



# Islamabad POST

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**Macron against strikes on civilian places**

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## Oil prices surge

# Trump: Israel won't attack Iran gas field again

Several Gulf states report Iranian attacks on energy sites after Israel struck Iran's South Pars gasfield

DNA

WASHINGTON: Trump promised on Thursday that Israel won't attack Iran gas field again after it "violently lashed out". Earlier, US President Donald Trump on Wednesday threatened to destroy Iran's key South Pars gas field if there were further attacks against Qatar's main gas plant. Trump confirmed on his Truth Social platform that Israel had struck the South Pars field but said the United States "knew nothing" of the attack, which spurred Iran to launch an attack on Qatar's Ras Laffan facility. "NO MORE ATTACKS WILL BE MADE BY ISRAEL" pertaining to this extremely important and valuable South Pars Field unless Iran unwisely decides to attack a very innocent, in this case, Qatar - In which instance the United States of America, with or without the help or consent of Israel, will massively blow up the entirety of the South Pars Gas Field at an amount of strength and power that Iran has never seen or witnessed before," the US president wrote. Meanwhile, Oil surged more than 5% Thursday, and stocks sank as Iran attacked several Gulf energy facilities and warned of more in retaliation for a strike on one of its key gas fields. Brent crude soared past \$113 per barrel as Tehran threatened to target regional installations after an Israeli hit on a site serving its massive South Pars field, which it shares with Qatar. Iranian missiles struck Qatar's Ras Laffan, the world's largest liquefied natural gas (LNG) hub, causing extensive damage and stoking energy supply fears as the war grinds on. European gas jumped more than 30% after the strikes. US President Donald Trump said Washington "knew nothing" of Israel's attack on South Pars, but vowed "NO MORE ATTACKS WILL BE MADE BY ISRAEL" on the site if Tehran stops attacking Qatar. But if Iran did not comply,

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## US has lost control of its foreign policy: Oman

DNA

OMAN: Oman's Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi has said that the United States has lost control of its foreign policy and is involved in a war that is not its own. Writing in *The Economist*, he said the United States and Iran had been close to reaching a genuine agreement. He added that the joint US-Israeli strikes on Iran on 28 February, carried out just hours after the latest and most substantive round of talks, were a "shock but not a surprise." Albusaidi said: "The American administration's greatest miscalculation, of course, was allowing itself to be drawn into this war in the first place." He added: "This is not America's war, and there is no likely scenario in which both Israel and America will get what they want from it." He continued that "Israel's leadership seems to have persuaded America that Iran had been so weakened by sanctions, internal divisions and the American-Israeli bombings of its nuclear sites last June, that an unconditional surrender would swiftly follow the initial assault and the assassination of the supreme leader." He added that "it should now be clear that for Israel to achieve its stated objective will require a long military campaign to which America would have to commit troops on the ground, opening a new front in the forever wars which President Donald Trump previously vowed to end."

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a high level meeting to assess the economic situation and availability of petroleum products in country risen due to Gulf situation. - DNA

## PM says 5G rollout to boost youth innovation

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday said the launch of 5G spectrum marked a major milestone for Pakistan, benefiting sectors including agriculture, technology and industry. Addressing the signing ceremony of license agreements for the 5G spectrum, the prime minister said the auction process was conducted in a transparent manner despite legal challenges. He appreciated the efforts of Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar who fully cooperated to remove the legal hurdles in the process. He said transactions such as the divestment of Pakistan International Airlines were also carried out with transparency, setting new precedents in the country's history. The prime minister congratulated telecom companies including Jazz, Zong and Ufone on successfully acquiring spectrum, with Jazz securing the largest share.

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## Middle East crisis

# Islamic, Arab FMs urge Iran not to attack regional states

The ministers strongly condemned what they described as deliberate Iranian attacks using ballistic missiles and drones targeting civilian infrastructure, including oil facilities, desalination plants, airports, residential buildings, and diplomatic premises across Gulf Cooperation Council countries and beyond

NEWS DESK / DNA

RIYADH: Foreign ministers from Arab and Islamic countries called on Iran to immediately halt its attacks on regional states, warning that the future of relations with Tehran depends on its respect for sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs. In a joint statement issued after a consultative ministerial meeting in Riyadh, the ministers stressed that continued Iranian actions - both direct and through allied groups - threaten regional security and undermine prospects for diplomacy. "The future of relations with Iran depends on respecting the sovereignty of states and non-interference in their internal affairs," the statement said, in a clear reference to Tehran's support for proxy groups across the region. The meeting brought

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## Saudi Arabia holds meeting with FMs of Pak, Türkiye, Egypt

DNA

RIYADH: Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan held a meeting with this counterparts from Egypt, Pakistan and Türkiye, the Saudi foreign ministry. Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty, Pakistan Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, and Turkey's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan joined Prince Faisal on the sidelines of an emergency Arab and Islamic foreign ministers meeting to discuss the Iran war crisis. The ministers discussed Iran's

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## Briefs

### Rupee remains stable

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Despite 19 days of war in the Middle East, Pakistan's exchange rate remained stable, encouraging stakeholders, including the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and the government. The exchange rate has largely remained stable during the current fiscal year, and predictions of destabilisation proved unfounded despite the prolonged conflict. This stability comes as regional currencies weakened; the Indian rupee depreciated by up to five per cent from Rs88 to Rs92 against the US dollar during the war, while fears of further depreciation persist. Financial sector experts believe the exchange rate is being managed to some extent, though they caution that continued war could still pose risks. Flights to Dubai, Umrah travel continue; airfares surge.

### PM talks to King of Jordan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif held a telephone conversation with His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr. During their warm conversation, the Prime Minister extended Eid greetings and felicitations to His Majesty, the Royal Family and the brotherly people of the Kingdom of Jordan. His Majesty King Abdullah II reciprocated these sentiments. Both leaders also called for peace and harmony in the ranks of the Ummah. The two leaders discussed the evolving situation in the Middle East. The Prime Minister expressed deep concern over the ongoing hostilities in the region.

## Gabbard statement on Pak missiles not true

In a post on X, the former foreign minister maintained that the assertion that the "US Homeland is within range of Pakistan's nuclear/con missiles is not grounded in strategic reality"



FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Former caretaker foreign minister Jalil Abbas Jilani on Thursday dismissed a statement made by US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard over Pakistan's missile capabilities posing a threat to the United States.

### RELATED NEWS ON BACK PAGE

In a post on X, the former foreign minister maintained that the assertion that the "US Homeland is within range of Pakistan's nuclear/con missiles is not grounded in strategic reality". He said that Pakistan's

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## FO dismisses US official statements

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office (FO) on Thursday categorically rejected the recent assertion by US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard alleging a potential threat from Pakistan's missile capabilities. In a statement, FO Spokesperson Tahir Hussain Andrabi emphasised that Pakistan's strategic capabilities are exclusively defensive in nature, aimed at safeguarding national sovereignty and maintaining peace and stability in South Asia. Andrabi made the remarks while responding to media queries seeking Pakistan's response to the statement made by the US Official. A day earlier,

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## China, Russia term Larijani killing a murder

Putin highlighted Larijani's role as a "true friend" of Russia and his contributions to the strategic partnership between Moscow and Tehran, extending deepest condolences to Iran's leadership and the family of the deceased

DNA

BEIJING: China has issued a strong condemnation of the killing of Ali Larijani, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, describing the act as "unacceptable" amid the ongoing escalation in the Middle East conflict. In an official statement, China's Foreign Ministry expressed deep concern over the targeted airstrike that resulted in Larijani's death, along with several others including his son and close aides. Beijing emphasized that such actions against senior leadership of sovereign nations violate international norms and exacerbate regional instability. "China strongly condemns the killing of Ali Larijani and other Iranian leaders," the statement read. "This unacceptable act threatens peace and security in West Asia and must be

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## EU vows to deal with energy crisis

NEWS DESK

BRUSSELS: Europe's heavy reliance on energy imports has left it exposed to spiralling prices since the Strait of Hormuz was effectively closed and Tehran started striking energy infrastructure in the Middle East. A fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas supplies normally passes through the narrow strait near Iran. The price of benchmark Brent crude rose again on Thursday after Iran targeted energy facilities in Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and European gas prices were double their level when the US-Israeli war on

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# KP CM for results-driven skills for youth employment

The meeting was informed that under the Rural Economic Transformation Project around 42,000 youth are being provided startup grants averaging Rs73,000 each. So far, Rs397 million has been disbursed among 5,445 beneficiaries

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sohail Afridi, on Thursday directed authorities to ensure visible outcomes from ongoing technical education and skills development initiatives, stressing that youth employment remains a central priority of the provincial government. Chairing a high-level meeting of the Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority, the CM reviewed progress on multiple programmes aimed at equipping young people with market-oriented skills and improving their access to jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities. He noted that billions of rupees are being invested in youth-focused schemes and underlined the need for effective implementation to translate these investments into tangible

benefits. He emphasized alignment of training programmes with market demands to enhance employability. The meeting was informed that under the Rural Economic Transformation Project around 42,000 youth are being provided startup grants averaging Rs73,000 each. So far, Rs397 million has been disbursed among 5,445 beneficiaries. In Peshawar, employment opportunities are being created for 750 trained youth, while an overall target has been set for internship and placement of 25,000 youth. Under the Ehsaas Hunar Programme, interest-free loans of up to Rs500,000 are being extended to youth at a total cost of Rs3 billion. So far, Rs585 million has been distributed among 1,211 applicants. Additionally, TEVTA has launched a special programme to en-

hance youth skills, offering a monthly stipend of Rs15,000 to each trainee. Under this initiative, 88 youth have received on-job training in various industrial units, while 560 have been successfully placed in 85 industries. For the merged districts, a fast-track skills development programme worth Rs685 million is underway, providing financial and technical support to 3,000 youth. Training of 800 participants has been completed, while 520 youth have been placed in the National Logistics Cell and 1,400 in the University of Engineering and Technology. The CM directed the concerned authorities to ensure implementation of all programmes under a comprehensive strategy and to expedite efforts to maximize benefits for the youth.—DNA



RAWALPINDI: People boarding on vehicle at the General Bus Stand in Pirwada to travel to their hometowns and celebrate Eidul Fitr with their loved ones.

## CM Maryam directs foolproof security on Eid

DNA

LAHORE: Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif directed the authorities concerned to ensure foolproof security arrangements on bus stands, commercial centers, and markets on Eid-ul-Fitr. She also directed them to deploy additional personnels in markets on Chand Raat (Moon-Sighting Night). She directed Women Police Squads to patrol markets on Chand Raat to ensure protection of women and children from harassment at all costs. She also directed the relevant authorities to use drone cameras and night vision binoculars during night for surveillance of markets, besides taking strict monitoring measures to prevent one-wheeling (stunt riding) on roads on Chand Raat.

Chief Minister Punjab directed the relevant stakeholders to enhance security and patrols around ATMs and banks; and directed the police and transport authorities to continuously monitor van stands and bus stations after getting the official fare list displayed on windcreens of buses and vans.

## KP Health dept puts hospitals on high alert for Eid emergencies

PESHAWAR: Following directives from Chief Minister Sohail Afridi, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Health Department has placed all public and private hospitals on alert to handle potential emergencies during Eid-ul-Fitr. According to an official notification, hospitals are instructed to ensure uninterrupted 24/7 emergency services. Doctors, nurses, and paramedical staff are required to be present as per duty rosters, which will be strictly enforced. No officer is allowed to leave their duty station without prior approval, and ambulance and referral services will remain

fully operational. The notification also directed that medicines, oxygen, blood, and other essential medical supplies be available in adequate quantities. Special arrangements and contingency plans have been put in place to respond effectively to accidents or emergencies. Emergency services in tourist and transit areas including Galiyat, Swat, Malakand, and Abbottabad have been strengthened. The Director General Health Services has established an emergency control room to ensure 24-hour monitoring and coordination. Health facilities

will be continuously supervised through the Incident Management Unit (IMU), tracking staff attendance and service delivery. Digital monitoring and real-time reporting will enable immediate corrective action when needed. Field officers will conduct on-site visits and, where possible, virtual monitoring to maintain oversight. Dedicated helplines for public assistance have been activated and prominently advertised. The notification emphasized that strict action will be taken against any official failing to comply with these instructions.—APP

## Police, Rangers put on high alert amid heavy rains

KARACHI: Authorities across Sindh, including Karachi, have been placed on high alert following heavy rains, with both Sindh Police and Pakistan Rangers Sindh taking precautionary measures to ensure public safety and smooth traffic flow. According to a spokesperson for Karachi Police, Additional IGP Karachi Azad Khan directed deployment of additional police personnel in various parts of the city, particularly in low-lying areas and on major arteries, to facilitate citizens during the rain. Traffic police have been mobilised to maintain flow of vehicles, while police mobiles are actively patrolling to respond to any emergency situation. Meanwhile, Pakistan Rangers Sindh also announced that it had been put on full alert across the province to assist the public and ensure timely rescue operations in case of any untoward situation. Rangers spokesperson said coordinated arrangements had been finalised to deal with potential emergencies, including deployment of monitoring and rapid response teams in vulnerable and low-lying areas. Rescue and assistance measures have also been completed to tackle possible urban flooding during the ongoing rains, while close coordination has been established with relevant institutions. The Rangers are also assisting in security and traffic management at sensitive locations. Both authorities have urged citizens to avoid unnecessary travel, exercise caution, particularly in low-lying areas, and stay away from electrical installations and exposed wires. People have been advised to immediately contact helpline 15 or nearby security personnel in case of any emergency and rely only on authentic information, avoiding rumours.—APP

## Ramazan package to 1.05m distributed in KP

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has scaled up its Ramazan relief efforts, announcing that over 1.05 million people have received assistance under the provincial relief package, with 82 percent coverage achieved so far. Addressing a press conference here, Special Assistant to the Chief Minister on Information, Shafi Jan, said the remaining beneficiaries would be covered soon, adding that criticism by the opposition was unjustified as the government was delivering tangible relief amid challenging economic conditions. He said the government has introduced a special two-month relief package for motorcyclists, one of the

most affected segments due to rising fuel prices. Under the initiative, he said registered motorcyclists will receive Rs1,100 per month in fuel support, totaling Rs2,200, with over Rs3 billion allocated for the programme benefiting more than 1.6 million people. He added that the government has not increased fares of the Bus Rapid Transit system and has imposed a ban on the purchase of new vehicles to reduce expenditures. Meanwhile, Provincial Finance Minister Muzammil Aslam said that rising fuel prices have placed a heavy burden on the public, noting that significant increases in petrol rates have led to substantial additional financial outflows from consumers. He said the

province's financial position has improved, adding that while previously resources were barely sufficient for a few weeks' salaries, the government is now in a position to cover several months of expenditures. Commenting on Afghan refugees, the minister said there are currently 43 refugee camps in the province. He added that while the repatriation decision was taken by the federal government, the provincial government facilitated the process by providing over Rs1 billion in transport support.

He further said the government aims to transition towards a cashless and paperless economy within the next two years, while maintaining control over provincial debt and avoiding new borrowing.—DNA

## The Karachi admin removes fallen trees

The coordinated effort reflects the administration's commitment to maintaining public safety and ensuring swift recovery following adverse weather conditions

KARACHI: The Karachi administration, with the cooperation of local government institutions, has completed the removal of trees that fell during recent rainfall. Commissioner Karachi, Syed Hasan Naqvi, stated that the Karachi administration is on high alert to manage the current rain situation in the city, said a spokesperson on Thursday. All Deputy Commissioners and Assistant Commissioners are deployed in the field and, in coordination with relevant departments, are actively engaged in restoration efforts to address rain-related damages. According to the Commissioner's Office, the Commissioner himself is personally supervising post-rain restoration activities. The Deputy Commissioners have reported to Commissioner Karachi that all fallen trees within their respective districts have been cleared. The Commissioner has urged citizens that if any fallen tree remains unremoved at any location, they should report it immediately to the Commissioner Karachi's Control Room or via the rescue helpline number 1299. The Control Room is fully operational, and citizens can contact this number at any time to request assistance or relief services. Commissioner Karachi has instructed all Deputy Commissioners to remain in the field and closely monitor restoration work in their districts, ensuring that no fallen tree disrupts traffic flow or causes inconvenience to residents. The Commissioner's Office has also released a list of 51 trees removed from major and prominent thoroughfares include, Hijri Road near Bilal Mosque, Rab Medical Center, Gulshan-e-Iqbal, Jaffri Optics, Gulshan-e-Iqbal, Ahmed Saya Road, Akhtar Eye Hospital, Gulshan-e-Iqbal, Football Ground, Block 7, Gulshan-e-Iqbal, Shabbir Usmani Road near Disco Bakery, Block 4 City Lawn, Block 13-D, Gulshan-e-Iqbal, Near Homeland Apartment, Block 13-C, Gulshan-e-Iqbal, Mehran Apartment, Block 16, Gulshan-e-Iqbal, Z.A. Nazim Road, Block 17, Gulshan-e-Iqbal, Near County Garden, Metroville III Near Metro Park, Metroville III, Khadija Bukhari Park, Block 13-A-1, Al-Quds Mosque, Block 9, Shaheen Super Stores, Block 8, and several other locations. The coordinated effort reflects the administration's commitment to maintaining public safety and ensuring swift recovery following adverse weather conditions.—DNA

## Old Memories, New Lahore Nawaz, Punjab CM for restoring old roads, streets' names in Lahore

DNA

LAHORE: President Pakistan Muslim League-N Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif chaired a meeting of Lahore Heritage Areas Revival (LAHAR), and directed the authorities concerned to restore old names of roads and streets in Lahore, besides restoring old names of government colleges that have been granted university status by removing the suffix "University" from their names. They reviewed a report on restoration projects for the ancient and historical buildings in Lahore, as a pictorial overview of the progress on ongoing projects was presented in the meeting. They took a decision to establish a

Tollington Market, besides developing an "Everything Organic" cafe in Tollington Market. Relevant authorities briefed the participants of the meeting that a semi-covered area and shops will be built in Convent Garden, besides the construction of a two-storey underground parking lot for bikes and cars. They also apprised them on the New Museum Block project, under which world-class galleries will be set up, besides establishing galleries dedicated to antique weapons, coins, Chinese and Sikh heritages. They said that interactive screens in the New Museum Block will be a center of interest for the tourists. Qaid Pakistan Muslim League-N Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif directed the authorities

concerned to convert the route from Shah Alam Gate to Rang Mahal Chowk into a pedestrian walkway, besides restoring to their historic glory 08 ancient and historic thoroughfares of Lahore, including the inner royal thoroughfares of Bhati, Mori, Mochi, Shah Alam, Yakkhi, Masti, and Delhi Gate areas. They also directed them to establish a tourist information office at Akbari Gate, besides operating electric carts for tourists in these royal thoroughfares. They agreed to a proposal to restore Maryam Zamani Mosque and other historic buildings in the Walled City. Projects for the restoration of Mochi Gate, Akbari Gate, Yakkhi Gate, and Masti Gate were also presented by the relevant authorities. Both leaders directed to restore to its original condition Forti-

fied Wall of Lahore Fort. In Phase-I, the wall around Lahore Fort from Taxali Gate to Bhati Gate will be built, while the wall from Yakkhi Gate to Masti Gate will be built in Phase-II. President Pakistan Muslim League-N Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif reviewed restoring the clean water drain/channel around the Walled City, and agreed to a proposal to create a special wing of "Suthra Punjab" to clean and maintain historic buildings. They emphasised on the need to restore uniform historic design of the exteriors of old buildings, and directed the relevant stakeholders to restore Baoli Bagh in Shah Alami Chowk after clearing all encroachments. They also directed them to restore the porch adjacent to Nila Gumbad as per his-

toric architectural standards, besides establishing a "Nila Gumbad Cafe" for tourists there. They reviewed progress on the underground parking project at Nila Gumbad, and directed the relevant authorities to restore to their historic form First India Bank building, Evening Hall, and Pak Tea House located at Nila Gumbad Chowk. A report was also presented on 36 Kuchas/Galis (neighbourhoods/lanes) inside Lahore, named after the identification of skilled artisans/craftsmen. They also reviewed progress on Data Darbar expansion project, for which 18 kanals of land will be acquired. Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif directed the authorities concerned to compensate all affectees at the market rates.

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## National Days and Armed Forces Days

### MARCH

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

Turkish Airlines.....8494949



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- Cantonment Board 9270151-3



### Islamabad Metropolitan

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# HEC Cyber security curriculum in line with industry demands

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### DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan has announced updated, industry-aligned curriculum for BS, MS, and Associate Degree programmes in Cyber Security, to be implemented from Fall 2026. Developed in accordance with

the HEC Undergraduate Education Policy 2023, these programmes emphasise practical skills, hands-on training, internships, and industry-recognised certifications in the domain of cyber security to better prepare graduates for real-world cybersecurity challenges. The curriculum has been developed in consultation with subject experts from academia, industry and relevant ac-

creditation bodies. It offers recommended specialisations including Network and Infrastructure Security, Cryptography, Digital Forensics and Incident Response, Internet of Things and Embedded Systems Security, and Governance, Risk, and Compliance. The programmes also place strong emphasis on research, innovation, and ethical responsibility. Higher education institutions (HEIs) may

introduce additional specialisations based on the availability of faculty, infrastructure, and resources, subject to approval by their statutory bodies. The curriculum has been shared with higher education institutions and is available on the HEC website. Director General Dr. Amjad Hussain chaired the meeting of the National Curriculum Review Committee (NCRC) for Cyber Security.

# PTML enters 5G race with global standard

### DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani telecom operator Pak Telecom Mobile Limited (PTML), operating as Ufone, has formally entered Pakistan's 5G landscape with the largest share of the critical 3500 MHz frequency band, a global standard for 5G connectivity. Subject to regulatory approvals, the planned amalgamation of Telenor Pakistan into Ufone is expected to position the combined entity, MergeCo, as the largest spectrum holder in Pakistan's telecom industry. MergeCo will hold the largest and most diversified spectrum portfolio of 292.4 MHz, 8 MHz more than the closest competitor, spanning low, mid- and high-frequency bands. This will position the company to deliver top-quality digital services to both individual and enterprise customers. PTML (Ufone) followed an aggressive 5G acquisition strategy to secure the largest share in the 3500 MHz band, which is the global benchmark for 5G, alongside an additional 60 MHz in the 2600 MHz band to deliver blazing fast data speeds and a consistently superior user experience.

Moreover, PTML's 120 MHz contiguous spectrum will support wider 5G channels in line with global standards, translating into higher peak speeds, faster and more stable data throughput, and the ability to serve a significantly larger number of concurrent users, particularly in high-demand urban environments. Post amalgamation, the MergeCo's enhanced capacity will unlock a new generation of digital experiences, including seamless ultra-high-definition streaming, immersive cloud gaming, augmented and virtual reality applications, and faster access to a growing ecosystem of digital platforms and services serving both Individual and Corporate customers. Apart from clocking blistering speeds, MergeCo will lead in nationwide coverage. With 44.8 MHz of spectrum, the largest in the industry, in low-frequency bands such as 850 MHz and 900 MHz, the company is well-positioned to extend reliable internet services across rural and semi-urban areas. The MergeCo will leverage the industry's largest telecom footprint to deliver consistent coverage, improved quality, and enhanced user experience across Pakistan. This integration

will also uplift the overall 4G experience for customers nationwide.

Commenting on this milestone, President & CEO, PTCL & Ufone, Hatem Bamatraf said, "PTML now controls the largest share of the global standard 3.5 GHz spectrum, twice as much as any competitor, giving us the ability to set the benchmark for speed and performance in Pakistan. Especially post Telenor Pakistan integration, we will become the largest spectrum holder in the market, which will put us in a position to take digital services to the next level, delivering faster speeds, broader coverage, and experiences that truly matter to our customers. Our goal has always been to build a network that empowers individuals, businesses, and communities across the country, and today we are closer than ever to making that a reality." With its matchless spectrum assets and nationwide footprint, the MergeCo will deliver a seamless, inclusive, and high-quality 5G experience, while continuing Ufone's legacy as a proudly Pakistani brand committed to connecting and empowering communities.

# Kashmiri bangles gain popularity among Women

ISLAMABAD: With the festive spirit building ahead of Eid al-Fitr, markets across the capital are witnessing a surge in shoppers, as women throng stalls showcasing traditional Kashmiri bangles (churiyan). Known for their intricate craftsmanship and vibrant designs, these bangles have become a seasonal favourite, adding colour and elegance to Eid preparations. Prominent destinations for buying Kashmiri bangles include G-7, G-10, F-7 and F-10 Markaz, as well as stalls set up outside Centaurus Mall. Vendors report a noticeable increase in demand for Kashmiri-style bangles. Unlike standard glass bangles, these are often embellished with delicate stones, beads and hand-painted patterns, making them a preferred accessory for festive wear. Prices typically range between Rs500 and Rs1,000, while online rates start from over Rs2,000 and go up to Rs3,000. Talking to APP, Aman, a vendor with a stall in Sector G-10, said that Kashmiri bangles are in high demand this Eid season. "New designs featuring pastel shades and minimalist embellishments are especially popular among young women," he said. He further shared that the trend gained momentum after social media influencers heavily promoted Kashmiri bangles, creating significant hype around the product. "Other accessories in high demand include Kashmiri ear cuffs and Kashmiri jhumkas. Floral 'dream' claw catchers are also popular among women visiting these stalls," he added. Ali, another vendor, encouraged people to set up stalls featuring such accessories, describing it as a profitable business opportunity during the Eid season. Shiza, a university student and resident of Sector F-7, told APP that the appeal of Kashmiri bangles lies in their blend of tradition and versatility. "These bangles perfectly complement both eastern and fusion outfits. They offer a unique, handcrafted feel that you don't get with regular bangles," she said. She added that the trend is gaining momentum through social media, where influencers showcase Eid outfit inspirations featuring Kashmiri bangles. "As a result, younger buyers are increasingly drawn to the accessory, blending cultural heritage with modern fashion sensibilities," she noted. Atia, another visitor, said she purchased Kashmiri bangles for herself and her two young daughters. She selected a multi-shaded set that included traditional Kashmiri bangles, primarily in golden tones, while similar designs were also available in dull gold, metallic and silver finishes. She described the bangles as unique and versatile, praising their fine quality, elegant appearance and the impressive variety available. Retailers have responded by expanding their collections and offering customised sets to match specific outfits. Some shops are also taking pre-orders to manage the growing demand in the final days before Eid. With the last week of Ramadan expected to bring even larger crowds to markets, traders remain optimistic about strong sales. For many women in the capital, Kashmiri churiyan have become more than just an accessory—they are now an essential part of Eid celebrations, symbolising tradition, festivity and personal style.—DNA

# 2 vehicles seized as fare checks intensify

ISLAMABAD: As Eid-ul-Fitr approaches, a large number of passengers are gathering at bus terminals to travel to their hometowns, prompting action by the district administration. Officials of the district administration have stepped up monitoring to ensure transporters follow the official fare list, with 2 vehicles taken into custody during late-night inspections. Authorities said enforcement teams are working to control overcharging and maintain order at bus stands.

On the instructions of the Deputy Commissioner of Islamabad, Assistant Commissioners carried out surprise inspections at bus terminals late at night. During these visits, officials met bus stand managers and spoke directly with passengers to review the situation on ground. The inspections focused on checking whether transporters were following the approved fare list issued by the administration. During the operation, two vehicles were found picking up passengers from outside designated bus terminal areas. Both vehicles, along with their staff, were taken to the police station for violating regulations. Officials said such actions are part of ongoing efforts to ensure that all transport activities remain within legal limits. The Deputy Commissioner Islamabad said that complaints of overcharging usually increase as Eid approaches. He stated that it is the responsibility of transporters to strictly follow the official fare list. He warned that any violation would lead to action against both the vehicle and its staff. To assist the public, the district administration has displayed contact numbers at all bus terminals. These numbers are meant to help citizens report any cases of overcharging or other issues without delay—APP

# PIPS implements austerity, energy conservation steps

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS) has implemented a comprehensive set of measures aimed at ensuring fiscal discipline, operational efficiency, and responsible utilisation of public resources, on the same lines as notified and adopted by the Senate and National Assembly Secretariats. On the direction of the Chairman of the Senate/President of the PIPS Board of Governors, the institute has adopted a four-day working week (Monday to Thursday), while introducing a hybrid working model whereby 50% of staff will perform duties from the office and 50% will work remotely on a rotational basis. Employees working from home will remain fully accessible through digital communication platforms and may be required to report to the office on short notice, ensuring uninterrupted institutional functioning. Significant steps have also been taken to promote energy conservation. These include a target of achieving up to 70% reduction in energy consumption through minimising unnecessary use of electricity and ensuring that official meetings, trainings, and events are scheduled during daylight hours. Foreign tours are banned, and international meetings are being held virtually.

# Eid security, traffic plan finalized for Islamabad

ISLAMABAD: Capital Development Authority (CDA), Muhammad Ali Randhawa. The meeting was attended by Inspector General (IG) Islamabad Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad Irfan Nawaz Memon as well as senior officers from the district administration and Islamabad Police. The meeting reviewed measures to ensure foolproof security on the occasion of Chand Raat and Eid-ul-Fitr in the Federal Capital, Islamabad. During the briefing on security and law and order arrangements in the Federal Capital, Islamabad, the meeting was informed that Shakarparian National Park, Lake View Park, and Daman-e-Koh Park have been declared family parks from March 20 to 23 on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr, while F-9 Park will remain open to the public on Eid-ul-Fitr. Briefing the meeting, it was said that security has been further tightened at entry and exit points of the City, including checkpoints and sensitive locations established in the City. Similarly, a comprehensive security plan has been devised regarding Eid gatherings at Eidgahs, markazi mosques and Imambarghahs. The meeting was further informed that a special traffic plan has been devised,



particularly for Faisal Mosque for the Eid-ul-Fitr gatherings. Chief Commissioner Islamabad and Chairman of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) Muhammad Ali Randhawa directed that effective coordination with the Rawalpindi administration be ensured to control traffic from Murree on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr. He said that all Assistant Commissioners and Magistrates in their respective sub-divisions, should perform their

duties as one unit in collaboration with Islamabad Police and CDA. The meeting directed special traffic and security arrangements around all marakiz, commercial centers, and shopping malls on the occasion of Chand Raat. Inspector General (IG) Islamabad Police, Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi said that ensuring security is the top priority in this regard, complete coordination between security and traffic police will be ensured.—DNA

# Vibrant reflection of Pak-China everlasting friendship at exhibition

ISLAMABAD: A "China-Pakistan Art Exhibition" was organized through the collaboration of China Media Group and the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA), in the context of the enduring friendship between Pakistan and China and the 75 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The event was graced by the Minister of State for Federal Education and Professional Training, Ms. Wajaha Qamar, as the Chief Guest. In her address, she stated that the relationship between Pakistan and China is not limited to strategic or diplomatic dimensions but is also deeply rooted at the people-to-people level, where strong cultural and civilizational harmony exists. She noted that this exhibition beautifully reflects that connection through colors and artistic expressions. She further emphasized that such cultural initiatives not only strengthen bilateral ties but also help educate the younger generation about the significance of this historic relationship. On this occasion, the Cultural Counsellor of the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan, Mr. Chen Peng, attended as the Guest of Honour. In his remarks, he said that the "China-Pakistan Art Exhibition" reflects the 75 years of diplomatic relations and the timeless friendship between the two countries, founded on mutual trust, cultural harmony, and sustained cooperation. He added that through fine arts, the exhibition highlights the shared cultural heritage and creative expression of both nations, while promoting mutual understanding and closeness, thereby further strengthening Pak-China friendship.—APP

## Briefs

## CDNS touches Rs 1t savings inflows

ISLAMABAD: The Central Directorate of National Savings (CDNS) has attained Rs 1 trillion in savings inflows from July 1st to March, 18th of the current fiscal year 2025-26, achieving over 76.92 Percent its annual target and reflecting steady progress in promoting a savings culture in the country. According to officials, the CDNS has set an overall savings inflows target of Rs1.3 trillion for FY 2025-26. The inflows recorded so far indicate encouraging public participation in national savings schemes during the first half of the fiscal year. Similarly, the CDNS has fixed a target of Rs50 billion for investments in Islamic savings instruments during the current fiscal year to support the growth of the Islamic economy, a senior CDNS official told APP on Thursday. Sharing details of previous performance, the official said National Savings had set an annual target of Rs1.65 trillion for FY 2024-25, alongside a Rs170 billion target for Islamic finance investments, both aimed at strengthening the savings culture and expanding Shariah-compliant financial options. In response to a question, he said the CDNS realised Rs1.742 trillion in fresh bonds during FY 2023-24, surpassing 100 per cent of the annual target. National Savings had set a target of Rs1.7 trillion for that year, and exceeding it was an encouraging sign of public confidence. The CDNS had also achieved its target of Rs1.6 trillion in fresh bonds in FY 2022-23, which was Rs200 billion higher than the Rs1.3 trillion target set for FY 2021-22. The savings target for FY 2021-22 was later reviewed upward to Rs1.4 trillion in view of market trends and the objective of further improving the national savings culture. The official said institutional reforms were underway in the CDNS, with new initiatives, innovations, and policy measures being introduced to enhance efficiency and expand outreach across the country.—APP

## ITP deploys 520 officers

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) has devised a special traffic plan for Chand Raat and Eid-ul-Fitr, deploying over 520 traffic officers at major roads, commercial centers and recreational spots to ensure smooth flow of traffic. An ITP official told APP on Thursday that special traffic squads would be present at various locations to guide citizens and manage traffic effectively during the festive days. He said that special help desks have also been established in markets to assist citizens, while student volunteers would be deployed at different locations to facilitate the public and ensure implementation of traffic rules. The official added that indiscriminate crackdown would be launched against one-wheeling and hooliganism on public roads during Chand Raat and Eid days. Chief Traffic Officer Captain (R) Hamza Humayun would personally supervise all arrangements to ensure effective implementation of the traffic plan.—APP

## Pakistan firms eye new opportunities in IT

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani firms and freelancers said this week they were eyeing fresh opportunities in the information technology sector, noting that the ongoing Middle East conflict, despite economic uncertainties, has driven the demand for cost-effective services higher. The war in the Middle East involving the US, Israel and Iran has disrupted key energy shipping routes, driven global oil prices higher and created general economic uncertainty in the Gulf region. Sajjad Syed, chairman of the Pakistan Software Houses Association (P@SHA), said that despite the broader economic slowdown in Gulf nations, demand for cybersecurity services in the region has surged. Pakistan's IT exports surged to a record \$3.8 billion in the 2024-25 fiscal year, according to official data, with the momentum carrying into the current fiscal year. Exports rose 20 percent to \$2.98 billion during the July-February FY2025-26 period compared with the same period last year. Syed noted that the US and the Middle East together account for around 75 percent of Pakistan's IT market, including software houses and freelancers. He said that while both regions face econom-

## Pakistan EPS Center and OEC discuss cooperation

Under the Employment Permit System (EPS), employers receive referrals of job seekers through the computerized system operated by the competent local employment center for each workplace

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Head of the Pakistan EPS Center, held a meeting with OEC regarding the Employment Permit System (EPS) and the points-based selection system. The main topic of the meeting was the efforts of both institutions to expand the dispatch of Pakistani workers in the future. During the meeting, the Center Head responded to questions frequently raised by job seekers as follows. 1. Low Referral Ratio for Pakistani Job Seekers Under the Employment Permit System (EPS), employers receive referrals of job seekers through the computerized system operated by the competent local employment center for each workplace. Based on employers' labor demand,

three times the number of workers to be hired are recommended, and the employer makes the final selection of workers with whom to conclude labor contracts. No other institution or individual is involved in this process. Workplaces in Korea tend to prefer workers with a higher level of Korean language proficiency in order to facilitate early adaptation, improve productivity, and prevent industrial accidents. The Pakistan EPS Center expects that if more Pakistani job seekers with strong Korean language ability are sent to Korea, the excellence of Pakistani workers will become more widely recognized over time, thereby helping establish a virtuous cycle of entry in the long term. 2. Long-Term Non-Referral on the Job Seeker Roster Job seeker rosters are recommended through the computerized

system according to employers' labor demand, with three times the number requested being referred, and no other institution or individual can intervene in this process. In addition, among candidates who meet employers' demand, those who have been on the roster for a longer period are given priority for recommendation. 3. Selection Process and System Operation Under the Points-Based Selection System, successful candidates are determined strictly in order of highest scores within the final quota, based on the results of the first-stage Korean Language Test and the second-stage Skills Competency Assessment. No other factors are involved. In addition, starting this year, the cut-off score for the Korean Language Test in the manufacturing sector will be raised to 60 points. While the basic skills component

of the Skills Competency Assessment will be simplified, the interview component and its weighting will be expanded in order to strengthen interview-based evaluation. 4. Addition of New Job Seekers While Existing Rosters Remain Unadmitted Since the COVID-19 pandemic, a large number of workers have already been sent to Korea, and the pace has recently shown signs of temporary moderation. Accordingly, the Foreign Workforce Policy Committee of the Republic of Korea has adjusted the entry quota, and the Ministry of Employment and Labor and the Human Resources Development Service of Korea plan to reduce the selection quota. 5. Differences in Selection Policy or Management Standards by Country Except for differences in the industries subject to selection, all other standards and procedures are applied equally.



ISLAMABAD: Chairperson BISP Senator Dr. Rubina Khalid called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif in Islamabad.

## High cost of doing business major economic obstacle

ISLAMABAD: Business leader and former president of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce, Shahid Rasheed Butt, said that despite decades of trying different economic policies, public incomes continue to fall. With per capita income staying around \$1,500, true prosperity remains out of reach for most people. He said policymakers often declare GDP growth as a success, but real development is about the income and quality of life of ordinary citizens. Pakistan's economic progress has been limited by rapid population growth, low productivity, and other structural problems, which leave people burdened by rising inflation. Shahid Rasheed Butt explained that economic growth and economic development are different. GDP shows how large the economy is but does not indicate how income is shared among people. He noted that rising prices for food, transportation, and energy have added to public hardships, while rural and underdeveloped areas still lack enough healthcare, education, and basic services.—DNA

## Rs103m spent on internet connectivity

ISLAMABAD: An amount of Rs103 million has been spent on providing internet connectivity to 1,078 public schools in Punjab under the ongoing education reforms aimed at strengthening the digital learning infrastructure. According to official documents available with Wealth Pakistan, internet billing worth Rs103.488 million was allocated to ensure internet connectivity in these schools, enabling students and teachers to access online educational resources and digital learning platforms. The target has been successfully achieved. This initiative is part of broader reforms introduced under the ASPIRE program (2022-23 to 2024-25), which focuses on improving school infrastructure, introducing modern technology, and strengthening digital education across public schools. The provision of internet services is expected to play a key role in supporting online teaching, teacher training programs and access to digital content, particularly after the growing reliance on technology in the education sector. The document shows that the ASPIRE programme carries a total allocation of Rs6,539.759 million, with overall progress reaching 67% completion. Among the major components, construction of 2,401 classrooms accounts for the largest share, with an allocation of Rs5,232 million, while provision of furniture for these classrooms, costing Rs569 million, has been partially achieved. The programme also includes rehabilitation of toilets in 3,258 girls' schools. In addition, digital infrastructure efforts cover the establishment of 138 new IT laboratories and revamping of 1,078 existing labs, along with installation of smart LED systems in 923 schools. The initiative has also provided online training to 32,000 teachers to support digital and distance learning.—DNA

## DIG inspects Safe City camera sites

ISLAMABAD: Director General Safe City/Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Traffic Muhammad Haroon Joiya visited the Safe City Islamabad expansion project camera sites in New Blue Area to review progress on ongoing development work. An official told on Thursday that the DIG Joiya, accom-

panied by Deputy Director OFC Wasif Sarwar and other team members, inspected various camera installation sites under the expansion project. He said that during the visit, Muhammad Haroon Joiya reviewed the pace and quality of work and issued directions to complete the construction and installation work at the earliest. The official added that the expansion project aims to enhance surveillance coverage and strengthen security monitoring in the federal capital through modern technology. Joiya emphasized that timely completion of the project would play a vital role in improving public safety and operational efficiency of Islamabad Police.—APP

## PAL chairperson condoles Sameena demise

ISLAMABAD: Chairperson of the Pakistan Academy of Letters (PAL), Prof. Dr. Najeeba Arif, has expressed profound grief over the passing of celebrated fiction writer, novelist, poet, and essayist Sameena Syed. In her condolence message, Prof. Dr. Najeeba Arif said that Sameena Syed's valuable contributions to Urdu and Punjabi literature will never be forgotten. "Her versatile literary talent is an irreparable loss to the literary community," she added. She prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul and extended her heartfelt condolences to the family, wishing them patience and strength during this difficult time. Born in Pakpattan, Sameena Syed was associated with the teaching profession for many years and served as Vice President of the literary organization Seva International. She also wrote numerous radio plays and regularly recorded short stories for broadcast. Her literary works appeared in national and international journals, including Bayaz, Adab Dost, Duniya-e-Adab, Takhleeg, Mafahim, Fanoos, Sha'er, Urdu Digest, Deedban, and Salas. Her notable publications include Ruddad-e-Mohabbat (short stories), Kahani Safar Mein Hai (short stories), Hija Ke Bahao Mein (poetry collection), Raat Noon Dako (Punjabi stories), Jaan Nisar Dost (translation of the English novel The Devoted Friend), Dr. Yasin Aatir: Ishq Waseela Se Riazat Tak (booklet), Same Maat Hai (poetry collection), Zan-e-Zindagi (novel), and Nayaab Hain Hum (essays, under publication). The literary fraternity has voiced deep sorrow at the demise of Sameena Syed, whose writings enriched Urdu and Punjabi literature.—DNA

## Strict arrangements ordered in Galiyat

NATHIAGALI: Director General Galiyat Development Authority (GDA) Muhammad Fawad has directed hotel owners to provide quality accommodation at reasonable rates and maintain high standards of cleanliness for tourists during the upcoming Eid holidays. Chairing a meeting with the Hotel Association Galiyat, he emphasized ensuring basic facilities including clean rooms, hot water, and improved services to facilitate both domestic and foreign visitors. The DG said a large influx of tourists is expected in Galiyat during Eid, stressing that the hotel industry must play its role in providing a safe and pleasant experience. He also reviewed arrangements during a visit to Galiyat, inspecting control rooms, tourist facilitation centers, parks, sanitation, and public washrooms. Officials accompanying him included Director Administration Noor-ul-Haq, Director Tourism Usman Khan, and Assistant Director Technical Syed Asad Shah. Muhammad Fawad directed field staff to remain fully active during Eid holidays and ensure maximum facilitation for tourists.—APP

## IRSA releases 79,500 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Thursday released 79,500 cusecs of water from various rim stations with inflow of 60,200 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in the River Indus at Tarbela Dam stood at 1451.38 feet which was 51.38 feet higher than the dead level of 1402.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam were recorded as 23,300 cusecs and 25,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in the Jhelum River at Mangla Dam was 1140.40 feet, which was 90.40 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded as 18,400 cusecs and 36,000 cusecs respectively.—APP

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## Israeli invasion would punish Lebanon, reward Hezbollah

MOHAMED CHEBARO

LEBANON and the Lebanese people have been here before. Israel has been here before too. Believe it or not, the Iran-aligned Hezbollah militia has also been here before, cornered and struggling for its domestic survival. In the past, Hezbollah has repeatedly been offered a lifeline by Israel's mis-conceived, misdirected and disproportionate attacks on Lebanon, instead of it holding the Assad regime or Iran to account. The Lebanese people have seen their country bombed and destroyed before. Once for hosting Palestinian resistance forces and time and again due to their nation being hijacked by Syria and its desire to resist and fight Israel through Lebanese armed groups. In 2005, the Assad regime handed the torch to Iran, which established a so-called axis of resistance and, through Hezbollah, hijacked the Lebanese state and put it at the service of its own agenda. Fast forward to 2026 and the Lebanese people had, before March 1, tried for 15 months to reclaim their sovereignty and independence, attempting to peacefully disarm Hezbollah. However, that dream became the latest to be shattered by Israeli shortsightedness and Hezbollah's emboldened, pro-Iranian, sectarian stance. As Israeli troops gather on the border in ever bigger numbers, this time Lebanon looks set to lose big. The salvo of missiles and drones launched by Hezbollah against Israel in support of a Tehran regime under deadly attack by the US and Tel Aviv has once again drawn Lebanon into something far bigger than this multicultural, multi-religious, small nation on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean. This time, despite assurances from the political leadership of Hezbollah that it would keep Lebanon neutral and save it from Tehran's anti-US, anti-Israel and anti-Arab calculations, the militia preferred to engulf the region in a ball of fire. The aim was purely to defend the Iranian regime, its despotic government and its revolutionary stance that has been exporting discord, meddling and fear throughout the Middle East and the world since its inception 47 years ago. As Israeli troops gather on the border in ever bigger numbers, this time Lebanon looks set to lose big. And it is no exaggeration to say that those leaving their villages in the south could be kissing goodbye to their land and the livelihoods they knew before March 2026, just like the many Palestinians who never returned home after 1948, 1967 or the Israeli genocide in Gaza. Hezbollah's military action on behalf of Iran is making Lebanon stare doom in the eye. This time, the gloves are off. No one is likely to prevent Israel from carving off parts of Lebanon and turning them into a security buffer until fur-



ther notice. The equation is simple: either the Lebanese government and people reign in, disarm and disband Hezbollah or Israel will empty villages and destroy livelihoods. This will not be designed and executed like previous Israeli incursions against the Palestinian forces and later Hezbollah in 1978, 1982, 1993, 1996, 2006 or 2024. The writing on the wall is the displacement of civilians from Christian and Muslim villages alike. This tells us that something new is cooking and it will not be far from the death and destruction dished out by Israel in Gaza since October 2023. Lebanon and the Lebanese people that support Hezbollah could change that. But the window of opportunity is very narrow. In the changing world we live in, the discord between superpowers means that the rules-based international order has been weakened and, as a consequence, it is possible no one will come to the rescue. The second-term version of US President Donald Trump believes that might reigns supreme, eroding the standing of multilateralism. The UN, even with the recent visit of Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to Beirut and his pleading for an end to the violence, has been unable to make a difference. The clout and guardrails offered by UN Security Council resolutions – which for a long time protected people's rights when all justice and reason was walked over – has withered. Unfortunately, pessimism is written all over Lebanon, the Middle East and the world at the moment, as bombs and missiles fly everywhere and inflamed rhetoric dominates. The displacement of civilians from Christian and Muslim villages alike tells us that something new is cooking. The initiative of Lebanese President Joseph Aoun is maybe the only way to avert the catastrophe that is about to befall Lebanon. He has proposed starting direct negotiations with Israel to achieve an immediate ceasefire and even go all the way to a peace settlement that protects Lebanon's independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty, meaning the country is ready to live in peace alongside Israel. Yes, the record of the current government is not very promising. It has tried, since Israel's last war with Hezbollah, to push the armed militia back to areas north of the Litani River. Prime Minister Nawaf Salam has pledged to ban all armed groups. But as Lebanon's diverse religious and sectarian fabric dictates, consensus, compromise and practical steps to disarm and dismantle Hezbollah's infrastructure remain elusive. As the clouds of yet another Israeli ground incursion gather on Lebanon's southern border, preceded by Israeli warnings for all civilians to leave their villages, Aoun and Salam are facing an existential situation that implores them to act and even risk civil peace. Those in Lebanon and across the region that still believe Hezbollah is a national Lebanese resistance movement are in for a surprise. The missiles and drones it launched against Israel and Cyprus were on the orders of Tehran. This time, the fallout awaiting Lebanon is going to be unprecedented. There is still time to avert that fate, but only if those Lebanese that support Iran for religious and ideological reasons put their national interests and their own survival first and refrain from blindly following Iran's orders. Only then can they and Lebanon as a whole prevent Israel's ground incursion and avoid a lethal blow to the country, its stability and its future territorial integrity and independence. The Lebanese should unite behind their flag and allow the government to gather all the weapons and infrastructure deployed in the country to the benefit of a foreign power and its agenda before it is too late.

## The Iran War Paradox: Israel Gains, America Bleeds

Qamar Bashir



Air traffic, once heavily routed through hubs like Dubai and Doha, is being diverted elsewhere, further eroding revenue streams. Tourism has collapsed, trade has slowed, and investor confidence has weakened. These economies, built on connectivity and stability, are now facing unprecedented disruption. And yet, amid this widespread devastation, Israel appears remarkably insulated. Its casualty figures remain comparatively low, and its infrastructure has sustained minimal damage relative to the scale of destruction elsewhere. More importantly, Israel is advancing its strategic objectives with striking effectiveness

AS the conflict enters its third week—approaching the twentieth day—an urgent and uncomfortable question is beginning to surface across policy circles, media debates, and public discourse: Who is the real beneficiary of this war? Beyond the fog of propaganda, beyond the daily casualty figures and battlefield claims, a clearer geopolitical picture is emerging—one that challenges conventional narratives and exposes a deeply asymmetric outcome.

At first glance, the war appears to be a brutal contest between the United States and Iran, with Israel positioned as a frontline ally. Yet, when the layers are peeled back, a different reality unfolds. Israel, despite limited direct losses, appears to be achieving long-standing strategic objectives. The United States, on the other hand, is bearing the overwhelming burden—militarily, economically, and diplomatically—while Iran, though heavily damaged, occupies a complex middle ground as both victim and resilient actor. Iran has undoubtedly suffered immense losses. Its military infrastructure has been degraded, key leadership figures targeted, and economic systems disrupted. Strategic assets—ranging from oil facilities to logistical networks—have been hit repeatedly. Civilian hardship is mounting, and the country's economic backbone is under unprecedented strain. In terms of physical destruction, human casualties, and systemic disruption, Iran stands as one of the primary victims of the conflict.

Yet, paradoxically, Iran has also demonstrated a degree of endurance that complicates the narrative of defeat. Its ability to disrupt shipping lanes, influence regional proxies, and impose costs on its adversaries has elevated its image as a power capable of asymmetric resistance. While materially weakened, Iran has not collapsed—nor has it surrendered strategic leverage. In contrast, the United States finds itself in an increasingly precarious position. The financial cost alone is staggering, with estimates suggesting expenditures approaching \$1 billion per day when accounting for military deployments, logistics, and operational support. Thousands of American personnel have been deployed across vast distances, stretching supply lines and complicating sustainment efforts. Casualties—both fatalities and injuries—are mounting, further intensifying domestic scrutiny.

More critically, the United States is experiencing a profound erosion of its global image. Long regarded as a stabilizing force and architect of a rules-based international order, Washington now faces accusations of unilateralism and overreach. The perception that it is enforcing its will through military dominance rather than diplomacy is damaging its credibility, particularly among allies and neutral states.

This reputational decline is most visible in the Middle East itself. U.S. bases across the region have come under sustained pressure, with several reportedly damaged or rendered less operational. Gulf states—once reliable partners—are increasingly questioning the value of hosting American military infrastructure. Rather than ensuring security, these bases have become potential targets, exposing host nations to heightened risks. The economic repercussions are equally severe. The disruption of the Strait of Hormuz—through which approximately 20% of global oil supply flows—has triggered a sharp spike in energy prices, with increases of up to 40% in some markets. Oil prices exceeding \$100 per barrel have strained global economies, particularly those heavily dependent on imports. Supply chains have been disrupted, inflationary pressures intensified, and growth trajectories derailed.

For many countries, the consequences are existential. Energy shortages are forcing governments to ration fuel, shut down industries, and curtail public services. Universities are closing, businesses are scaling back operations, and entire sectors are slowing to a crawl. The global economy—already fragile—is now facing a contraction driven by the very lifeblood of modern industry: energy. The Gulf states themselves are among the hardest hit. Nations such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain are grappling with a multifaceted crisis. Oil production facilities and refineries have been damaged or shut down. Airports and critical infrastructure have come under attack. Expatriate populations—the backbone of their economies—are fleeing in large numbers, creating labor shortages and economic instability.

Air traffic, once heavily routed through hubs like Dubai and Doha, is being diverted elsewhere, further eroding revenue streams. Tourism has collapsed, trade has slowed, and investor confidence has weakened. These economies, built on connectivity and stability, are now facing unprecedented disruption.

And yet, amid this widespread devastation, Israel appears remarkably insulated. Its casualty figures remain comparatively low, and its infrastructure has sustained minimal damage relative to the scale of destruction elsewhere. More importantly, Israel is advancing its strategic objectives with striking effectiveness. For years, Israel has sought to weaken regional adversaries, particularly Iran and its network of allies. This conflict has provided the conditions to do precisely that. Iranian capabilities are being systematically degraded. Regional actors are destabilized. The geopolitical focus has shifted away from Israel's own actions, allowing it greater operational freedom.

In Gaza, military operations continue with reduced international scrutiny. In the West Bank, territorial encroachments are accelerating. In southern Lebanon, in-

tensified strikes are being justified under the pretext of countering militant threats. With global attention diverted to the broader war, Israel is pursuing multiple objectives simultaneously—military, territorial, and political. Perhaps most significantly, Israel has succeeded in shifting the burden of the conflict onto the United States. Washington is now the face of the war, absorbing the financial costs, diplomatic backlash, and strategic risks. Israel, while deeply involved, operates with a degree of insulation that allows it to reap benefits without bearing proportional costs. When the hierarchy of impact is assessed, a stark picture emerges. Iran, in terms of physical destruction and economic damage, ranks among the most affected. The United States follows closely, bearing immense financial costs and suffering a decline in global standing. The Gulf states, once pillars of regional stability, are experiencing severe economic and security disruptions. The broader international community is grappling with energy shortages and economic contraction. At the very bottom of this hierarchy—least affected, yet most strategically advantaged—stands Israel.

This reality demands a fundamental reassessment of strategy, particularly in Washington. The United States must confront a difficult truth: it is investing enormous resources in a conflict that is yielding limited direct benefits while enabling another actor to achieve its long-term objectives.

History offers sobering lessons. From Vietnam to Iraq to Afghanistan, prolonged engagements driven by strategic overconfidence have resulted in costly outcomes and lasting reputational damage. The current trajectory risks repeating those patterns, with potentially even greater global consequences.

The path forward requires clarity, courage, and a willingness to recalibrate. Continuing down the current course in the name of credibility or face-saving would only deepen the quagmire. Instead, a strategic pivot—grounded in national interest rather than inertia—is essential. De-escalation, diplomatic engagement, and a redefinition of objectives must replace open-ended military commitment. The United States must ask not only how to win the war, but whether the war, as currently structured, is worth winning at all.

As the twentieth day approaches, the answer to the central question becomes increasingly clear. This is not a balanced conflict with shared gains and losses. It is a war in which one actor is quietly consolidating advantage while others bear the visible costs. Recognizing that reality is the first step toward changing it.

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

## Eid, Sacrifice, and the Sentinels of the Nation

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



Pakistan, situated in a region marked by enduring tensions, bears a burden that many other nations do not. There exist countries in the world whose borders are but lines upon maps, where neighbours exchange goodwill without suspicion, and where soldiers seldom confront the spectre of hostility. We, however, are not so fortunate.

EID arrives each year like a gentle breeze after a long season of trial, carrying with it the fragrance of forgiveness, reunion, and gratitude. It is a day when hearts soften, when differences are forgotten, and when families gather beneath one roof to offer thanks to Almighty Allah for the strength to endure and the blessings to rejoice. In every town and village, in every street adorned with lights and laughter, the spirit of Eid transforms ordinary hours into moments of profound happiness.

For those who live abroad, or who reside in distant cities in pursuit of livelihood, Eid holds a special longing. Many travel great distances, crossing oceans and deserts, boarding crowded trains and flights, only to embrace their parents, children, and siblings. They strive to double the joy of Eid by returning home, believing that no celebration is complete without the warmth of family. Their journeys reflect a universal truth: that the essence of Eid lies not merely in new garments or festive meals, but in togetherness.

Yet while millions rejoice within the safety of their homes, there are sons of the soil who stand watch where no festivity can reach them. They remain at the borders, on the seas, upon the icy heights of glaciers, and in the vast expanse of the skies, vigilant and resolute. They cannot partake in the embrace of their children nor sit beside aging parents at the Eid table. Their place is at the frontiers, guarding the trust of a nation. Pakistan, situated in a region marked by enduring tensions, bears a burden that many other nations do not. There exist countries in the world whose borders are but lines upon maps, where neighbours exchange goodwill without suspicion, and where soldiers seldom confront the spectre of hostility. We, however, are not so fortunate. Our eastern neighbour, India, and our

western neighbour, Afghanistan, present challenges that compel constant vigilance. History has taught us that complacency invites peril. Thus, our guards must remain ever alert, even when the rest of the nation bows in prayer and gathers in celebration.

These sentinels of the homeland do not merely perform a duty; they embody sacrifice. While children exchange gifts and laughter echoes through our homes, they scan horizons under a relentless sun or within biting cold. On snow-covered peaks and along restless shores, in silent watchtowers and roaring fighter aircraft, they uphold the sovereignty of Pakistan. Their celebration is not marked by festivity, but by steadfastness. Their joy lies in knowing that their compatriots may celebrate without fear.

It has long been a noble tradition that the chiefs of Pakistan's armed forces spend Eid among their troops at the borders. This gesture is not ceremonial alone; it is symbolic of unity between command and soldier, between leadership and sacrifice. By sharing a simple meal or offering prayers shoulder to shoulder with those stationed at the frontiers, they affirm that no rank is detached from the hardships of duty. Such moments strengthen morale and remind every soldier that the nation stands with him in spirit, even if distance separates them from their homes.

But our reflection on Eid must not end with those who stand guard today. We must also remember those who once stood where others now stand, and who gave the ultimate sacrifice. Across Pakistan are homes where the chair at the Eid table remains empty, where a mother's eyes search instinctively for a son who will never again cross the threshold, where a widow gathers her children and speaks of a father whose embrace they can recall only in memory. These are the

families of our martyrs, whose young lives were laid down so that the nation might endure.

For them, Eid is not untouched by sorrow. The call to prayer carries echoes of absence. The laughter of neighbours reminds them of what has been lost. Their loved ones will not return with sweets in their hands or smiles upon their faces. They will not join in the communal prayer nor exchange greetings beneath the open sky. Yet their sacrifice has woven itself into the fabric of our freedom. As a nation, we bear a collective responsibility toward these families. It is not enough to utter words of praise or to post messages of tribute. On the day of Eid, when we distribute gifts and extend hospitality, we should remember the homes of martyrs in our own neighbourhoods and cities. A simple visit, a shared meal, a moment of sincere gratitude can assure them that their sacrifice has not been forgotten. When we sit beside a grieving father or comfort a child who asks about his absent hero, we reaffirm that the blood shed for this land was not in vain.

Eid teaches us compassion, gratitude, and unity. Let us therefore celebrate not only with joy, but with consciousness. Let us pray for those who guard our borders, that they may return safely to their families. Let us honour those who have fallen, by standing beside their loved ones with humility and respect. And let us remember that the peace we enjoy, the laughter that fills our homes, and the freedom to bow in prayer without fear are secured by the vigilance and sacrifice of others. In doing so, our celebration of Eid will rise above mere festivity and become an expression of national solidarity. It will reflect a people who understand that happiness is sweetest when shared, and that gratitude is most meaningful when accompanied by responsibility.

## Briefs

## Trump: Israel won't attack Iran gas...

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the United States would "massively blow up the entirety of the South Pars Gas Field", Trump warned. The Iranian strikes on Qatar came as Abu Dhabi shut down operations at a gas facility due to falling debris from missile interceptions.

## US has lost control of its foreign...

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Albusaidi said such a course "is not what America's government wants. Nor do its people, who certainly do not see this as their war."

## EU vow to deal with energy crisis

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Iran began on February 28. "If that becomes structural, we're in deep trouble," Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever said of the energy price rise as he arrived at the summit. In the longer term, Europe is betting on replacing fossil fuels with local low-carbon energy production to end the bloc's exposure to volatile oil and gas prices.

## FO dismisses US official statements

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the US spy chief Gabbard had identified Pakistan among countries posing a growing strategic concern, warning that Islamabad's evolving long-range missile capabilities could potentially bring the American homeland within range. Presenting the 2026 Annual Threat Assessment before the Senate Intelligence Committee, Gabbard had also named Iran, China, Russia, and North Korea as nations actively developing new missile delivery systems, including both nuclear and conventional warheads, which put the US within range.

## Gabbard statement on Pak...

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nuclear doctrine was "India-specific, aimed at maintaining credible deterrence in South Asia, not projecting power globally". On Wednesday, Gabbard, presenting the 2026 Annual Threat Assessment before the United States Senate Intelligence Committee said, "Russia, China, North Korea, Iran and Pakistan have been researching and developing an array of novel, advanced, or traditional missile delivery systems with nuclear and conventional payloads, that put our Homeland within range." "Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile development potentially could include ICBMs with the range capable of striking the Homeland," she said. Gabbard said that the nations identified in the threat assessment report "will likely seek to understand US plans for advanced missile defence... for the purpose of shaping their own missile development programmes and assessing US intentions regarding deterrence."

## China, Russia...

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addressed through dialogue rather than further violence." The condemnation comes shortly after Iranian authorities confirmed Larjani's martyrdom in an Israeli airstrike overnight, marking one of the most significant losses for the Islamic Republic since the death of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei earlier in the war. Separately, Russian President Vladimir Putin described the incident as a "murder" that cannot be accepted. In a message conveyed through official channels and echoed by Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, Russia firmly condemned actions targeting the leadership of sovereign and independent Iran, calling it a grave violation.

## Pakistan calls for shielding Syria's fragile recovery

"Incidents inside Syrian territory have mainly involved the crashing of debris following interception of Iranian missiles and drones in Syrian airspace, causing civilian casualties, and one incident of shelling from Lebanon attributed to Hezbollah," he said

DNA

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 19 (DNA):Pakistan has underscored the need to safeguard Syria amid the alarming escalation in the Middle East—specifically the US-Israeli war on Iran and the conflict in Lebanon—now spilling into Syria and threatening its recovery, following the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime in late 2024. "In such a complex and volatile environment, it is imperative that Syria is insulated from these destabilizing developments as it gradually moves toward recovery and stabilization," Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, permanent representative of Pakistan to the United Nations, told the UN Security Council which debated the situation in Syria. In this regard, the Pakistani envoy underscored the need for continuing the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process to advance in a credible, inclusive and timely manner towards the completion of institutional arrangements, including legislative structures. "We look forward to the conclusion of the Parliamentary process in the Northeast, as well as appointment of the remaining seventy members of the legislature." Pakistan, he said, also supports the continued engagement and constructive role of the UN. Welcoming the January 30 agreement between the Government and the Syrian Democratic Forces, a Kurdish-led coalition of left-wing ethnic militias, as a con-

structive step toward national integration, Ambassador Asim Ahmad called for its effective implementation through sustained dialogue, mutual trust, and a commitment to avoiding actions that could undermine confidence. Recent steps taken by the Syrian Government, including institutional appointments, were encouraging. As regards the security transition, he said the integration of armed groups into unified national structures, effective border management, and intensified efforts to combat terrorism, including against Daesh must remain key priorities. The presence of foreign terrorist fighters continues to pose a serious threat and requires coordinated international attention. On the economic front, the Pakistani envoy noted improvement, but said it remains fragile. The lifting of sanctions provides legal space for state activity, banking, transport, energy, and reconstruction, but the recent regional developments could undermine these efforts. "The opening created by sanctions relief must be effectively utilized through strengthened institutions," he said. On the humanitarian front, the situation remains dire for millions of Syrians, he said, stressing the importance of scaling up early recovery efforts, including through adequate funding and support for basic services, infrastructure, and livelihoods. Israel, he said, must vacate the illegal occupation of the Syrian Golan, and fully re-

spect the 1974 Disengagement Agreement in line with relevant UN Security Council resolutions, including Resolutions 338 and 497. "Respect for Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity is imperative." Earlier, Claudio Cordone, the Secretary-General's Deputy Special Envoy for Syria, and Joyce Msuya of the UN humanitarian affairs office, OCHA, briefed ambassadors alongside Syrian Olympic athlete Yusra Mardini, a Goodwill Ambassador with the UN refugee agency, UNHCR. Cordone began by addressing how "the alarming regional escalation" is impacting Syria, which continues along the path to political transition more than a year after the overthrow of the Assad regime and 14 years of civil war. "Incidents inside Syrian territory have mainly involved the crashing of debris following interception of Iranian missiles and drones in Syrian airspace, causing civilian casualties, and one incident of shelling from Lebanon attributed to Hezbollah," he said. Israeli helicopter and drone operations in Syrian airspace have also increased, and Israeli forces continued to carry out incursions into Syrian territory. Furthermore, Israeli airstrikes on Lebanon have killed both Lebanese and Syrian citizens and forced roughly 140,000 people, mostly Syrian nationals, to cross into Syria in search of safety. "I reiterate our call in this context on Israel to fully respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, adhere

to the terms of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement, and refrain from any actions that could undermine Syria's stability and political transition," he said. The envoy commended the Syrian Government for its engagement with regional and international stakeholders to insulate the country from further escalation and ensure that its territory is not used in ways that could widen the conflict. Ms. Msuya, the UN Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, reported on the humanitarian aspects of the crisis. "For Syria, this escalation adds new strain at a fragile moment — one that still offers a genuine opportunity for progress," she said. She noted that falling debris has killed or injured several people, in addition to damaging property, while the scores of people who fled from Lebanon join some 1.5 million refugees who have returned from neighbouring countries since December 2024. Ms. Mardini — a member of the first refugee team to compete at the Olympic Games — described herself as a child of war. She said half of all children in Syria today have never known a single day of peace. Ms. Mardini emphasized that her homeland requires years of recovery that is not only physical. "Syria also requires reconciliation and societal recovery. A future where no religious sect divides us, and where no one group is favoured over another. We must break down the walls of division, not build new ones," she said.

## Conclusion of sports tournaments

AL-DHALE: The competitions of the second Ramadan tournaments for table tennis and chess, and the first for football for the Sprouts and Cubs categories, concluded at the Ittihad Na'wah Sports, Cultural, and Social Club in Juban District, Al-Dhale Governorate. The tournament, organized by the club, came within the general program of sports, cultural, and social Ramadan activities and events for the current year, funded and organized by the Ittihad Na'wah Sports Club and sponsored by the Deputy Minister of Youth and Sports, Nabeh Ali. The final match of the table tennis tournament brought together the duo Mohammed Al-Najjar and Ali Saleh Mithal, which Mohammed Al-Najjar decided with four consecutive sets, crowning him champion of the tournament and leaving the

runner-up position to his colleague Ali Mithal. In the chess tournament, the final match brought together Ali Al-Alfi and Ali Mithal, which Al-Alfi decided with a clean win, claiming the tournament title and leaving the runner-up position to player Mithal. As for the football tournament for the Sprouts category, in which four teams participated, the Al-Ahli team won over the Al-Shu'ala team in a penalty shootout (3-1) after the two regular halves ended in a 1-1 draw, crowning Al-Ahli with the tournament cup and leaving the runner-up cup to the Al-Shu'ala team. Al-Ahli player Mohammed Al-Khamri received the best player award, while Al-Shu'ala goalkeeper Munir Ali received the best goalkeeper award, and top scorer Mohammed Al-Abi received the

top scorer award. In the football tournament for the Cubs category, in which four teams also participated, the Al-Ta'awun team won over the Al-Tilal team in a penalty shootout (3-1) after the two regular halves ended in a goalless draw, crowning Al-Ta'awun with the tournament cup and leaving the runner-up cup to the Al-Tilal team. Al-Ta'awun player Mohsen Al-Asfour received the best player award, while Al-Tilal goalkeeper Hussein Dukhin received the best goalkeeper award, and Yahya Jard, Al-Ta'awun's goalkeeper, also received the best goalkeeper award, while Zaid Al-Mu'ir received the top scorer award. In conclusion, the President of the Ittihad Na'wah Sports Club, Mani' Al-Asfour, his deputy Hussein Al-Mallah, and club board members Mohsen Al-Asfour — Agencies

## Popular Osaka expo mascot's goods to remain on shelves

OSAKA: The organizer of the 2025 World Exposition in Osaka has recently decided to extend the sales of merchandise featuring the official Myaku-Myaku mascot for two more years, given the continuing popularity of the red-blue character. Sales of the goods were scheduled to end in March this year, but the expo association decided at a board meeting held on Monday to extend the period to the end of March 2028. From next month, companies that did not cosponsor or participate in the global event will be allowed to use the character design and the expo's official logo for a fee. According to the Japan Association for the 2025 World Exposition, merchandise sales totaled 129.1 billion yen (\$812 million), with 6.3 billion yen going into the association's coffers as license fees. "Widespread use of Myaku-Myaku, which reminds us of the expo, contributes to building on its legacy," Masakazu Tokura, head of the association, told a press conference after the board meeting. The expo, themed on ways to create a sustainable future society, was held for six months through October and drew more than 25 million visitors. Initially, Myaku-Myaku — a mysterious creature said to be born from the fusion of cells and water — was seen by some as creepy, with five eyeballs scattered around a bobbly, doughnut-shaped red ring, another eye on its tail and a dripping blue body. But it gained huge popularity once the expo opened. — Agencies

## No. of marriages in S. Korea rises 8.1% to 7-yr high in 2025

SEOUL: The number of marriages in South Korea increased 8.1 percent from a year earlier in 2025 to post the highest figure in seven years, government data showed Thursday. A total of 240,300 marriages were reported last year, up from 222,400 cases in 2024 and marking the third consecutive year of increase, according to the Ministry of Data and Statistics. The 2025 tally was similar to the pre-pandemic level of 239,200 cases posted in 2019. The number of marriages hovered around the 200,000 threshold from 2020-2023, as many couples postponed the event during the pandemic, before the tally rebounded to 222,000 in 2024. — APP

## A real possum appears among plush toy animals

MELBOURNE: On shelves crammed with cuddly toy native animals in an Australian airport gift shop, one fluffy possum stood out: Its big brown eyes were moving. A browsing passenger first spotted a living Australian brushtail possum peering out from among the kangaroos on the display shelf at the departure terminal shop at Hobart Airport in Tasmania state on Wednesday, an airport retail manager Liam Bloomfield said on Thursday. Above the possum were bunnies, marsupials with rabbit-like long ears, and dingoes, Australia's native dog. Beside the possum in the kangaroo section were Tasmanian devils, a growling carnivore that inspired the feisty Warner Bros. cartoon character Taz. "A passenger reported it to ... one of the staff members on shift who couldn't quite believe what she was hearing." — APP

## PHF congress meeting convened to amend Federation Constitution

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) has convened an important Congress meeting on Friday, March 27, 2026, in the federal capital, Islamabad. According to the official notice issued by the Pakistan Hockey Federation, the meeting will be held at the Pakistan Sports Board, Islamabad, commencing at 10:30 AM. The convening of this Congress session is in accordance with the relevant provisions of the PHF Constitution 2010, specifically Clauses 12.10 and 12.10.3. A detailed agenda has already been circulated to all members, covering key matters pertaining to the federation. All esteemed members of the PHF Congress are requested to ensure their participation in the meeting. The invitation and notice have been dispatched to all Congress members under the directions of PHF President Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani and Secretary General Syed Shakeel Shah, and signed by Captain (Retd) Farrukh Atiq Khan. The agenda for the session includes discussions on the organizational structure of hockey in the country, future strategic planning, and other significant issues. Congress members will be fully briefed and taken into confidence on these matters to guide the federation's path forward amid ongoing efforts to revive and strengthen Pakistan hockey. The Pakistan Hockey Federation remains committed to transparency, good governance, and the development of the sport at all levels. For further details, members are advised to refer to the official notice and agenda circulated by the federation.

## Parks to welcome visitors during eid holiday

Governor Salah urged garden and park owners and proprietors to pay attention to security and safety procedures, maintain cleanliness and general appearance, and facilitate citizens' access to services

IBB: A meeting in Ibb Governorate, chaired by Governor Abdulwahid Salah today, discussed the ongoing preparations to equip gardens and parks in the governorate, in preparation for welcoming visitors during the blessed Eid al-Fitr holiday. The meeting, which included the Director of Tourism in the governorate, Ghanem Awsaj, the Director of the Cleaning and Improvement Fund, Adel Omar, the Traffic Police Colonel, Mohammed Atef, and a number of garden, park, and tourist facility owners, touched upon the plans for preparation and readiness to welcome visitors and arrivals to the governorate during the Eid holiday. Those present approved the assignment of a field team from the Tourism Office to conduct visits during the Eid days, to ensure

the extent of gardens, parks, and tourist facilities' commitment to applying the regulations and procedures governing their work. In the meeting, Governor Salah stressed the necessity of increasing the pace of work and improving the level of services provided, to contribute to creating a suitable atmosphere for citizens to spend the Eid holiday. He pointed to the importance of intensifying efforts and working as one team to improve the general appearance of the governorate capital, enhance the level of cleanliness, and preserve the environment, especially during the Eid days, which witness density in movement and activity. The Governor stressed the necessity of completing the equipping of tourist resorts, and raising the level of commu-

nity awareness about the importance of maintaining the cleanliness of gardens, parks, and their contents, as they are public places for all citizens. He explained that the local authority is keen to enhance partnership with the private sector and provide necessary facilities to improve tourism services, reflecting the civilized image of the governorate and meeting the aspirations of visitors during the Eid holiday. Governor Salah urged garden and park owners and proprietors to pay attention to security and safety procedures, maintain cleanliness and general appearance, and facilitate citizens' access to services. For his part, the Director of the Tourism Office reviewed the general plan for equipping gardens and parks, which includes

improving the level of services provided to visitors, and implementing expansion works at the Ibb City tourist resort. Ghanem Awsaj pointed to the readiness of public and private gardens and parks to welcome visitors during the Eid days, with continued coordination with security agencies and relevant authorities to provide a suitable and safe atmosphere. In turn, the Director of the Cleaning and Improvement Fund reviewed the Fund's plan to welcome Eid al-Fitr, which focuses on doubling field efforts and raising the level of performance. Adel Omar explained that the plan includes increasing working hours in markets, streets, and public places that witness density in commercial activities, contributing to maintaining public cleanliness. — APP

## 5G rollout to boost youth innovation

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He also extended congratulations to Chinese officials associated with Zong and reiterated that Pakistan-China friendship would continue to grow stronger. He expressed hope that 5G technology would expand to all parts of the country, including urban and rural areas, and emphasized the need to move swiftly to enable youth to benefit from modern technological advancements. Minister for Information Technology, Shaza Fatima Khawaja said 480 MHz spectrum had been added to the system, compared to 274 MHz previously, which would significantly improve internet speeds in the coming months. She added that while 5G had been launched for the first time in Pakistan, 4G services would also see improvement. Chairman Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) Hafeez ur Rehman said Pakistan had become number one in the region in terms of spectrum capacity. Earlier, the prime minister witnessed the signing of license agreements by Jazz, Ufone and Zong.

## Islamic, Arab FMs urge Iran...

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together foreign ministers from Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Türkiye, and the United Arab Emirates. The ministers strongly condemned what they described as deliberate Iranian attacks using ballistic missiles and drones targeting civilian infrastructure, including oil facilities, desalination plants, airports, residential buildings, and diplomatic premises across Gulf Cooperation Council countries and beyond. They said such actions "cannot be justified under any pretext," and affirmed the right of affected states to defend themselves in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. Calling for immediate de-escalation, the ministers urged Iran to adhere to international law, international humanitarian law, and the principles of good neighborliness as a first step toward restoring stability and advancing diplomatic solutions. The statement also emphasized the need for Iran to comply with UN Security Council Resolution 2817, which calls for an immediate cessation of attacks and prohibits support, financing, or arming of affiliated militias in Arab countries. This includes groups such as the Houthi movement in Yemen and Hezbollah in Lebanon, which several regional governments accuse Iran of backing.

## Saudi Arabia holds meeting...

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military escalation in the region and continued consultation and coordination on achieving security and stability in the Middle East. The US and Israel attacked Iran on Feb. 28 and Iran has launched missiles and drones at its Arab neighbors, Israel and US assets in the Arabian Gulf region. Talking earlier to reporters, Prince Faisal said the Kingdom "reserves the right to take military action if deemed necessary," warning that continued Iranian escalation would carry political and moral consequences. Tehran attacked a major energy hub in Qatar on Wednesday after an Israeli strike against Iran's South Pars gas field. QatarEnergy said several of its LNG facilities were subjected to missile attacks in the early hours of Thursday, causing sizeable fires and extensive damage. Qatar's interior ministry said on Thursday two fires at Ras Laffan industrial area had been fully contained, and no injuries were reported. In a post on social media, US President Donald Trump blamed Israel for the South Pars attack and promised to punish Iran severely if it attacked Qatar again.

## Briefs

## UAE support package lifts lenders shaken by Iran war

DUBAI: Shares of UAE-listed banks jumped on Wednesday after the Central Bank of the UAE announced measures to support their liquidity as the Iran crisis hits Gulf economies. The package detailed by the CBUAE in a statement dated March 17 includes enhanced access to reserve balances of up to 30 percent of the cash reserve requirement and term liquidity facilities in both UAE dirhams and US dollars. Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank chief economist Monica Malik said the measures echoed the central bank's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. "Again, we see this package aimed at ensuring that banks have sufficient liquidity and that credit continues to flow to the real economy. We see the package as supporting macro stability and broader economic confidence," she said. Dubai's Emirates NBD and Abu Dhabi Islamic Bank jumped over 9 percent on Wednesday morning before paring gains, while ADCB rose as much as 6.6 percent. First Abu Dhabi Bank, the UAE's biggest bank by assets, closed down 3.6 percent. FAB is perceived as a defensive pick compared to its peers, said Naresh Bilandani, Jefferies head of CEEMEA equity research, noting the stock remains Jefferies' preferred UAE exposure. Stocks of banks based in the UAE have suffered double-digit losses since the US-Israeli war on Iran began on Feb. 28. The conflict, which shows no signs of de-escalation, has thrown global energy markets and transport networks into chaos and has quickly become regional, with multiple attacks by Iran on Dubai and other countries across the Gulf. Some lenders have temporarily closed branches in the country.—APP

## GCC insurers seen as resilient

RIYADH: Insurers across the Gulf are expected to maintain stable credit profiles despite the ongoing Middle East war, with strong capital buffers helping absorb market volatility and limiting exposure to war-related claims, according to S&P Global Ratings. In a report, the agency said most rated insurers in the Gulf Cooperation Council have sufficient financial strength to withstand near-term shocks because claims linked to the conflict are either heavily reinsured or excluded under standard policies. The rating agency, however, warned that there could be a slowdown in revenue growth for most GCC insurance markets in 2026, following double-digit growth in recent years. The analysis added that the extent of the slowdown will likely vary by market and depend on the duration of the war. This comes after US-based credit rating agency AM Best said earlier in March that the immediate impact of the ongoing Middle East conflict remains manageable for global reinsurers, while warning that a prolonged crisis could challenge the sector's resilience. In its latest report, S&P Global Ratings credit analyst Emir Mujkic said: "We expect that our ratings on GCC insurers will remain broadly stable in the short-to-medium term." He added: "This is thanks to robust earnings generation in recent years, which has contributed to a significant buildup of capital buffers." S&P Global added that it is still too early to assess the full financial impact of the war in the Middle East on the GCC insurance sector, given the rapidly evolving situation and uncertainty over how long the conflict will last. The agency's base-case scenario remains that the military confrontation will be relatively short-lived, with the most intense phase lasting around two to four weeks, although broader spillovers and intermittent security incidents could extend beyond that period. Earlier this month, S&P Global said in a separate report that banks operating in the Gulf region are expected to remain resilient in the short term because of strong financial buffers. The maritime insurance industry has been forced to make changes to its offerings in light of the conflict.—APP

## Major incentives to attract transshipment vessels

"The new incentive structure provides significant relief in port dues and berthing charges based on performance, effective from March 18, 2026," Junaid Chaudhry said

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry here on Thursday unveiled a package of fiscal incentives aimed at attracting foreign-flagged transshipment vessels to Karachi Port in a bid to strengthen its position as a regional maritime hub. Chaudhry announced the measures while chairing a high-level meeting, describing them as part of a broader strategy to boost shipping activity and reward environmentally sustainable practices. "The new incentive structure provides significant relief in port dues and berthing charges based on performance, effective from March 18, 2026," Junaid Chaudhry said. Under the revised framework, vessels carrying dry bulk export cargo will receive a 60% concession on port dues, wharfage and storage charges under the Karachi Port Trust (KPT) tariff. The minister said incentives linked to the number of monthly ship



calls had been significantly enhanced compared to previous policies, while the minimum transshipment cargo requirement had been reduced from 10% to 7.5%. "This step is expected to encourage more carriers to utilise Karachi Port," he said, add-

ing that the base discount has been increased from 5% to 20%, with further incentives rising from 2% to 5% for every additional 5% increase in transshipment volumes. According to the new policy, vessels carrying transshipment cargo equivalent to 50% of their

gross registered tonnage (GRT) will be eligible for a flat 60% discount on port dues. The rate has been set at US \$1.18 per GRT. In addition, large container ships with at least 25% transshipment cargo will be eligible for up to a 50% discount on applicable wet

charges. Ships using environmentally friendly fuels will receive an extra 5% reduction in berthing charges. Junaid Chaudhry said the initiative reflected the government's proactive approach to maritime trade and aimed to position Karachi as a cost-effective and efficient gateway for global shipping.

By incentivising both operational scale and environmental responsibility, KPT is driving the modernisation of Pakistan's blue economy," he said.

## Four decades of Damien Hirst on display

SEOUL, Mar 19 (KYODO/APP): Most Koreans, even those new to art, may have heard of Damien Hirst, or stumbled upon his characteristically provocative work online. Few, however, have had the chance to see it in person. That is partly what makes the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA) exhibition significant – it marks the British artist's first solo show in Asia, bringing together a sweeping body of work, including pieces that have rarely been seen in public. "The exhibition here, I think, showcases about 40 years of my art making career," Hirst said during a press conference held at the museum Wednesday. "The curators have done an amazing job hanging it very beautifully and very economically," he added. At the press event, the MMCA's curators highlighted the artist's unwavering commitment to exploring themes of death, immortality, human desire, and faith in science and medicine, and his relentless drive to push those boundaries even further. The upcoming exhibition features some 50 works spanning his career, from early pieces to his latest creations. Some of his most iconic works to be on display include "For the Love of God," a platinum cast of a human skull encrusted with diamonds, and the "Natural History" series preserving real animals in tanks of formaldehyde. On "The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living," his 1991 work featuring a shark preserved in a formaldehyde-filled tank, the museum described the process of bringing it to Korea as "incredibly hard," from contract negotiations to shipment and installation. According to the museum, this marks only the fourth time the work has been on public view since its creation, following its debut at the Saatchi Gallery in London in 1992, a showing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art from 2007-10 and its appearance at Hirst's retrospective at Tate Modern in London in 2012. Another highlight of the exhibition is a recreation of the artist's "River Studio" in London, featuring his works in progress – paintings that have never been seen by the public before. An artist's note posted on the wall offers a rare glimpse into his thoughts on painting – his admiration for Henri Matisse, his ongoing search for what he truly wants in his work, his determination to keep creating and a renewed sense of purpose in the art of painting. "The paintings here are unfinished and works in progress, much like ourselves and so many things in life," he wrote. "Humans are like a river, and that river runs through all paintings and through us. Perhaps the river is our life, or our death.—DNA

## Trump may push Japan for help with Iran war

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump may use a White House meeting with Japan's prime minister on Thursday to press for help in the war on Iran, placing Sanae Takaichi in an awkward position as Tokyo weighs how much support it can provide. Trump has lashed out at allies for their lukewarm support for the US-Israeli military campaign and said the US doesn't need any help. However, he is still pushing for more ships to clear mines and escort tankers through the Strait of Hormuz, largely closed by Iran in the conflict. Trump hosts Takaichi for a long-scheduled White House visit aimed at burnishing the decades-old security and economic partnership between Washington and its closest East Asian ally. Takaichi has sought to move Japan away from a pacifist constitution imposed by Washington after World War Two, but with the Iran war unpopular at home, she has so far not offered to assist in clearing the Strait of Hormuz. US allies such as Germany, Italy and Spain have ruled out participating in any Gulf mission, angering Trump. Takaichi told the Japanese parliament on Monday that Japan had received no official request from the United States but was checking the scope of possible action within the limits of its constitution. "This has suddenly become a very fraught visit for Takaichi," said Chris Johnstone, a former White House official who is now a partner at the Asia Group consultancy. "She was hoping to be effectively the last voice in the room that could influence the president's approach to his trip to China. Instead, she's going to be basically the first ally in the room responding to Trump's request for assistance in the Middle East." Trump heaped praise on Takaichi during a visit to Tokyo after she became Japan's first female prime minister last year. Japanese officials said she hoped to remind him during their meeting of the dangers posed by a regionally assertive China – especially to Taiwan – ahead of his planned visit there.—APP

## Iranian Americans mark Persian New Year with mix of sadness, joy

LOS ANGELES: After thousands of Iranian demonstrators were killed in a January crackdown, Shima Razavi Gacek wanted to keep alive her family's favorite springtime holiday traditions but didn't feel like throwing her annual house party with a roaring bonfire ahead of Nowruz – the Persian New Year. Instead, the 46-year-old Los Angeles resident organized a vigil Tuesday night at a local park, where the photos of slain protesters were displayed and dozens of Iranian Americans lit candles and took turns hopping over tea lights in a version of a fire-jumping tradition known as Chaharshanbe Suri. "It is such a beautiful and joyous time of year," said Razavi Gacek, who has lived in the United States since she was 5. "This year, it's not, but we need our community more than ever." Iranian Americans are marking Nowruz this year with a mix of somber celebrations and the traditional flowers, music and dancing. Many communities canceled festivities following the crackdown on protesters in January, while others have organized smaller, quieter versions of the usually joyous celebration. The holiday comes less than a month after US and Israeli forces attacked Iran, killing the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Since then, conflict has spread throughout the region. Nowruz means "new day" in Farsi, the language typically spoken in Iran. The holiday that coincides with the spring equinox is rooted in Zoroastrian tradition dating back millennia and is celebrated from Afghanistan to Turkey. Iranians of diverse religious faiths mark Nowruz even though the hard-line Iranian regime has at times discouraged festivities. It is also celebrated in the United States, including in Los Angeles, which is home to nearly a third of the country's 750,000 Iranian Americans, and in Nashville, Tennessee, with the largest Kurdish community in the nation. Many communities have canceled planned Nowruz parties and events since Iran's deadly crackdown on demonstrations. In New York, a group of elderly Iranian American women called off their celebration, which they host at a suburban shopping mall 25 miles (40 kilometers) outside Manhattan. "People are not in the mood to celebrate the New Year," said Marjan Khalili, president of the Long Island Ladies Association. "That's what Nowruz is – we welcome the New Year, and now we really don't have much to welcome, you know?" Shani Moslehi, chief executive of the Orange County Iranian American Chamber of Commerce in Southern California, said her group scratched plans for an annual party and is teaming up with a mental health clinic to provide support to community members dealing with the stress of the war and inability to communicate with family in Iran. "Everyone I hear from is not doing well," Moslehi said. "The dancing and singing lasted a day, and people realized just killing that one guy is not going to solve the problem." Some community organizations felt compelled to carry on with Nowruz traditions but have tempered them to meet the moment. At New York University, the student-run Persian Cultural Society held a vigil with speeches and poems in place of its annual Nowruz celebration and asked attendees to dress in black rather than the festive colors normally favored during the holiday. In Los Angeles, organizers called off an outdoor festival that typically draws thousands and instead held a concert titled "Light Always Prevails." It featured an Iranian female vocalist who was barred from singing after the 1979 Islamic Revolution and an Iranian-American performing in Persian for the first time, said Shahab Paranj, artistic director of the Iranshahr Orchestra. It is now more vital than ever to celebrate Nowruz in defiance of the Islamic regime, said Hedi Yousefi, who organized a Norooz Bazaar in Manhattan that showcased vendors and artists, and displayed a memorial wall listing the names of some 3,000 people killed in January. "They want us to be quiet. They want us to shut up and don't talk and celebrate," she said. "But we have to talk about our culture, we have to keep our tradition alive." In the Nashville area, where the local Kurdish community hails from Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey, organizers are planning an event meant to show solidarity with people across the war-torn region.—DNA

## Hormuz shock could shake Pakistan's economy

PIDE study warns of inflation surge and external pressure

ISLAMABAD: A new study by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) warns of Pakistan's economic vulnerability to a potential disruption in the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most critical energy chokepoints. The research highlights that even a mild global oil supply shock could quickly translate into higher fuel prices, rising inflation, and mounting pressure on Pakistan's external sector. Titled "Pakistan's Exposure to a Strait of Hormuz Shock: Fuel Pricing, Inflation, and External Vulnerability," the study by Ahsan ul Haq Satti and Shahzada M. Naeem Nawaz provides a comprehensive, scenario-based assessment of how global energy disruptions ripple through Pakistan's economy. Nearly 20% of the world's petroleum supply, around 20 million barrels per day, passes through the Strait of Hormuz, making it a critical artery for global energy flows. Any disruption, whether geopolitical or logistical, can trigger immediate oil price spikes. For Pakistan, an energy-importing economy where over 22% of imports consist of energy products, the implications are profound. The study emphasizes that oil shocks affect not just crude prices but also freight costs, exchange rates, taxes, and domestic pricing structures, ultimately amplifying the impact felt by consumers. The research challenges the common perception that crude oil prices alone determine domestic fuel costs,

highlighting a more complex transmission mechanism. Freight and shipping costs surge during crises, war-risk insurance premiums increase, exchange rate depreciation amplifies import costs, and taxes and margins compound final retail prices. Consequently, global oil shocks translate into multi-layered domestic price shocks, significantly intensifying inflationary pressures. Using a nonlinear scenario framework, the study models three possible outcomes—mild, stress, and severe shocks—with striking findings. A mild shock could push inflation to nearly 8.8% within six months, a stress scenario could see inflation cross 10.4% and become macro-critical, while a severe shock could drive inflation above 12%, fueled by strong second-round effects. Even under conservative assumptions, disinflation trends could be quickly reversed, with diesel-driven transport and food costs amplifying the shock across the economy. The study also reveals that a Hormuz disruption could destabilize Pakistan's external balance. Monthly petroleum imports could rise by up to US\$384 million, the current account could shift from surplus to deficit within months, and the annual external impact could exceed US\$4.6 billion in severe scenarios. This creates a dangerous feedback loop of higher imports leading to a weaker rupee, higher fuel costs, and more inflation. A key insight from the study is the outsized role of high-speed diesel (HSD) in trans-

mitting inflation, given its deep embedding in Pakistan's transport and logistics systems, agricultural production, and food supply chains. Diesel thus acts as a core driver of second-round inflation effects, particularly in food prices. In response, the study calls for urgent and coordinated policy action to mitigate these risks. Recommended measures include adopting a transparent, rules-based fuel pricing mechanism to reduce uncertainty, prioritizing diesel monitoring, strengthening coordination between the State Bank of Pakistan, Ministry of Finance, and Petroleum Division, providing targeted support to essential supply chains and public transport, and planning fuel financing proactively to protect the external account. In the longer term, structural reforms are needed to reduce diesel dependence and improve energy resilience. PIDE's message is clear: Pakistan's exposure to global energy shocks is deeper and more complex than commonly understood. A disruption in the Strait of Hormuz is not just an external event—it is a domestic macroeconomic shock in waiting. Fuel pricing, inflation, and external stability are tightly interconnected and must be managed together. The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) is a leading public policy think tank committed to advancing evidence-based, reform-oriented research to guide Pakistan's economic future.—DNA

## Greece starts animal airlift pets, owners from Mideast

ATHENS: This was an animal airlift. Dozens of dogs and cats arrived in Athens on Wednesday with their owners aboard a special evacuation flight for Greeks with pets who were trapped by the current war in the Middle East. Emotional scenes unfolded at Athens airport as small dogs leaped for joy after being let out of their special travel carry cases. The government-organized Aegean flight from Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates carried 45 pets and 101 people. "Our pets are not luggage, they are part of our families," said the Greek Interior Ministry's Special Secretary for the Protection of Companion Animals Nikos Chrysakis. He said the interior and foreign ministries had worked together for days "so we can have this good result, for the animals and people to return home safely." The Israeli and US attack on Iran has wreaked havoc on airline travel across the Middle East. Countries have been forced to repeatedly shut their airspace and cancel thousands of flights in major airline hubs such as Dubai and Qatar as missiles flew overhead. Hundreds of thousands of travelers found themselves stranded. For Danai Koukouolamati, finding a flight that would also take her cat Muay Thai was non-negotiable.—APP

## Mideast war blocking vital aid to over 400,000 children

GENEVA: The Middle East conflict is obstructing key delivery routes for humanitarian supplies, delaying shipments of lifesaving aid for nearly half a million children far beyond the region, Save the Children said Wednesday. The charity warned that the war was disrupting key air, sea and land routes, with dire ripple effects on global aid supplies. Since US-Israeli forces launched the war against Iran on February 28, Tehran has responded with attacks throughout the Middle East and threats that have nearly halted shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, through which one-fifth of global oil supplies normally pass. Aid deliveries have been heavily impacted, with shipping costs soaring up to 50 percent in some cases as the shipments are rerouted, Save the Children said. This has left lifesaving aid intended for at least 400,000 children and their families in crisis-ravaged Sudan, Afghanistan and Yemen stuck in the Middle East. "The escalating conflict is having grave ripple effects for children far beyond the region," Willem Zuidema, the NGO's head of global supply chains, said in a statement. One shipment of medical supplies bound for Sudan is stuck in Dubai due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, the charity said. This was putting more than 90 primary health care facilities across Sudan at risk of running out of essential medicines, it added.—APP

## Israel reopens key Gaza crossing amid new truce push

CAIRO: Israel reopened the Rafah crossing with Egypt on Thursday after nearly three weeks to allow some wounded Palestinians to leave for treatment, after Gaza medics said Israeli strikes had killed four people in the enclave. The Palestinian Red Crescent Society said only eight Palestinians who were injured in Israeli attacks during the two-year war and 17 of their family members would be allowed into Egypt for medical treatment after the crossing reopened on Thursday. It was unclear how many would be let through from Egypt back into Gaza. Sources told Reuters earlier that the border opening resulted from recent talks that envoys from President Donald Trump's "Board of Peace" had with Hamas officials in Cairo in an effort to safeguard the Gaza ceasefire, which has been under serious strain since the United States and Israel started bombing Iran. The crossing had reopened in early February after being largely shut since May 2024, in the early months of Israel's war against Gaza. Its reopening offered some relief to Palestinians who want to leave Gaza for medical care, or those who want to return after fleeing the fighting.—APP

## Asian container shipping firms see business shift

RIYADH: Profits of container shipping companies in China and Taiwan reflect how the sector is dealing with global disruptions, at a time when the war on Iran is dampening hopes of reopening the Red Sea and driving freight rates up, providing a welcome breather after a year of declining profits. Both China's Orient Overseas International and Taiwan's Evergreen Marine reported sharp declines in profits, as the prospect of reopening the Red Sea shipping route before the war began exacerbated the oversupply that kept prices low for most of last year. Taiwan's smaller shipping companies, Yang Ming Marine Transport and Wan Hai Lines, also saw a decline in profits. Momentum now appears to be shifting toward change, despite ongoing uncertainty. While container shipping companies have significantly less exposure to the Strait of Hormuz compared to oil tankers, the escalation of the war has effectively dashed hopes for a full reopening of the Red Sea this year, although forecasts remain difficult.—APP

## Briefs

### Power bills to rise by over Rs1.50 per unit in April

Charge meant to recover fuel costs that ran significantly above what customers were billed in February

#### DNA

ISLAMABAD: Electricity consumers could see higher power bills as early as April after utilities asked the country's energy regulator Monday to approve an additional charge of Rs1.64 per unit. The charge is meant to recover fuel costs that ran significantly above what customers were billed in February 2026, The News reported. The Central Power Purchasing Agency (CPPA-G), acting on behalf of ex-Wapda distribution companies, filed the request with the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra). In its request, the CPPA-G cited a gap between the reference fuel cost of Rs6.73 per unit built into February bills and the actual cost of Rs8.37 per unit, a shortfall of nearly 25%. The surcharge, if approved, would apply to K-Electric consumers as well. Total power generation in February reached 7,696 gigawatt-hours (GWh) at a cost of Rs62.75 billion, or roughly Rs8.15 per unit.

### Pakistan's int'l departures fall nearly 50% amid regional unrest

Gallup data shows int'l departures dropped from 1,127 flights between Feb 1-10 to just 572 flights during March 1-10

#### DNA

KARACHI: The international aviation sector in the country has witnessed a significant drop in outbound traffic in early March, with departures declining by nearly half amid rising regional tensions linked to the Iran conflict. According to data released by Gallup Pakistan Digital Analytics, international departures dropped from 1,127 flights between February 1 and February 10 to just 572 flights during March 1-10. The contraction represents one of the steepest short-term declines in recent aviation activity. Analysts attribute the sudden drop primarily to widespread airspace disruptions following heightened geopolitical instability in late February. Restrictions across Iranian and parts of Gulf airspace forced airlines to cancel flights.

# Field Marshal vows to eliminate terrorists operating against Pak

In his interaction here with Ulema of Ahl-e-Tasheeh community where matters of national security and role of Ulema in societal harmony came under discussion, the COAS emphasized that Afghan Taliban must prevent use of Afghan soil for terrorism against Pakistan, said a press release issued by Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR)



RAWALPINDI: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) and Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), HJ emphasized that Pakistan will not tolerate use of Afghan soil for conduct of terrorism against our people, and reiterated the resolve to eliminate terrorists and their infrastructure operating against Pakistan wherever they may be, through precise, intelligence-based operations.

In his interaction here with Ulema of Ahl-e-Tasheeh community where matters of national security and role of Ulema in societal harmony came under discussion, the COAS emphasized that Afghan Taliban must prevent use of Afghan soil for terrorism against Pakistan, said a press release issued by Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR). The Field Marshal underscored vital role of the Ulema in promoting unity, tolerance and

national cohesion, particularly in countering misinformation, sectarian narratives and externally sponsored destabilization efforts. The Field Marshal highlighted to the participants, Pakistan's efforts and pro-active diplomacy in seeking regional de-escalation. He emphasized the critical role of Ulema to strengthen unity and counter extremism, reiterating that religious sentiments must not be exploited to incite violence in the

country. Violence in Pakistan, on the basis of incidents occurring in another country, will not be tolerated, he added. The participating Ulema expressed their desire for peace, stability, and condemned violence in the name of religion in strongest terms. They expressed wholehearted support to law enforcement agencies in bringing about peace and stability in the country, the press release said. - APP

### Seven year jail term sought for Norwegian prince son

#### DNA

OSLO: Prosecutors in the trial of Marius Borg Hiby, son of Norwegian Crown Princess Mette-Marit, have requested a jail term of seven years and seven months, arguing he should be found guilty of 39 of the 40 charges he is accused of. The 29-year-old denies the most serious charges, which include four counts of rape as well as serious assault. The trial, which began in early February, is due to come to an end this week and the three judges will then retire to consider their verdicts. Hoiby was in court on Wednesday as the prosecution wrapped up its case. He was born before his mother married Norway's crown prince in 2001, and grew up within the royal family without being a member of it. He maintains that he had consensual sex with all four women before the alleged rapes took place. His defence lawyers were due to begin summing up their case later. The defendant has pleaded guilty to some of the lesser offences, which include a drugs charge, traffic offences and breaching a restraining order.

# Government may leave fuel prices unchanged despite global oil spike

Govt may resist fuel hike till March 31 while securing extra crude and refined cargoes

#### NEWS DESK

KARACHI: The government is weighing whether to keep petrol and high-speed diesel (HSD) prices unchanged until March 31, sources said Wednesday, despite the rise in global oil prices. The proposal was discussed with industry representatives during a meeting chaired by Petroleum Minister Ali Pervaiz Malik, where officials

asked oil companies to avoid hoarding and maintain steady supplies in the market. Sources said the minister told participants that the government was working to secure additional cargoes of crude oil and refined petroleum products, including possible imports from Russia, to keep domestic refineries running. He also indicated that authorities may discourage travel to northern tourist destinations during the Eid holidays as part of fuel conservation measures, amid heightened geopolitical tensions in the Middle East. Industry officials estimate that recent increases in global crude prices could translate into a rise of around Rs29 per litre in HSD and Rs19 per litre in petrol. They not-

ed that the government absorbed the previous price shock by agreeing to pay Rs23 billion in price differential claims to oil marketing companies, adding that emergency funding has been arranged to cushion consumers. During the meeting, the minister directed action against oil marketing companies (OMCs) holding more than 20 days of stock but failing to supply the market, as well as those maintaining inventories below the required threshold. Officials from the Petroleum Division said show cause notices would be issued to non-compliant companies. Separately, National Refinery Limited has secured additional crude supplies from Fujairah, with a 70,000-tonne cargo delivered aboard MT Sargodha on Wednesday.

# Pakistan's missile programme could bring US within range, claims American spy chief

Tulsi Gabbard warns Russia, China, N Korea, Iran, Pakistan developing nuclear capable missiles that could reach US



#### DNA

WASHINGTON: US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard has identified Pakistan among countries posing a growing strategic concern, warning that Islamabad's evolving long-range missile capabilities could potentially bring the American homeland within range. Presenting the 2026 Annual Threat Assessment before the Senate Intelligence Committee, Gabbard also named Iran, China, Russia, and North Korea as nations actively developing new missile delivery systems, including both nuclear and conventional warheads, which

put the US within range. "The US secure nuclear deterrent continues to ensure safety in the homeland against strategic threats. However, Russia, China, North Korea, Iran and Pakistan have been researching and developing an array of novel, advanced, or traditional missile delivery systems with nuclear and conventional payloads that put our homeland within range," Gabbard said. She noted that Pakistan's ballistic missile development "potentially could include intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs)" capable of reaching the US homeland. Gabbard also warned that the number of missile threats facing the US was expected to rise sharply, with the intelligence community projecting that global missile inventories could exceed 16,000 by 2035, up from more than 3,000 currently. She added that the countries identified in the report would likely seek to understand US missile defence plans in order to shape their own development programmes and assess Washington's deterrence posture.

# European Union summit focusses on Iran war

Many of those leaders have deflected entreaties by US President Donald Trump to send military assets to secure the Strait of Hormuz, a key waterway for the global flow of oil, gas and fertilizer

#### NEWS DESK

BRUSSELS: European Union leaders held a summit in Brussels on Thursday for talks on the Iran war, energy prices, migration and an enormous loan for war-ravaged

Ukraine being held up by Hungary. Many of those leaders have deflected entreaties by US President Donald Trump to send military assets to secure the Strait of Hormuz, a key waterway for the global flow of oil, gas and fertilizer. Rising energy prices be-

cause of the war and fears in Europe of a new refugee crisis have pushed leaders to make the Middle East one of the top priorities at the summit. The European Commission, the EU's executive branch, has floated the idea of a "toolbox" of measures to lower energy prices for leaders to discuss because no single policy will work across the myriad markets in the 27-nation bloc to blunt economic shocks from the war, according to a senior European diplomat who wasn't authorized to be publicly named so spoke on condition of anonymity. The summit will also focus on a long-brewing standoff between Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and most other EU nations.

# PSX falls as Gulf attacks spark oil price surge

KSE-100 Index registers intraday low of 150,728.17, falling 3,564.08 points, or 2.3%

KARACHI: Stocks at the bourse fell on Thursday as a fresh spike in global oil prices, driven by escalating attacks on Gulf energy infrastructure, revived inflation and fuel-cost concerns and triggered profit-taking. The Pakistan Stock Exchange's benchmark KSE-100 Index traded between a high of 152,698.51 (down 1,593.74 points, or 1.03%) and a low of 150,728.17 (down 3,564.08 points, or 2.3%) versus the previous close of 154,292.25. "PSX is under pressure today due to increased oil prices caused by the Middle East conflict. The latest attacks on the LNG field in Qatar caused oil to spike 5%, which is creating selling pressure in the market," said Ahfaz Mustafa, CEO of Ismail Iqbal Securities.

"Expected fuel price hike, and deteriorating macros, are also weighing in on the negative sentiment," he added. Qatar's main gas hub suffered "extensive damage" after two waves of Iranian strikes, QatarEnergy said on Thursday, heightening supply fears as the Middle East war grinds on. Missile attacks on Ras Laffan Industrial City damaged a gas-to-liquids facility and later sparked sizeable fires and further damage to several liquefied natural gas (LNG) facilities, though Qatar's interior ministry said crews brought all fires under control and reported no injuries. Qatar's defence ministry said the energy hub was hit by ballistic missiles from Iran. US President Donald Trump warned Iran against further strikes on Qatar's gas plant and threatened to destroy Iran's South Pars gas field if attacks continue. Trump said Israel struck facilities at South Pars but that the United States "knew nothing" of the attack. The South Pars/North Dome mega-field is the world's largest known gas reserve and is shared by Iran and Qatar; around 70% of Iran's domestic natural gas comes from its portion of the field. Supply risks also extended to Saudi Arabia. The Ras Tanura complex, one of the largest refineries in the Middle East with a capacity of 550,000 barrels per day, has been repeatedly targeted during the conflict, including an early drone strike that caused a fire and partial shutdown. Bloomberg reported on Wednesday that operations had resumed. - DNA

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