,445 from \$4,455 whereas that of silver declined by \$0.30 to \$69.70, the Association reported.—APP

Pakistan's ports set new benchmarks in transshipment: Anwar

He emphasized that despite global challenges, the country has demonstrated resilience and the ability to turn opportunities into record-setting performance at Karachi Port

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry Friday hailed the government's forward-looking strategy and the exceptional performance of port authorities, stating that surging transshipment activities are breaking records, showcasing Pakistan's global maritime potential and establishing the country's ports as premier hubs for trade and commerce. Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry, in an exclusive interview with a local media channel noted that the steady growth in transshipment activities has set new milestones, showcased Pakistan's national capacity and strengthened the country's ports as thriving centers of commerce and regional connectivity.

He extended his congratulations to the

entire nation on this achievement, stating that such progress reflects Pakistan's growing strength in the maritime sector.

He emphasized that despite global challenges, the country has demonstrated resilience and the ability to turn opportunities into record-setting performance at Karachi Port. He credited the success to the effective government strategy and the tireless efforts of the Ministry of Maritime Affairs, port chairmen and their teams. He appreciated their dedication and reaffirmed the commitment to continue this momentum, further strengthening Pakistan's position as a regional trade and transshipment hub. The minister highlighted that major ports, including Karachi Port, Port Qa-

sim, and Gwadar Port, along with other Pakistani ports, have achieved record performance.

The minister stated that Pakistan utilized around 8,300 transshipment units in 2025, while a new record has already been established within just 24 days, reflecting accelerated growth and improved operational efficiency. He reaffirmed the government's commitment to sustaining this momentum in the coming months. The minister further announced that under the government's vision, three additional ports will be developed, along with the establishment of a modern energy city to support industrial expansion and maritime trade. He emphasized that these initiatives will enhance foreign investment, create em-

ployment opportunities, reduce logistics costs and position Pakistan as a competitive maritime and trade hub in the region, further strengthening its economic outlook and global standing. He stated that while global markets were facing crises, Pakistan has achieved record performance in the maritime sector. He highlighted that Karachi Port is witnessing a significant surge in transshipment activity, largely driven by regional shipping disruptions in the Arab Gulf, prompting vessels to reroute toward Pakistan. He noted that the port handled around 8,300 TEUs during 2025, whereas in just the last 24 days, it has already managed 8,313 TEUs surpassing the entire previous year's volume and demonstrating exceptional growth and operational efficiency.—DNA

RCCI delegation participates in US-Pakistan symposium

On the occasion, RCCI President Usman Shaukat presented a report on RCCI's recent trade delegation visit to Washington, highlighting engagements with U.S. officials and businesses to enhance bilateral trade and investment. Congressman Tom Suozzi appreciated RCCI's efforts in promoting trade, exports, and strengthening business-to-business and people-to-people relations



DNA

RAWALPINDI: President Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI), Usman Shaukat, led a business delegation to attend the symposium "US and Pakistan: Past, Present and Future" held at Capitol Hill. The event was organized by the Congressional Pakistan Caucus under the Chatham House

Rule and co-chaired by Representatives Tom Suozzi and Jack Bergman, in collaboration with the Embassy of Pakistan in the United States.

The speakers highlighted Pakistan's growing diplomatic role, noting its recent offer to facilitate talks between the United States and Iran. Natalie Baker, Chargé d'Affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Pakistan, appreciated Congress

members for organizing the event.

Ambassador to the United States, Rizwan Saeed Sheikh, emphasized Pakistan's geostrategic importance and its sacrifices in promoting global peace. Assistant Secretary of State Dr. Paul Kapur noted improving U.S.-Pakistan economic ties, particularly in key sectors.

On the occasion, RCCI President Usman

Shaukat presented a report on RCCI's recent trade delegation visit to Washington, highlighting engagements with U.S. officials and businesses to enhance bilateral trade and investment. Congressman Tom Suozzi appreciated RCCI's efforts in promoting trade, exports, and strengthening business-to-business and people-to-people relations.

Philippines, France pact deepens military coop

MANILA: The Philippines and France have signed an agreement opening the door for their soldiers to participate in joint exercises on each other's soil, Manila said Friday, its first such pact with a European country. The archipelago nation has secured similar pacts with Japan, Canada and New Zealand over the past two years, as it seeks to counter Beijing's assertiveness in the disputed South China Sea. The Philippines and China have engaged in frequent clashes in the crucial waterway, which Beijing claims in nearly its entirety despite an international ruling that its assertion has no legal basis. The new "status of visiting forces agreement" with France was signed Thursday in Paris, hours after the Philippine military accused China of conducting "dangerous maneuvers" in the contested waterway. "The SOVFA will serve as the primary document to facilitate a wider range of defense cooperative activities between the Philippine and French armed forces in the territory of either country," Manila's defense department said in a statement. The French navy has previously taken part in joint drills in the South China Sea alongside Philippine and US vessels, while the aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle made its first port visit to Subic Bay in February last year. The new agreement, which must still be ratified by the countries' legislatures, would allow for greater cooperation with French ground forces, which have previously taken part as observers in the annual US-Philippine Balikatan military exercises. The Philippine military separately on Thursday accused China of conducting "dangerous maneuvers" that could have resulted in a collision near Pag-asa, a tiny island about 450 kilometers from the coast of Palawan. "While conducting lawful operations, BRP Benguet encountered the PLAN vessel, which executed an unsafe and unprofessional maneuver by closing in and passing at a dangerously close distance," the Philippines said in a statement.—APP

Iraq condemns any aggression of Gulf states, Jordan

BAGHDAD: Iraq condemned the targeting of the Gulf states and Jordan, a day after these countries issued a joint statement demanding Baghdad act to prevent attacks from its territory. The Iraqi foreign ministry "affirms the government's categorical condemnation of any aggression or targeting of the Gulf countries and the Kingdom of Jordan," it said in a statement, adding it was prepared to "work jointly to address them (attacks) responsibly and swiftly." Iraq was committed to taking the "necessary measures to manage the security challenges," it added. On Wednesday, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and Jordan issued a joint statement demanding that Baghdad act immediately to prevent attacks from its territory by Iran-backed armed groups. Iraq has been drawn into the war sparked by US and Israeli strikes against Iran on February 28. Pro-Tehran Iraqi groups have said they have targeted US interests in the country, as well as the wider region.—APP

Asiya the iron lady of Kashmir's resistance

A Coherent narrative of resolve, faith, consciousness, and resistance

ISLAMABAD: The Kashmir freedom movement represents a multidimensional struggle in which political insight, ideological conviction, social awareness, and spiritual resilience are deeply intertwined.

Within this movement, certain individuals transcend conventional roles and emerge as enduring symbols of resistance. Asiya Andrabi stands among these distinguished figures—aptly referred to as the "Iron Lady" for her extraordinary steadfastness, intellectual clarity, and fearless articulation of her beliefs, said a press release.

To perceive Asiya Andrabi merely as a political activist would be to underestimate the breadth and depth of her influence. She embodies multiple roles simultaneously: an ideological leader, a social reformer, a proponent of religious consciousness, and the founder of an organized movement. Her struggle reflects a coherent and integrated worldview in which faith, identity, and the aspiration for freedom are inseparably linked.

With a profound understanding of the realities in the Kashmir Valley, Andrabi has consistently maintained that the Kashmir issue is not merely a political dispute, but a matter deeply rooted in civilizational identity, religious conviction, and fundamental human rights. Guided by this perspective, she has fearlessly raised her voice against Indian control over Kashmir, framing the resistance as principled, sustained, and ideologically grounded. Central to her political thought is the assertion that the State of Jammu and Kashmir is, by natural, historical, and ideological dimensions, aligned with

Pakistan—a stance that has provided clear direction and consistency to her struggle.

A significant dimension of Asiya Andrabi's work lies in her role as a religious scholar and social mobilizer among women. She has played a pivotal role in fostering Islamic awareness, moral consciousness, and a sense of collective responsibility among Kashmiri women. Her efforts have strengthened the understanding of Islamic principles, identity, and societal obligations, emphasizing that a truly empowered society is shaped not only by political liberation but also by intellectual and spiritual development.

Recognizing the need for an organized platform, she founded Dukhtaran-e-Millat, a movement aimed at promoting religious awareness, preserving Islamic values, and mobilizing women within the broader framework of the Kashmir freedom struggle. Under her leadership, the organization transformed women into a cohesive and active force—demonstrating that women are not merely supporters in any movement, but are fully capable of assuming leadership roles and shaping its direction.

One of the defining features of Andrabi's leadership is her unwavering adherence to principle. She has consistently refused to yield under pressure, despite repeated arrests, prolonged detentions, and the hardships of imprisonment. This unflinching resilience is precisely what justifies her recognition as the "Iron Lady."

Her personal life further reinforces the depth of her commitment. Her husband, Muhammad Qasim

Fakto, has spent decades in Indian prisons, serving a life sentence in connection with the struggle for the right to self-determination. The sustained sacrifices of both individuals within the same family underscore that this movement is not merely political rhetoric, but a profound expression of ideological commitment and personal sacrifice.

At the international level, Asiya Andrabi's struggle carries significant relevance. She frames the Kashmir issue within the universally recognized principle of the right to self-determination, consistently reminding the global community of its own declared standards and obligations. Her narrative is grounded in moral and legal arguments, appealing directly to the conscience of the international community.

A comprehensive analysis of her personality reveals several defining elements: unwavering ideological commitment, fearless leadership, religious and social reform, organizational acumen, and persistent resistance. These attributes collectively position her as a remarkable and historically significant figure. Asiya Andrabi's life represents a luminous chapter in the Kashmir freedom movement—where faith, determination, resilience, and sacrifice converge. She is not merely a political leader, but a representative of a broader ideological and spiritual struggle. Her legacy conveys a powerful message for future generations: When conviction is clear, faith is strong, and the cause is just, no force can break the resolve of a determined people. — APP

Austria plans social media ban for children under 14

VIENNA: Austria's conservative-led, three-party government plans to introduce a ban on social media use for children under 14, it said on Friday.

Cabinet members from the three ruling parties announced a deal between them on the principle of a ban, aimed at protecting children from "algorithms that are addictive" and content including sexual abuse, but could not say when it would begin, and they have yet to agree on how it will be implemented.

"We will decisively protect children and young people in future from the negative effects of social media," Vice Chancellor Andreas Babler of the Social Democrats said. "We will no longer stand by and watch while these platforms make our children addicted and often also sick ... The risks associated with this use were ignored for long enough, and now it is time to act," he added.—APP

UN demands 'justice' after Iran school strike

GENEVA: The deadly bombing of an Iranian school spurred "visceral horror," the UN rights chief said Friday, urging Washington to conclude its probe and demanding justice "for the terrible harm done."

Speaking at the start of an urgent debate in the UN Human Rights Council focused on the February 28 strike on an Iranian elementary school in Minab on the first day of the Middle East war, Volker Turk said that "whatever differences countries have, we can all agree they will not be solved by killing schoolchildren."

The bombing "evoked a visceral horror," Turk told the United Nations' top rights body "The images of bombed-out classrooms and grieving parents showed clearly who pays the highest price for war: civilians with no power in the decisions that led to conflict," he said. "In this case, a reported 168 pupils, teachers, school staff, and their loved ones." A US Tomahawk cruise missile hit the school due to a targeting mistake, according to the preliminary findings of a US military investigation reported by The New York Times newspaper. The UN rights chief stressed that "the onus is on those who carried out the attack to investigate it promptly, impartially, transparently and thoroughly." "Senior US officials have said the strike is under investigation," he said, calling "for that process to be concluded as soon as possible, and for its findings to be made public."—APP

Korea, EU discuss expanding supply chain coop

SEOUL: Second Vice Foreign Minister Kim Jina met with Belen Martinez Carbonell, secretary general of the European External Action Service, on Friday and discussed ways to bolster supply chain cooperation and other issues, the foreign ministry said. Kim noted the growing importance of security cooperation between Seoul and the European Union (EU), voicing hope for tangible outcomes during the upcoming security and defense dialogue between South Korea and the EU scheduled for May. Carbonell underscored expanding bilateral cooperation in economic security, including efforts to stabilize supply chains and secure critical minerals, noting the need for regular dialogue to further broaden cooperation. The two sides also exchanged views on regional situations, including the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and the war in Ukraine, and agreed to maintain close communication at various levels, according to the ministry.—APP

Briefs

Iran urges civilians to stay away from US bases

DNA

TEHRAN: Iran's Revolutionary Guards urged civilians across the region on Friday to stay away from areas near US forces, nearly a month into the war with the United States and Israel. "The cowardly American-Zionist forces... are attempting to use civilian locations and innocent people as human shields," said the Guards in a statement on their Sepah News website. "We recommend that you urgently leave locations where American forces are stationed so that no harm comes to you." The warning came as Kuwait's main commercial port was damaged in a drone attack on Friday, authorities said, as Iran pressed on with its campaign in the Gulf in retaliation for US-Israeli strikes. The Shuwaikh port was targeted at dawn "by enemy drones, preliminary reports revealed material damage but no human casualties," the Kuwait port authority said in a statement on X. Bahrain sounded its missile alert siren late Friday morning over an incoming Iranian attack. Qatar, which had not seen a major attack in days, also sounded its alerts Friday. Iran's Revolutionary Guards said on Friday they had carried out missile and drone strikes the previous day targeting sites in Israel and military facilities in the Gulf used by US forces.

Oil prices fall

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: Oil prices fell in early trade on Friday and were down over a volatile week after US President Donald Trump said talks with Iran to end the war were going "very well" and announced he would pause attacks on the country's energy plants for 10 days. Brent futures fell 90 cents, or 0.8%, to \$107.11 per barrel as of 0024 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate futures lost 83 cents, or 0.88%, to \$93.65 per barrel, trimming gains from a bullish previous session. On Thursday, Brent rose 5.7% while WTI gained 4.6% on fears of further escalation of the war, although trading volume for the front-month Brent contract was the lowest since February 27, the day before the United States and Israel began strikes on Iran. However, Brent is headed for its first weekly fall in six weeks while WTI has fallen for a second consecutive week, with Trump talking up the prospect of ending the war. "As per Iranian Government request ... I am pausing the period of Energy Plant destruction by 10 Days to Monday, April 6, 2026, at 8pm, Eastern Time," Trump said in a post on Truth Social on Thursday.

AKDN chair Aga Khan marks inaugural visit to Canada

Canada and the Ismaili Imam commit to deepened collaboration on affordable housing, development finance and global diplomacy

DNA

OTTAWA: His Highness the Aga Khan, 50th hereditary Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslim community and Chair of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), began his first official visit to Canada, marking a milestone in a relationship between the Imam and Canada that spans more than five decades. His Highness met with Prime Minister Mark Carney, and was hosted at dinner by Governor General Mary Simon and His Excellency Whit Fraser. His Highness also met today with a diverse group of Senators and Members of Parliament at the Delegation of the Ismaili Imam. Reflecting on the depth of the partnership, His Highness said: "Like my father before me, I believe in the promise of Canada - its values, its principles and its willingness to act on them, even when it is most challenging. That is what we build on, and what makes this relationship enduring." The visit continues a longstanding relationship between Canada and the Imam, grounded in shared values and a sustained commitment to building a better world. Over five decades, this partnership has produced tangible outcomes in capacity building, economic development and the strengthening of civil society across some of the world's most challenging environments. Building on this historic relationship, Prime Minister Carney and His Highness released a joint declaration outlining new partnerships in housing, economic development and other areas of mutual interest, setting the stage for renewed collaboration. During substantive discussions with Prime Minister Carney, His Highness and the



His Highness the Aga Khan and Prime Minister of Canada Mark Carney on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on 25 March 2026. - DNA

Prime Minister agreed to advance collaboration across three priority areas: Affordable housing. Prime Minister Carney welcomed a series of investments by the Ismaili Imam in multi-generational not-for-profit housing projects across Canada to improve the supply of affordable housing. In addition, through Build Canada Homes, the Government of Canada will forge a long-term partnership with the Ismaili Imam to develop a series of low- and middle-income housing projects.

The leaders also announced the creation of an Economic Partnership Platform to strengthen development financing. FinDev Canada and the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development will pool public and private capital to invest in infrastructure, renewable energy and agriculture across Africa and Asia, combining AKDN's expertise and development models with Canada's resources. In addition, the leaders committed to ongoing joint development programming to advance economic oppor-

tunity, health, education, and pluralism, including in critical regions such as Syria. They identified particular opportunities to advance work in skills development related to key economic needs, energy initiatives, and leveraging Canadian innovations and technology in important sectors such as agriculture and climate. Recognising the urgent need for quiet, principled diplomacy to save lives, end conflict, and preserve human dignity, the Imam and Canada renewed their commitment to work together towards these goals. Prime Minister Carney also announced that the Honourable David Lametti, currently Canada's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, will also be appointed as the new Representative of Canada to the Ismaili Imam, a role that will help carry this renewed partnership forward. Speaking at a parliamentary reception attended by senators, ministers and members of Parliament, His Highness noted that as the world grows more complicated, traditional models of aid are increasingly difficult to sustain. He underscored the importance of new forms of partnership capable of creating lasting, sustainable prosperity in the world's most challenging regions - and of ensuring that more countries become countries of opportunity for their own populations. His Highness expressed his intention to make this the first of many visits to Canada, and reaffirmed the readiness of the Imam, the AKDN, and the Canadian Ismaili community and its institutions to serve as proud and reliable partners in building a safer, more prosperous and more pluralist world.

Afghans repatriation suspended

Torkham security officials said today that the IFR facilitation had been stopped at Torkham, and border forces were placed on high alert, due to the deteriorating security situation at the border

PESHAWAR: Repatriation of undocumented Afghan nationals was abruptly suspended on Friday after a border security official was injured in a late evening cross-border attack from the Afghan side on Thursday. The Torkham border crossing between Pakistan and Afghanistan was reopened on Thursday for the return of stranded and illegal Afghan nationals, after having remained closed since February 26 with the launch of Operation Ghazab lil-Haq. However, security officials at Torkham said local paramilitary forces went on high alert due to the injury of an FC official at the Awal Khan post near the border. The incident took place around 9:30pm on Thursday evening. Sources at Torkham and the Hamza Baba transit point said that although the entire staff of the National Database and Registration Authority (Nadra), the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), National Logistics Corporation (NLC), police and other government departments was present at the transit point and Torkham, they were directed to immediately stop the registration of undocumented Afghans. They said that around 220 undocumented Afghans were registered on Thursday and later sent back to their country via the Torkham border. Torkham security officials said today that the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation (IFR) facilitation had been stopped at Torkham, and border forces were placed on high alert, due to the deteriorating security situation at the border. They said that IFR facilitation was not possible due to the "aggressive attitude and behaviour of the Afghan side". Earlier this month, it was decided that action under the Foreigners Act 1946 will be taken against illegal Afghan nationals for the implementation of the single visa regime. The decision was made at a meeting held to review law and order and security arrangements in the capital city.

Finance Minister chairs session on petroleum prices

Punjab Senior Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, representing the Government of Punjab, emphasized the need to develop multiple policy scenarios in response to the evolving petroleum price situation

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, chaired a high-level consultative meeting on the petroleum products situation today at the Finance Division, in line with the directions of the Honourable President and the Honourable Prime Minister of Pakistan. The meeting commenced with a detailed presentation by the Petroleum Division on the current status of petroleum products' availability in the country. It was noted with satisfaction that the fuel supply situation remains stable and adequate across the country.

The Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication also gave a comprehensive presentation on proposed technological solutions to facilitate a targeted subsidy mechanism for petroleum products, with a focus on transparency and efficient delivery. The provincial leadership shared their views on the prevailing situation and policy options. Chief Minister Sindh, Syed Murad Ali Shah, appreciated the efforts of the federal government in maintaining uninterrupted fuel availability, while emphasizing the importance of behavioral measures to promote fuel conservation. Punjab Senior Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, representing the Government of Punjab, emphasized the need to develop multiple policy

scenarios in response to the evolving petroleum price situation. She stressed that any reduction in international petroleum prices should be effectively passed on to consumers and highlighted the importance of incorporating behavioral aspects into crisis management to ensure more sustainable consumption patterns. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Finance Minister Muzammil Aslam lauded the efforts of Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, and Federal Minister for Petroleum, Mr. Ali Perwaiz Malik, for effectively managing the oil supply situation. He noted that Pakistan's management of petroleum supplies has remained comparatively better than that of several countries in the region.

Pakistan secures fuel cargoes till April 25

Oman imports and refinery output keep Pakistan fuel supplies stable

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has secured petroleum supplies until April 25, with refineries operating at 80% to 100% capacity and diversified imports helping ensure uninterrupted fuel availability despite regional geopolitical tensions. Petroleum Division officials said on Thursday that the country is facing no shortage of petroleum products, as better inventory management and timely import decisions have reinforced supply chains. They said a key factor behind the stable situation is Pakistan's shift to alternative sources, including higher imports of petrol and diesel from Oman. In March, Pakistan imported three petrol cargoes and one diesel cargo from Oman, while two additional petrol shipments are expected before the end of the month, further strengthening domestic reserves.

Barrick slows Reko Diq rollout as Iran war jolts region

LONDON: Barrick Mining is delaying its massive copper and gold project in Pakistan due to the Middle East war and a worsening security situation in the country, The News reported, citing Financial Times. The move comes after the Toronto-based company launched a review of the Reko Diq project last month. "Following the preliminary findings of the review and in light of the subsequent escalation in security issues in Pakistan and the Middle East, the company considers it necessary to further assess the potential impacts and delivery strategy," the miner told its Pakistani equity partners and the project's local operator this week in correspondence seen by the FT. "As a result, development activity will be slowed, with a corresponding reduced

project spend, for a 12-month period commencing in July," it added, while the review period and slower pace of development "will impact previously stated budgets and timelines". Barrick declined to comment. Reko Diq could become one of the world's largest copper-gold mines, though industry experts have cautioned that it will be an expensive and challenging asset to develop. Barrick owns 50% of the mine and controls its board, with the remaining equity split between three Pakistani state-owned enterprises and the Balochistan provincial government. Three people involved in the mine said they had been notified of Barrick's plan, which comes ahead of a project board meeting scheduled for next week to finalise the project's strategy. - Agencies

IMF shares MEFP with Pakistan after outlining 2026-27 budget key points

Agreement would unlock \$7bn under EFF and \$1.4bn under RSF tranche release

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has provided Pakistani authorities with the Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies (MEFP) after finalising key outlines of the 2026-27 budget, while also urging more frequent revisions in oil prices. Pakistan and the IMF have exchanged drafts of the MEFP to reach a staff-level agreement for the third review and the release of the fourth tranche under the \$7 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) and \$1.4bn under the Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF). The IMF has sought a budgetary and fiscal framework for the 2026-27 budget, envisaging the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR)'s tax collection target of Rs15.08 trillion. The current fiscal year's FBR target has been revised downward from Rs13.79tr to Rs13.4tr for the end of June 2026. Earlier, the target had been reduced from Rs14.13tr to Rs13.79tr. The IMF has also requested Islamabad to readjust petroleum, oil, and lubricant (POL) prices more frequently. The government had recently moved from reviewing prices fortnightly to weekly adjustments. The IMF seeks faster price resets, reflecting fluctuations in international markets. Pakistani authorities are negotiating with the IMF to determine an appropriate timeframe for more frequent adjustments, but it remains unclear whether the Fund expects changes twice a week or on a daily basis, an official said.

Meanwhile, the Planning Commission's affiliate, the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (Pide), in its latest Policy Viewpoint 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 \$2bn if disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz persist. Imports from the region, particularly energy imports, could also decline sharply, disrupting domestic production and export activity. At the same time, rising international oil prices could add \$4.5bn 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% of the country'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 \$24bn to \$41.8bn, while inflation may surge from 7.1% to 11.1%. 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% of total exports.



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