



Islamabad POST

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Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

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Pakistan calls for abolition of the veto power: Asim

Detailed News On Page-08

Aurangzeb talks about climate challenges

Detailed News On Page-07



ICCI chief fears fiscal slowdown

Detailed News On Page-03



Riyadh may also be a venue

Pakistan plays key role in US-Iran talks

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif arrived in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday as part of his three-nation tour (Saudi Arabia ; Iran ups threats over US naval blockade on ports; Trump says he is 'permanently opening Hormuz')



ANSAR MAHMOOD BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: A high-level Pakistani delegation led by Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Asim

PICTURE ON BACK PAGE

Munir, along with Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, arrived in Tehran on Wednesday as part of Islamabad's intensified

Continued on Page 06

Iran says exchanges with US through Pakistan continue

"Regarding the level and type of enrichment, we have always stated that this issue is negotiable. We have emphasised that Iran should be able to continue enrichment in accordance with its needs," he added

NEWS DESK

TEHRAN: Iran said on Wednesday that exchanges with the United States via Pakistan had continued following negotiations in Islamabad over the weekend that yielded no result. The Pakistan delegation is in Tehran for settling modalities for the upcoming second round of talks. "Since Sunday, when the Iranian delegation returned to Tehran, several messages have been exchanged through Pakistan," said foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei in a weekly press briefing. "Today, we are very

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NEPALI ARMY DAY



ISLAMABAD: Chief Guest Lt. General Tabassam Habib of Pakistan Army, Prime Minister Coordinator on Tourism Sardar Yasir Ilyas, Director General Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sajjad Haider Khan, Ambassador of Nepal Ms. Rita Dhital, Military Attache Brig Gen Bhes Bahadur KC Acting High Commissioner of India, heads of missions of SAARC countries, and others cutting cake to celebrate the Nepali Army Day. - DNA

Ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel

NEWS DESK

BEIRUT: Diplomatic efforts to put pressure on Israel to agree a ceasefire in Lebanon as a necessary step toward formal peace negotiations are intensifying, following the unprecedented direct talks between the countries in Washington this week, Lebanese officials told Arab News on Wednesday. A senior official said intensive contacts are underway with international and regional actors to secure a halt to the hostilities, with a ceasefire a non-negotiable

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Trump claims China agrees not to arm Iran

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said Wednesday that China has agreed not to send weapons to its close partner Iran and that he has received personal assurances from leader Xi Jinping. "They have agreed not to send weapons to Iran. President Xi will give me a big, fat, hug when I get there in a few weeks," Trump wrote on Truth Social, referring to his planned May 14-15 summit with Xi in Beijing. Trump told Fox Business host Maria Bartiromo in a separate interview aired Wednesday that Xi had

Continued on Page 06

Evolving situation

US-Iran ceasefire remains in Limbo

Trump claims progress on Strait of Hormuz and Erdogan warns against Israeli sabotage

CENTRELINE REPORT

WASHINGTON: Washington and Tehran continue diplomatic engagement despite the lack of a formal extension to their fragile two-week ceasefire, with a senior US official confirming ongoing talks aimed at reaching a broader deal even as the initial truce window edges closer to expiration. President Donald Trump has struck an optimistic tone, declaring that China is "very happy" with US efforts to permanently reopen the Strait of Hormuz and claiming Beijing has agreed not to supply weapons to Iran in exchange. Trump described the move as benefiting China, the world, and preventing future disruptions, while vowing the situation in the critical waterway "will never happen again." He suggested the conflict could end soon, hinting at an "amazing two days" ahead. However, China has publicly criticized the US naval blockade of Iranian ports as "dangerous and irresponsible," even as some Chinese-linked

Continued on Page 06

EU warns of prolonged energy shock, forced cuts

DNA

BRUSSELS: The European Union has warned member countries that if the Iran conflict continues, energy markets will face a prolonged supply shock that would force cuts to fuel consumption, EU diplomats told Reuters. In a closed-door meeting with EU countries' ambassadors, the European Commission said it was considering two main scenarios, diplomats with knowledge of the talks said. In a scenario where the ceasefire agreed between the US and Iran holds, and the US blockade of the strait is lifted, oil and gas flows would recover in a few months, and prices should decline, the Commission said.

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PTI Secy Gen rejects Imran sister allegations

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Secretary General Salman Akram Raja has rejected all allegations leveled against him by Aleema Khan, the sister of party founder Imran Khan, ARY News reported. Expressing frustration over the criticism regarding his party role, Raja stated, "I damn all such positions," emphasizing that he is not driven by titles. He dismissed the accusation that he was fa-

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

ECP unfurls LG polls schedule in Punjab

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has formally announced the delimitation schedule for the upcoming local government elections in Punjab, DNA News reported. According to the commission, delimitations will be carried out under the Punjab Local Government Act, with clear directives issued to ensure the timely completion of the process. ECP stated that the initial administrative stages of delimitation will be completed by April 16, while preliminary lists of union council boundaries will be published between April 20 and 21. The list for public objections will be released on May 25, with citizens allowed to file objections from May 26 to June 23. All objections submitted by the public will be resolved by July 22.

Israel losing support in US

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: A new analysis by CNN indicates that Israel is experiencing a significant decline in public support across the United States, including among Republicans, mainly due to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. According to CNN's chief data analyst Harry Enten, recent data shows a sharp shift in attitudes toward Israel across multiple political and demographic groups. Among Republicans under the age of 50, net favorability toward Israel has dropped dramatically—from +28 points four years ago to -2 in 2025 and further down to -16 in 2026, marking a shift of over 40 points. Support has also declined among moderate and liberal Republicans, who make up roughly one-third of the party base.

China FM tells Iran Beijing supports momentum of peace talks: Yi

Meanwhile, the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) has reiterated that its naval blockade of Iranian ports remains fully effective. "No vessels have made it past US forces," CENTCOM stated on X

NEWS DESK

BEIJING: China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi has assured his Iranian counterpart that Beijing strongly supports maintaining the momentum of the ceasefire and ongoing peace talks between Iran and the United States. In a telephone conversation, Wang Yi told Iranian Foreign Minister that peace talks are "in the fundamental interests of the Iranian people and represent the shared hope of regional countries and the international community,"

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Sri Lanka repatriates Iranian sailor

DNA

COLOMBO: Iranian sailors rescued by Sri Lanka following a US submarine attack have been sent back home, officials said on Wednesday. The Sri Lanka Navy

Continued on Page 06

Pakistan to receive \$3bn support from Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia extends \$5bn deposit beyond rollover, easing Pakistan's external financing pressures

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: Saudi Arabia has committed \$3 billion in additional financial support for Pakistan, with disbursement expected next week, while also extending its existing \$5 billion deposit for a longer period, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb said on Wednesday.

Speaking to journalists in ISLAMABAD: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has kept Pakistan's growth rate unchanged at 3.6% for FY26, lower than the officially envisaged target of 4.2% amid a downward revision in global economic growth outlook in the wake of the ongoing war in the Gulf region. Global economic

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IMF keeps Pak growth outlook unchanged at 3.6%

FAISAL SHEIKH

Speaking to journalists in ISLAMABAD: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has kept Pakistan's growth rate unchanged at 3.6% for FY26, lower than the officially envisaged target of 4.2% amid a downward revision in global economic growth outlook in the wake of the ongoing war in the Gulf region. Global economic

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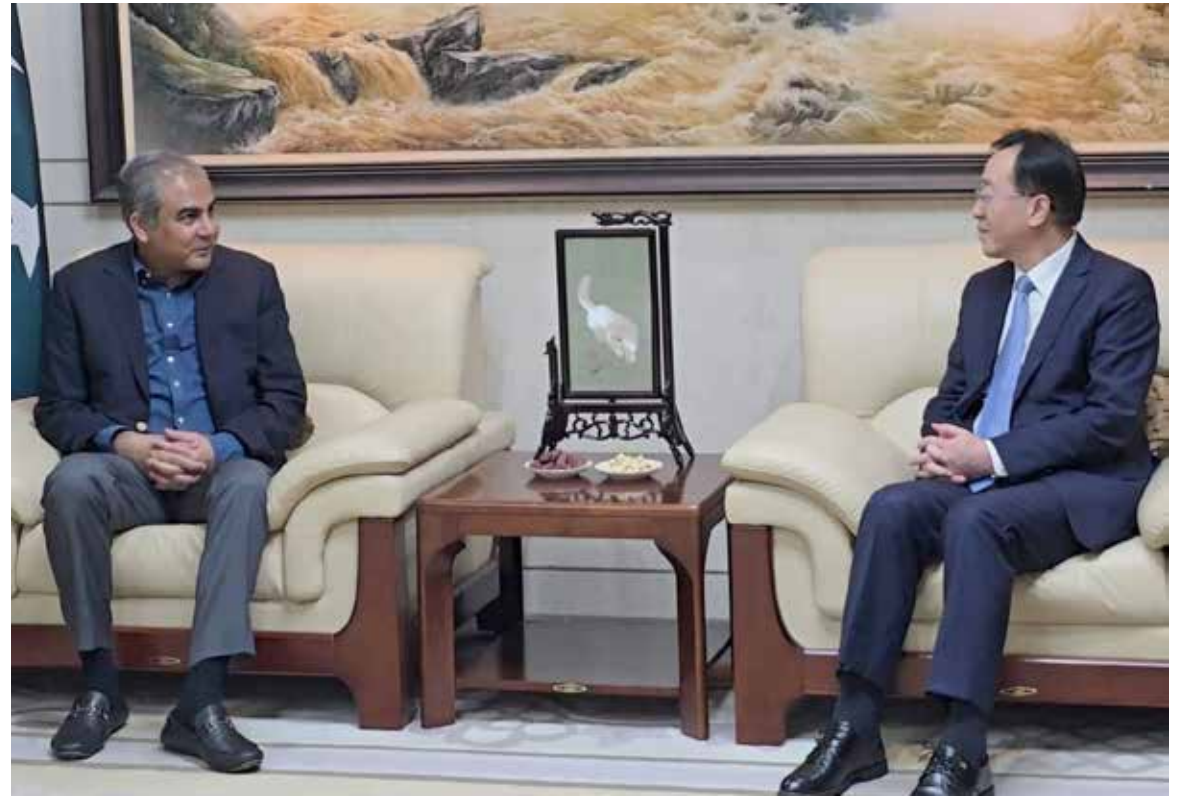
Pakistan, Italy, Denmark agree to strengthen trade coop

The Minister emphasized that Pakistan is among the few countries currently pursuing progressive tariff reduction, while many countries, due to prevailing global economic uncertainties and protectionist trends, are increasing tariffs

ISLAMABAD: The Ambassador of Italy to Pakistan, Marilina Armellini, and the Ambassador of Denmark to Pakistan, Maja Mortensen, called on the Federal Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal Khan, at his office to discuss avenues for enhancing bilateral trade, investment, and economic cooperation. During the meeting, the Minister highlighted Pakistan's role as a responsible global partner, emphasizing its efforts in promoting dialogue and de-escalation in times of geopolitical tensions, said a release issued here on Wednesday. He noted that recent global developments, particularly disruptions in key maritime routes such as the Strait of Hormuz, have significantly impacted global supply chains, including energy, food, medicines, and industrial inputs. These challenges, he stated, underline the importance of diversified trade partnerships and resilient supply systems. The Minister underscored Pakistan's strong economic potential, citing its large consumer base of over 250 million people, abundant natural resources, and strategic location. He remarked

that with improvements in per capita income, Pakistan could emerge as a major import and consumption hub, creating significant opportunities for foreign investors. Both Ambassadors acknowledged these prospects and expressed keen interest in expanding engagement, particularly in non-traditional sectors. A detailed discussion was held on Pakistan's ongoing tariff reforms under the National Tariff Policy, which aims to gradually reduce tariffs over a five-year period to promote export-led growth and enhance competitiveness. The Minister emphasized that Pakistan is among the few countries currently pursuing progressive tariff reduction, while many countries, due to prevailing global economic uncertainties and protectionist trends, are increasing tariffs. He noted that tariffs have already been reduced in several sectors and will continue to decline in the coming years, ensuring a balanced approach that protects local industry while facilitating imports of high-quality inputs. Specific concerns regarding tariff classification, particularly in the dairy sector, were also discussed,

with the Minister assuring that the government is open to reviewing proposals, including the creation of new HS codes where required. The discussion also focused on the transformation of Pakistan's dairy sector, which holds immense untapped potential. The Danish side highlighted innovative projects aimed at reducing waste, particularly whey byproducts, and converting them into value-added products such as protein drinks and bars. The Minister welcomed such initiatives, emphasizing the importance of technology transfer, investment, and capacity building to modernize the sector. He noted that with proper support, Pakistan can significantly enhance productivity and move towards a more formalized and efficient dairy industry. The Ambassadors raised concerns regarding proposed amendments to the intellectual property framework, particularly in the pharmaceutical sector. The meeting concluded with both sides reaffirming their commitment to deepening economic cooperation, promoting trade and investment, and facilitating stronger linkages between the business communities of Pakistan, Italy, and Denmark.



KARACHI: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi arrived at the Chinese Consulate in Karachi and held a meeting with the Chinese Consul General. The two sides discussed strengthening Pakistan-China bilateral cooperation, providing better facilities to Chinese investors, and addressing security-related matters. This important meeting highlights Pakistan's commitment to enhancing economic partnership and ensuring the safety of Chinese investors and nationals in the country. —DNA

Govt fast tracks youth employment drive

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has accelerated its youth employment strategy by designating the Digital Youth Hub (DYH) as the central national platform, Chairmen Prime Minister's Youth Programme Rana Mashood Ahmad Khan said on Wednesday, that coordinated directives have been issued to align skills development with global market demands and expand employment opportunities for Pakistani youth through a unified, technology-driven framework. According to official details, the government has declared the Digital Youth Hub the cornerstone of its youth employment campaign, integrating a wide range of opportunities, including scholarships, vocational training, internships, apprenticeships, and job placements into a single accessible platform. All federal and provincial institutions have been directed to connect their schemes with DYH on a priority basis to ensure wider outreach and institutional cohesion. Mr Khan said that, on the Prime Minister's instructions, key ministries including Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, Foreign Affairs, and Federal Education and Professional Training along with institutions such as the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission and the Higher Education Commission, are actively mapping high demand skills in major international labour markets. —APP

MoITT accelerates AI national initiatives

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's national AI roadmap is rapidly positioning Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a cornerstone of its economic future, with the government declaring AI a national priority sector and committing to a \$1 billion investment by 2030. At the foundation of this transformation is a nationwide effort to build a robust AI education pipeline. At school level, the government has directed the introduction of an AI curriculum across federal institutions, with a roadmap to include remote regions,

ensuring early AI literacy for all students. Plans are underway to support 1,000 fully funded AI scholarships by 2030, alongside scaling advanced research pathways to develop AI engineers, researchers, and specialists. Complementing this is a mass upskilling initiative targeting 1 million non-IT professionals, positioning AI as a core skill across sectors such as business, finance, and the public sector. These efforts were recently demonstrated by the Ministry of IT & Telecom's led National AI Trainings

Programme during Indus AI Week, where participation expanded from an initial 600 to over 2,000 learners due to overwhelming demand. Inclusion was central to the initiative, with the AI for HER initiative training over 500 women and girls and showcasing 10 women-led AI startups across multiple cities. Accelerating the strong start to the national direction, the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication (MoITT) in collaboration with Google for Developers and Telenor. —APP

Over 216,000 kids get polio drops

SARGODHA: More than 216,000 children were administered anti-polio drops across the district on the second day of anti-polio campaign, achieving 92 percent of the daily target. Presiding over an evening performance review meeting here on Wednesday, Deputy Commissioner Husain Ahmed Raza Chaudhary was informed that 216,015 children received the vaccine on the drive's second day. The meeting was briefed that 3,473 children, who were previously recorded as not available (NA), were tracked down and vaccinated, while three reported refusal cases were successfully resolved by the field teams. Additionally, 621 children were administered zero-dose vaccines during the day. Providing a cumulative report of the first two days, officials informed the Deputy Commissioner that 445,742 children have been vaccinated across the district so far. —APP

Oil company driver among two abducted from Bannu

PESHAWAR: Unidentified armed men abducted two persons including the driver of a gas company in Bannu district, police informed on Wednesday. As per details, the incident took place in Bakakhel area, within the jurisdiction of Bakakhel Police Station. Police said armed assailants intercepted a trailer vehicle in Mandi Bakakhel and at gunpoint, forcibly offload the driver and his companion. The kidnapers took both individuals to an undisclosed location using their own vehicle, while the company's trailer was left abandoned at the scene. —APP

NBFCs to promote halal lending

The SECP has been implementing a Strategic Action Plan to support Pakistan's transition towards a Shariah-compliant financial system, in line with constitutional requirements and the directives of the Federal Shariat Court

ISLAMABAD: Aimed at making loans accessible to people who avoid interest (riba), the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan has issued a practical guidebook to help lending Non-Banking Finance Companies (NBFCs) structure Shariah-compliant financing products. The guideline provides guidance to NBFCs to develop and offer halal financing options for people who do not use conventional bank loans. According to a press release issued by the SECP, the book will enable consumers to access Shariah-compliant products such as installment plans, micro-loans, and housing finance. Shariah-compliant digital financing will expand access for underserved

groups, enabling low-income households, small businesses, farmers, freelancers, and gig workers to obtain financing more easily without traditional credit histories. The Shariah-compliant lending products are based on risk-sharing and asset-backed models, promoting responsible and ethical finance while reducing the risk of exploitation and hidden charges. There is a growing market demand for Islamic financial services. This initiative is expected to enhance competition in the non-bank financial sector. As more NBFCs offer Islamic financing products, customers will benefit from better pricing, improved transparency, and higher service standards. Currently, five Lending NBFCs are fully Shari-

ah-certified and are offering products in areas such as Buy-Now-Pay-Later (BNPL), nano-lending, housing finance, and microfinance. Several other companies have also approached SECP for guidance on developing Shariah-compliant products. SECP's analysis of 265 products offered by 89 Lending NBFCs shows that around 16 to 17 percent of existing products are already Shariah-compliant, indicating strong momentum in the sector. The SECP has been implementing a Strategic Action Plan to support Pakistan's transition towards a Shariah-compliant financial system, in line with constitutional requirements and the directives of the Federal Shariat Court. —APP

Hands-on free training equips youth with digital skills

PESHAWAR: A cohort of approximately 40 youth from militancy-affected district of Lakki Marwat received hands-on, free digital skills training, resulting in improved employability and job placements for many participants. The students from Lakki Marwat were referred by Lucky Cement and Huma Mass IT (MHIT) training centre in Peshawar, a flagship initiative by Aziz Jan Trust imparting free IT training to thousands of youth of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in collaboration with Saylani Welfare Trust. "Administration of Lucky Cement headed by its chief, Muhammad Ali Tabba approached MHIT for training of a batch of young students from Lucky Cement in October 2024," informed Aqleem Orakzai, Administrator MHIT. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was also signed between the three organizations for imparting skill training especially in Information Technology for equipping the youth of Lakki Marwat with practical skills of livelihood. The selected students were provided free education, boarding and feeding facility jointly by Lucky Cement, Mohsin and Huma Information Technology and Saylani Welfare Trust. The initiative creates pathways to equip thousands of young people from terrorism-affected areas with sustainable livelihood opportunities, engaging them in meaningful activities that protect their future and guide them toward long-term growth and development. Aqleem informed that out of 40 students around 17 received training in Graphic Designing and 13 of them have secured jobs soon after completion of course. Similarly, the same number of students are attending classes in Web Development and their course is scheduled for completion in July 2026. Around six students could not compete their course due to several reasons, he added. The students were completely novice in computer studies and have started training by learning from very basic. "Established in 2023, Mohsin and Huma Information Technology Centre is offering free IT training to young people with the vision of equipping new generation with modern digital skills, enabling them to pursue self-employment opportunities through freelancing," says Sara Afan, Head of MHIT. —DNA

Pakistan's peace role gains global recognition: Masood

He further noted that Pakistan's diaspora remains a vital asset, contributing to economic growth and enhancing the country's global footprint. Increasingly, overseas Pakistanis are investing back home, particularly in technology, services, and industry.

ISLAMABAD: Former ambassador to the United States, China and the United Nations, and former president of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Masood Khan said Wednesday that Pakistan achieved a landmark diplomatic breakthrough, successfully facilitating high-stakes engagement between the United States and Iran, positioning itself as a credible peacemaker on the global stage. Describing the development as a "spectacular success," he emphasized that Pakistan delivered where many regional and international actors had struggled. Khan highlighted that Pakistan's success was rooted in proactive and sustained diplomacy. From the very outset of the crisis, Islamabad engaged not only the principal parties but also key regional stakeholders, building consensus through continuous communication and strategic outreach. This groundwork ensured that by the time delegations arrived in Islamabad, the environment was conducive for constructive dialogue. Khan termed the nego-

tiations a "work in progress," noting that there has been no indication of a return to hostilities. Statements from both Washington and Tehran acknowledged a positive and respectful atmosphere during talks, with both sides moving significantly closer to a comprehensive agreement before last-minute divergences stalled a breakthrough. Pakistan's mediation framework, he noted, remains intact, with technical and legal discussions continuing behind the scenes. This sustained engagement signals that diplomacy is still very much alive and that Islamabad remains central to future negotiations. Beyond diplomacy, Khan stressed that Pakistan must capitalize on this moment to strengthen its economic and strategic standing. He pointed to recent successes in economic diplomacy, including expanded cooperation with the United States in emerging sectors and deepening ties with China under initiatives such as CPEC 2.0. Simultaneously, partnerships with Saudi






Arabia and other Gulf states are opening avenues for major investments, particularly in energy and infrastructure. Pakistan's geostrategic location, combined with its evolving economic outlook, is increasingly being recognized globally. Ports such as Gwadar, Karachi, and Port Qasim are gaining prominence as vital hubs for regional connectivity, reinforcing Pakistan's role as both a conduit and destination for international trade and investment.

Addressing regional dynamics, Khan underscored the need for vigilance against competing narratives, particularly from India, while emphasizing that Pakistan's identity as a peace-builder and responsible global actor is gaining wider acceptance. He further noted that Pakistan's diaspora remains a vital asset, contributing to economic growth and enhancing the country's global footprint. Increasingly, overseas Pakistanis are investing back home, particularly in technology, services, and industry. —DNA

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

APRIL

- April 04/Senegal National Day
- April 07/W. H. O. World Health Day
- April 12/Somalia Armed Forces Day
- April 15/DPR Korea The Day of the Sun
- April 16/Denmark National Day
- April 17/Iran Army Day
- April 17/Syria Independence Day
- April 18/Zimbabwe Independence Day
- April 24/Holy See Anniversary of His Papacy of his Pontificate
- April 25/DPR Korea Armed Forces Day
- April 26/Tanzania National Day
- April 27/Sierra Leone Independence Day
- April 27/South Africa Freedom Day
- April 30/Sweden Birthday of His Majesty
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Water Tank

- Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Tahir warns of economic slowdown due to restrictive policies

ICCI President said that early closures and power cuts crippling business activity in capital

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Sardar Tahir Mehmood has expressed grave concern over the escalating challenges faced by the business community in Islamabad, due to the imposition of restrictive market timings by the federal government. Addressing a highly attended press conference at the Chamber House on Wednesday, he stated that the abrupt enforcement of strict business hours has not only disrupted commercial activity but has also negatively impacted the daily lives of citizens. He highlighted that the situation has been further aggravated by over two hours of load shedding during peak business hours, severely affecting productivity and bringing many commercial operations close to a halt. Sardar Tahir Mehmood noted that the impact extends beyond traders, as citizens are equally facing hardship. Limited shopping hours, combined with electricity outages, have made routine life increasingly difficult, particularly during the evening. Drawing attention to a critical issue, he said that inconsistent policies across provinces are creating a sense of discrimination. He pointed out that while markets in Sindh operate until 9:00 PM and restaurants until 11:30 PM, businesses in Islamabad are subjected to much stricter limitations, an approach that undermines business confidence. He urged the government to take immediate corrective measures,



including revisiting business operating hours, allowing markets in Islamabad to remain open at least until 10:00 PM, introducing rational timings for restaurants and food outlets, and ensuring uninterrupted electricity supply during peak commercial hours. He further emphasized that the formulation of business-friendly policies is essential to attract foreign investment, particularly from Gulf countries, where the current situation has adversely affected investor confidence. Reaffirming the role of the business community, he said that traders and industrialists in Islamabad have always contributed positively to the national economy and deserve facilitation rather

than undue restrictions. Referring to the recent US-Pak talks held in Islamabad, Sardar Tahir Mehmood said the business community extended full cooperation to the government and stands ready to support any future engagements of similar importance, as such events are directly linked to the country's prestige and global standing. On the occasion, President All Pakistan Anjuman-e-Tajraan, Ajmal Baloch, stressed the need for a viable and consultative mechanism for determining business hours in line with economic interests. He also urged government representatives to exercise caution in their statements regarding the business community, terming it the backbone

of the country's economy. He warned that if the community's demands are not addressed it will have no option but to go for protest. The press conference was also attended by Senior Vice President Tahir Ayub, Vice President Irfan Chaudhry, former President Mohammad Ejaz Abbasi, Executive Members Imran Minhas, Ishaq Sial, Abdul Rehman Siddiqui, Raja Naveed Satti, Najeeb Ellahi Malik, Zulqurnain Abbasi, former SVPs Khalid Chaudhry, Naveed Malik, senior members Israr Mishwani, Raja Majeed as well as Presidents and General Secretaries of various Traders Welfare Associations from across Islamabad.

Rawalpindi intensifies dengue surveillance, polio drive

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Deputy Commissioner Dr Hassan Waqar Cheema and MNA Tahira Aurangzeb on Wednesday reviewed dengue prevention measures, directing strict monitoring of high-risk areas across the district. Health officials briefed the meeting on vector surveillance, hotspot identification and larva elimination activities carried out from January to April. Data on recent surveillance, pending larva cases and hotspot coverage was reviewed, with instructions for immediate action where gaps were identified. The meeting decided to launch intensified anti-dengue activities in Potohar Town and Cantonment areas from April 17 to May 2 under a 14-day sweep plan. The DC ordered daily monitoring of field teams and stressed prompt response to larva detection, while the MNA called for enhanced public awareness to prevent dengue spread. Meanwhile, polio vaccination teams have also been asked for ensuring 100pc coverage. Deputy Commissioner Dr Hassan Waqar Cheema, in a separate meeting, directed polio teams to ensure 100 percent vaccination coverage during the ongoing anti-polio campaign in the district. He assessed overall performance, door-to-door vaccination and progress against targets, and issued certain directives for achieving a successful drive.

Joint ICT Academy to boost digital skills across OIC countries

ISLAMABAD: The OIC Ministerial Standing Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation (COMSTECH) and Huawei Technologies Pakistan have signed a landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish the COMSTECH-Huawei ICT Academy, aimed at strengthening digital capacity and empowering youth across 57 OIC member and five observer states. The MoU signing ceremony was held on Wednesday at the COMSTECH Secretariat in Islamabad, where the ICT Academy was also formally inaugurated. The facility is equipped with advanced digital learning infrastructure to support virtual instruction, hands-on ICT training, and real-time collaboration for students and professionals across the OIC region. Chairman of the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority,

Major General (R) Hafeez Ur Rehman, attended the ceremony as chief guest. He described the initiative as a timely and strategic investment in the region's digital future, highlighting its potential to strengthen Pakistan's ICT ecosystem and support capacity-building efforts across member states. Speaking on the occasion, Muhammad Iqbal Choudhary, Coordinator General COMSTECH, termed the agreement a transformative step towards digital self-reliance in the OIC region. He said the collaboration would leverage Huawei's global expertise to equip youth with cutting-edge skills and enable them to contribute to innovation-driven socio-economic development. CEO of Huawei Pakistan, Ethan Sun, said the initiative reflects Huawei's long-term commitment to empowering youth with essential

digital skills required in the global economy. Huawei leadership also reaffirmed its commitment to nurturing digital talent through programmes such as "Seeds for the Future," noting that the ICT Academy would serve as a key platform for promoting inclusive digital transformation, enhancing cybersecurity capabilities, and advancing sustainable technological growth across OIC countries. The academy will function as a central hub for blended learning, providing access to Huawei's global training ecosystem and offering high-quality courses in emerging technologies. Under the partnership, specialized certifications will be offered in 5G, Artificial Intelligence, Cloud Computing, and Cybersecurity to help bridge the global talent gap and prepare young professionals for industry demands.—DNA

APHC seeks Ramsoo killing probe

ISLAMABAD: The All Parties Hurriyat Conference (Azad Kashmir and Pakistan chapter) on Wednesday strongly condemned the killing of a 25-year-old man, Tanveer Ahmad Chopan, in the Ramsoo area of Ramban district in Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir, alleging that he was targeted on religious grounds while transporting livestock, and called for an immediate, transparent investigation to bring those responsible to justice. In a statement, APHC (AJK) Information Secretary Mushtaq Ahmad Butt expressed deep sorrow over the incident, terming it "tragic, inhumane and highly condemnable." He said the victim lost his life after allegedly being attacked and forced to jump into a local stream while attempting to save himself. Mr Butt alleged that extremist elements associated with groups such as the Bharatiya Janata Party and Shiv Sena were involved in the incident, and criticised the criminal silence and negligence of the local administration. He claimed that the patronage of such elements, coupled with the failure of law enforcement agencies, had contributed to rising religious intolerance and insecurity in the region. He said targeting individuals based on religion and subjecting them to violence is a grave and unacceptable crime, constituting a blatant violation of human values, international law, and fundamental human rights. "No individual should be attacked merely based on identity or routine livelihood activity, as such acts are contrary to the principles of any civilised society," he added. The APHC leader warned that such incidents not only instil fear among local populations but also pose serious risks to regional peace and stability. He demanded that all those involved in the incident be subjected to a prompt, impartial, and transparent investigation, and be awarded strict punishment in accordance with the law to prevent recurrence of such acts. He stressed that symbolic or temporary measures would be insufficient, calling instead for concrete and effective policy action. Appealing to the international community, including the United Nations and global human rights organisations, Mr Butt urged them to take serious notice of the deteriorating human rights situation in the region and press India to fulfil its international obligations and ensure the protection of civilians. He warned that failure to prevent such incidents and hold perpetrators accountable could lead to serious and far-reaching consequences, for which the authorities would bear responsibility. Mr Butt also extended his condolences to the bereaved family of Tanveer Ahmad Chopan, praying for the deceased's elevated status in the hereafter and for patience for his family.

PIDE calls for smart, sustainable mineral uplift in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) hosted a high-level seminar titled "Minerals & Economic Development: Prospects for Pakistan," bringing together scholars, policymakers, and development practitioners to examine how Pakistan can convert its mineral potential into inclusive and sustainable economic progress. Opening the session, PIDE Vice Chancellor Dr. Nadeem Javid (SI) observed that natural resources have shaped the rise and fall of nations, from the silver mines of ancient economies to the energy geopolitics of the modern world. He noted that the central question remains unchanged: why some countries are able to turn resource wealth into prosperity, while others continue to struggle. Dr. Javid said Pakistan stands at an important juncture, with growing interest in minerals as a possible source of foreign exchange and long-term growth, while also facing persistent challenges related to governance, energy constraints, security concerns, and institutional capacity. He framed the seminar around four central questions: whether mineral wealth can support sustainable development or reinforce inequality and volatility, what distinguishes countries that escape the resource curse from those that remain trapped in it, where Pakistan currently stands on this spectrum, and what a realistic, policy-driven mineral development strategy for the country should look like. The seminar featured Prof. Saleem H. Ali, Chair and Distinguished Professor at the University of Delaware, affiliated with the University of Queensland, and a member of the UN International Resource Panel, as the keynote speaker. Introducing him, PIDE highlighted Prof. Ali's extensive global work on extractive industries, environmental conflict resolution, and sustainability, noting his academic, policy, and field experience across more than 160 countries. Dr. Javid noted that Prof. Ali's work bridges global scholarship and policy practice in extractive industries and sustainable development, and expressed hope that his insights would help illuminate a practical way forward for Pakistan. Setting the tone for the discussion, he asked what one reform or strategic decision Pakistan should prioritize in the minerals sector. In his address, Prof. Ali argued that minerals have historically played a foundational role in economic transformation and remain deeply linked to modern prosperity, even in service-led economies. Drawing on both economic history and contemporary policy debates, he emphasized that mineral wealth alone does not guarantee development; what matters is whether countries build the institutions, policy frameworks, and reinvestment mechanisms needed to turn resource endowments into broad-based national gains. A major theme of the seminar was the need to move beyond simplistic narratives of mineral abundance. Prof. Ali cautioned against confusing resources with reserves, stressing that only economically viable and extractable reserves should inform serious planning. He also revisited the ideas of the "resource curse," the "Dutch disease," and the "paradox of plenty," noting that while mineral-led growth can create wealth, it can also deepen inequality, distort institutions, and weaken alternative sectors if not managed wisely. At the same time, he underlined that these outcomes are not inevitable. Countries that combine investment, learning, transparency, and effective governance can transform extractive sectors into drivers of national development. Discussing Pakistan's options, Prof. Ali outlined several mineral development pathways, including large transformative projects with royalties and fiscal flows, infrastructure minerals linked to construction and connectivity, energy minerals, and the branding of Pakistani gemstones for global commercial markets.—DNA

ICT open door policy ensures direct public access to officials

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad district administration has continued its open-door policy, allowing citizens to meet officials on a daily basis and present complaints and suggestions without restriction. The system ensures that people can visit offices during working hours and get direct access to administrative officers, including assistant commissioners. Officials said the policy is also helping review performance and address issues reported by the public. According to the district administration, the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Islamabad meets citizens every day to hear their concerns. During these meetings,

complaints and proposals shared by the public are forwarded to the relevant officers with instructions for immediate action. This process aims to ensure that issues raised by citizens are handled without delay. The DC Islamabad stated that citizens are free to visit district administration offices at any time during official working hours. The policy has been implemented across all public offices under the district administration, making it easier for people to reach the concerned departments. Citizens can also meet assistant commissioners and other administrative officers without any restriction or prior appointment.

Officials said the open-door policy provides an opportunity to directly assess the performance of officers. By interacting with citizens, the administration receives first-hand information about ongoing issues in different areas of the city. This helps in identifying gaps in service delivery and taking corrective measures. The administration further stated that regular interaction with citizens allows officials to understand ground realities and respond accordingly. Through these meetings, the district administration aims to resolve public issues based on direct feedback rather than relying only on reports.—DNA

ConnectHear takes sign language AI nationwide

ISLAMABAD: South Asia's leading assistive technology startup, ConnectHear, marked another major milestone by hosting the "National Deployment of Sign Language AI for Public Broadcast" in collaboration with GSMA and Ufone. The event brought together key stakeholders from government, telecom, UN agencies, and the humanitarian sector to advance partnerships for accessible communication for the Deaf community at a national level. The event also served as the closing ceremony of ConnectHear's GSMA supported Early Warning AI initiative, SUNO, showcasing key achievements while launching its next phase of nationwide deployment. The initiative represents a significant step forward, building on earlier deployments of SUNO in partnership with Ufone and moving from pilot implementations to scalable, integrated solutions for public communication systems. During its pilot phase, SUNO reached nearly 2,000 beneficia-

ries across more than 10 disaster affected districts in Sindh, delivering critical emergency information in sign language to Deaf communities, even in low bandwidth environments. With its newly announced integration into the ConnectHear virtual interpretation app, SUNO will now extend its reach to over 50,000 users, significantly expanding access to inclusive early warning and disaster communication. In Pakistan, where over 1.35 million people with disabling hearing loss face increased risks during disasters, and more than 27 million people have been displaced since 2008, this initiative highlights the urgent need for inclusive communication systems. British High Commissioner Jane Marriott CMG OBE said: "SUNO is a powerful example of how inclusive, locally led, and AI driven solutions can strengthen disaster preparedness and ensure people with disabilities have equal access to life saving early warning information. The UK is proud to back innovations that leave no one behind,

including the 10 million Deaf and hard of hearing individuals across Pakistan who have the potential to benefit from this technology." Kimberly Brown, Head of Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation, highlighted the significance of the initiative, stating "The GSMA Innovation Fund for Humanitarian Challenges exists to support solutions that move beyond pilots to deliver real, scalable impact, and that ConnectHear's work reflects this ambition." She added "With the national rollout of SUNO, AI powered sign language broadcasts and low bandwidth innovations can ensure Deaf communities receive timely, life saving information during emergencies, setting a global benchmark for accessibility." Syed Atif Raza, Chief Commercial Officer, PTCL and Ufone, emphasized "Technology must go beyond connectivity to enable access and inclusion for underserved segments. Ufone leverages its digital expertise and nationwide footprint to ensure critical information reaches everyone.—DNA

Briefs

Nihal, Abbasi discuss uplift projects, regional situation

ISLAMABAD: Governor Sindh Nihal Hashmi Wednesday called on Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi and discussed matters of mutual interest, the national and regional situation and ongoing development projects. During the meeting, the two leaders also exchanged views on Pakistan's recent diplomatic role, particularly its efforts regarding Iran-US negotiations, said a news release. They appreciated the roles of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, and Field Marshal Asim Munir in the successful holding of the talks in Islamabad. Both sides agreed that Pakistan's diplomatic initiatives were highly significant for the promotion of peace and stability in the region. The meeting also focused on various Pakistan Railways development schemes, including the ML-1 project in Sindh. They agreed to accelerate the pace of work on railway infrastructure improvement and new development initiatives. It was also decided that the Governor Sindh and the Railways Minister would jointly attend the inauguration ceremony of an international-standard educational institution in Karachi on April 20. Hanif Abbasi will inaugurate the country's first IB World School. They termed the promotion of education and provision of world-class educational facilities among the government's top priorities.—APP

Police arrest liquor supplier

RAWALPINDI: Cantt police on Tuesday arrested a liquor supplier and recovered 39 bottles of alcohol during an operation. Officials said the police intercepted a suspicious vehicle and recovered the liquor from the possession of the accused. A case has been registered and the suspect will be presented before court with solid evidence. SP Potohar Sardar Babar Mumtaz Khan said strict action was being taken to curb the menace of drugs and illegal substances. In separate operations across the district, police arrested five suspects and recovered drugs and illegal weapons from their possession. According to officials, Chaklala police recovered 1.56kg hashish from one suspect, while City police seized 110 grams of heroin from another.

Wah Cantt and Gujjar Khan police arrested three suspects and recovered arms with ammunition, registering separate cases. Divisional SPs said action against drug dealers and illegal weapon holders would continue without discrimination.—APP

Al-Shifa Trust eye camps treat 665,000 patients in one year

He informed that the newly commissioned mobile theatre comprises two specialised truck units. The first houses a generator, sterilisation equipment, and pre-operative facilities. The second expands into a full operating environment with two surgical tables, allowing surgeons to operate simultaneously and perform up to 100 surgeries per day

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Al-Shifa Trust's community outreach programmes reached more than 665,000 patients in the financial year 2024-25, while the organisation also launched a mobile operation theatre developed in collaboration with Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) to provide free eye surgeries in remote communities where fixed hospitals remain inaccessible. While briefing media, President of Al-Shifa Trust Maj. Gen. (Retd) Rehmat Khan said that the Al-Shifa Centre for Community Ophthalmology (ACCO), set up over 1,400 eye camps, screened more than 420,000 patients and 244,000 schoolchildren for vision defects, and performed 13,777 surgeries, mostly cataract procedures in one year. It also screened over 38,000 patients for hypertension and diabetes, reflecting a widening scope beyond ophthalmology, he added. He informed that the newly commissioned mobile theatre comprises two specialised truck units. The first houses a generator, sterilisation equipment, and pre-operative facilities. The second expands into a full



operating environment with two surgical tables, allowing surgeons to operate simultaneously and perform up to 100 surgeries per day. MD of OGDCL Ahmed Hayat Lak said the company has sponsored 160 surgical camps since 2017, enabling 28,000 surgeries, treating 260,000 patients, and screening 75,000 schoolchildren. General

Manager ACCO Dr. Hafiz Muhammad Najam-ul-Hasnat said over the past 25 years, ACCO has conducted approximately 150,000 surgeries across all four provinces as well as AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan. In FY 2024-25, the programme expanded internationally for the first time, serving 5,632 beneficiaries and performing more than 400 cataract operations in Somalia, with plans to extend services to Afghanistan and East Africa. Following the 2025 monsoon floods, ACCO teams also reached more than 32,000 affected people in KPK and north and south Punjab, distributing medicines, glasses, and hygiene kits.

About 26 million people in Pakistan live with vision impairment, including 1.5 million who are blind and more than 3 million children facing preventable sight loss. Nearly 90 percent live in low-income areas with limited access to care. Pakistan has only 15 ophthalmologists, five optometrists, and nine allied ophthalmic personnel per million people, highlighting the scale of unmet need and the limits of charity-driven models without sustained public health investment.

Pakistani scholar bridges academia and industry

BEIJING For Dr. Sami Iqbal from Pakistan, the journey from a master's student at Southeast University in 2015 to a leading researcher and tech entrepreneur in 2026 is a testament to how academic excellence, when paired with entrepreneurial vision, can create tangible solutions to some of the world's most pressing challenges. Dr. Sami is now an assistant professor at the university's School of Electronic Engineering and the founder of Enfinity Innovate, according to a report published by China Economic Net on Wednesday. The technology startup focuses on smart devices, wearable technologies, AI-assisted preventive healthcare, renewable energy materials, and technology transfer from China to Pakistan and other Belt and Road countries. Through these roles, Dr. Sami is positioning himself as a bridge between academia and corporate innovation. Why would a young researcher devote himself to a field that has not yet been commercialized? The answer lies in a problem that affects billions of people: energy poverty. Specializing in third-generation solar cells and organic materials like perovskites and multi-walled carbon nanotubes, Dr. Sami has published nearly 30 papers and filed several patents. His work is backed by a global network of collaborations. Speaking about China's dominance in the solar industry, Dr. Sami noted that more than 80 percent of the world's solar cells and silicon are produced and processed in China. "Even during my recent four-month sabbatical research visit at McGill University in Montreal, most of the materials we used in those labs were imported from China as R&D raw resources," he said. He further expressed confidence that third-generation photovoltaic devices will be available for commercial production in less than a decade. "This would highly impact power shortages in Pakistan and every developing country," he added. "China already has a huge production of intermittent power sources from solar cells connecting to the national grid. The same model can benefit Pakistan." What inspired Dr. Sami to start his company is the speed with which China is turning research into real products. "In China, the distance between the lab and the market is very short," he said. He co-founded Enfinity Innovate in 2021 with a Chinese partner and is now working with young entrepreneurs from Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe and other Belt and Road countries. The company has already delivered results. For the Lagos State Police in Nigeria, it developed a biomedical device that tests urine for up to 18 drugs. "Commercialization is expected in the third quarter of this year," Dr. Sami said. In agriculture, Enfinity Innovate has been providing stevia – a natural sugar substitute – to the Punjab Agriculture Research Board since 2024. "Pakistan is one of the most diabetes-affected countries in the world," he noted. "This can help." He also hosted eight officials from the Punjab Soil Fertility Research Institute for an eight-day visit to Anhui province, where he briefed them on tissue culture, smart farming and portable soil analysers. In terms of technology transfer, the company has signed an agreement with a smart farming company in Luan, Anhui province, to send Pakistani technical staff for four to twelve months of training in Chinese labs. "The same model will apply to healthcare and smart manufacturing," he added. Dr. Sami's entrepreneurial efforts have been recognized through multiple awards. His team won second place at the Nanjing selection round of the 4th China Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition, as well as second prize in the Belt and Road International Student Track at the 8th "Win in Nanjing" Youth University Student Entrepreneurship Competition. "These competitions provide platforms for international students to showcase their abilities and gain support," he shared. "This is one way I can contribute back to the international community in Nanjing and pay something back to China and the Chinese people." Beyond his professional life, Dr. Sami has found a home in Nanjing. "Nanjing is an amazing city – a blend of history, culture and modern architecture," said him. He enjoys traveling to the countryside, hiking Purple Mountain, and volunteering for events organized by the district government and local NGOs. Through his startup platform, he also organizes entrepreneurial events for students from Africa, South Asia and the Gulf states to help them understand the opportunities Nanjing offers for foreigners to learn business and run startups.—DNA

CPEC awards honor excellence at Dasu hydropower project

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Dasu Hydropower Project hosted a China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) awards ceremony to recognize employees for their outstanding performance and contributions to the project. A total of 22 employees were honored across three categories, including "Management Builders," "Outstanding Team Leaders," and "Grassroots Model Workers," highlighting a strong culture of professionalism, teamwork,

and operational excellence, Gwadar Pro reported on Wednesday. According to officials, the award recipients demonstrated exceptional dedication and leadership, playing a vital role in ensuring the steady progress of the strategically significant hydropower initiative. The Dasu Hydropower Project is a key component of Pakistan's long-term energy strategy, aimed at generating clean and reliable electricity. Officials say the recognition of employees reinforces a shared commitment to advancing sustainable energy solutions and supporting the country's growing power needs.



RAWALPINDI: Women posing for a group photo on the occasion of lunch hosted by MNA Isphanyar Bandhara for the minority community. DNA

ICT Police intensify security

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police enhanced security across the federal capital and conducted large-scale grand combing operations, detaining 17 suspicious individuals, along with one vehicle and 36 motorcycles during search operations. An official told on Wednesday that the operations were carried out in the jurisdictions of Tarnol, Khanna, Aabpara, Shams Colony, Sumbal, Sihala and Shahzad Town police stations under the supervision of zonal SPs. He said lady police officials also participated in the operations to ensure effective checking. During the operations, a total of 802 individuals and 406 households were checked. The official said 115 shops and 26 hotels were also inspected during the search. He said 276 motorcycles and 106 vehicles were examined during the drive. The official said suspects involved in illegal weapons possession were also arrested and two guns along with ammunition were recovered. He said drug peddlers were also apprehended and 333 grams of ice (crystal meth) was recovered from their possession. He said special checking points had been established at entry and exit routes of the city to ensure effective monitoring. All patrolling units and special squads were actively performing duties across the city, he added. Senior officers remained present in the field, reviewing security arrangements and ensuring implementation of measures.—APP

Murree admin reviews facilities, orders improved arrangements

DNA

RAWALPINDI, Deputy Commissioner Agha Zaheer Abbas Shirazi on Tuesday inspected various key locations in Murree to review administrative arrangements and public facilities. During the visit, he checked traffic flow, cleanliness, parking arrangements, and anti-encroachment measures on Mall Road, Jhika Gali, and adjoining areas, officials said. He directed authorities to prioritise facilitating tourists and residents, issuing on-the-spot instructions when shortcomings were observed. The DC said Murree, as a major tourist destination, required well-organised management and strict enforcement of policies. He reiterated zero tolerance against encroachments and stressed improved traffic management to ensure a pleasant environment for visitors.

Gwadar "Fishermen Colony" gets over 200 acres land

GWADAR: The Balochistan government has provided over 200 acres of land for the development of modern "Fishermen Colony" for Gwadar fishermen at the cost of Rs2,439.6 million, Gwadar Pro reported on Wednesday. The land is located at Mouza Ankada South, near the junction of Jiwani and Awaran Avenue, and the Sports Complex Gwadar. The "Fishermen Colony" is a low-cost housing scheme. A total of 2,970 residential plots, each measuring 120 square yards, will be allocated to fishermen. A key meeting regarding the Fishermen Colony project in Gwadar was held under the chairmanship of Director General Gwadar Development Authority (GDA), Mo-in-ur-Rehman Khan. The meeting was attended by Chief Engineer GDA Haji Sid Muhammad, Director Town Planning Shahid Ali, and Deputy Director Town Planning Abdul Razzaq. During the meeting, the Director Town Planning provided a detailed briefing, stating that the Fishermen Colony project was announced approximately three years ago by the Prime Minister of Pakistan during his visit to Gwadar, which aims at the welfare of local fishermen. Subsequently, GDA completed initial groundwork. It was further shared that a request has been submitted to the federal government for the required funding, and the project is awaiting the release of these funds. Once the funds are made available, development work will formally commence. In the next phase, the process of plot allotment to fishermen will also begin. The Government of Balochistan will provide significant subsidies on land prices and development costs to ensure affordable and quality housing for fishermen. The project will include modern urban facilities such as clean drinking water supply, sewerage system, roads, electricity, schools, mosques, hospitals, and parks. The Planning and Development (P&D) Department Balochistan has already approved the PC-II of the project, under which consultancy services, master planning, design, and other technical aspects will be completed. To ensure transparency, a digital database of allottees will also be established. On this occasion, DG GDA Mo-in-ur-Rehman Khan directed that the project should be advanced on a priority basis so that the real stakeholders of Gwadar – the fishermen – can be provided with modern and dignified housing facilities at the earliest.—DNA

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What Hungary's election means for the world of politics

DR. DIANA GALEEVA

AFTER 16 years in power, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's rule is coming to an end following his party's defeat in a parliamentary election on Sunday. Peter Magyar, the leader of the center-right opposition Respect and Freedom Party, will succeed him. This party was founded in 2020 and has been led by Magyar since 2024. The key focus of the party is to tackle government corruption and improve living standards and public services. Internationally, it will take a pro-European and unifying stance.

The Respect and Freedom Party is set to secure more than two-thirds of the seats in parliament (136 of 199). This election was eagerly awaited, as the result will have implications for Europe and the world.

Many analysts coined the outcome as the end of an "illiberal democracy." European Commission President Ursula von Der Leyen posted on X: "Europe's heart is beating stronger in Hungary tonight." She added: "Hungary has chosen Europe. Europe has always chosen Hungary. A country reclaims its European path. The Union grows stronger." German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said: "Let's join forces for a strong, secure and, above all, united Europe." Emmanuel Macron also sent his congratulations, saying that "France welcomes the victory of democratic participation, the Hungarian people's commitment to European Union values, and Hungary's European engagement." Similarly, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer wrote that these elections were a "historic moment, not only for Hungary, but for European democracy."

What does it mean in practical terms? For Hungary, it means a potential return to a more democratic method of governance and operation of the state. The key point is that Hungary is now poised to return to a course of closer relations with the EU, as Magyar promised the crowd in Budapest. The key point is that Hungary is now poised to return to a course of closer relations with the EU, as Magyar promised.

Magyar's victory will be considered a relief for Brussels given the EU's difficult history of relations with Orbán due to his stances on many issues. Under Orbán's leadership, Hungary used its veto to

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tackle the European response to many crucial strategic issues, including the Ukraine war. Orbán has repeatedly blocked an aid package to Ukraine and resisted EU sanctions on Russia since 2022. In February, Hungary blocked a planned €90 billion (\$106 billion) EU loan to Ukraine until the flow of Russian oil through the damaged Druzhba pipeline resumed. The elections in Hungary might have an impact on the continued future support of Kyiv from the EU side, but there are many obstacles. Currently, Europeans are facing an energy crisis that has direct links to their own security and necessities. At the same time, Hungary itself struggles with its economy and, if Magyar repairs relations with the EU, the bloc might consider increasing its funding for the country. Hungary has faced many economic challenges, such as stagnation and soaring living costs. In other words, the economic factor is a challenge for both Hungary and the EU. This adds uncertainty to the future of the Ukraine conflict.

Paradoxically, these elections will have a less clear impact on relations with the rest of the world, as the country will now follow the course of the EU. Modern politics is strange, with some analyses billing these elections as a "historical milestone." This is indeed a milestone for bilateral relations between Hungary and the EU, but what it will mean for the rest of the world, which has its own uncertainties to deal with, is unclear at this stage. What it will mean for the rest of the world, which has its own uncertainties to deal with, is unclear at this stage.

Nonetheless, Magyar's victory means that the EU as a bloc will become more united despite all the challenges of the past. From an international relations standpoint, it means that the formation of alliances has proven to be an effective model. This example can be useful for others to consider, including the Gulf Cooperation Council states, as together they can tackle their own challenges and uncertainties.

This also means the competition of the great powers will continue in the short run, meaning the world will face struggles over and over again. If this game of "big politics" continues, the world will not be safe for all. The wise alternative would be for leaders who represent different views and stances to accept the reality that all are different. The world of politics would win if the diverse array of stances around the globe were welcomed everywhere. Consequently, Hungary's elections could allow for the opening of a new era of relations between countries, in which the EU can focus on its own problems and uncertainties with neutrality, providing an example for others through daily efforts to bring peace and stability. This also links to the ongoing discourse about the battle of democracy versus autocracy. The acceptance of a diversity of views across the globe is the only winning strategy. In the end, world leaders who have a responsibility to secure their own interests are also responsible for peace in the world.

Pakistan's Peace Window Reopens

Qamar Bashir



Pakistan's importance has therefore grown rather than diminished. It hosted the first direct U.S.-Iran discussion in nearly half a century, won public praise from Guterres, and is now being openly discussed again as the venue for the next round. In diplomacy, trust is measured less by ceremony than by repetition. If two adversaries return to the same table in the same country after a failed first round, that country has already scored a quiet but significant success. Pakistan's role is no longer symbolic; it is becoming operational. The reason the world cares so intensely is obvious.

AFTER a tense pause in talks between Iran and the United States held in Islamabad on April 11, and to the relief of the entire world, diplomacy has not died; it has simply entered a more difficult and consequential phase, with Pakistan once again emerging as the venue where war-weary rivals may still search for an exit. The collapse of the first round of direct U.S.-Iran talks in Pakistan did not end diplomacy. It exposed how far apart the two sides still are, but it also showed that both Washington and Tehran believe the crisis is too dangerous to leave to military logic alone. On April 14, President Donald Trump said a second round of talks in Pakistan could happen "over the next two days," while U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres called it "highly probable" that negotiations would restart. Pakistan's finance minister, Muhammad Aurangzeb, also said the country's leadership was "not giving up" and would keep pursuing dialogue.

That is the real story of the moment. The first session in Islamabad may have ended without a deal, but it was not a diplomatic failure in the larger sense. Vice President JD Vance himself struck a more optimistic tone on April 14, saying negotiators had made "a ton of progress," that Iranian negotiators appeared to want a deal, and that he felt "very good" about where things stood. That is a very different message from a final rupture. It suggests the breakdown was procedural and substantive, not terminal. The gap remains wide, especially over enrichment, inspections, and access, but the process is alive.

Pakistan's importance has therefore grown rather than diminished. It hosted the first direct U.S.-Iran discussion in nearly half a century, won public praise from Guterres, and is now being openly discussed again as the venue for the next round. In diplomacy, trust is measured less by ceremony than by repetition. If two adversaries return to the same table in the same country after a failed first round, that country has already scored a quiet but significant success. Pakistan's role is no longer symbolic; it is becoming operational. The reason the world cares so intensely is obvious. The war has already imposed a severe economic shock. Reuters reported that Wall Street rallied sharply on April 14 because investors interpreted talk of renewed negotiations as a sign that the worst-case scenario might still be avoided. The S&P 500 rose 1.17%, the Nasdaq jumped 1.95%, and Brent crude fell 4.6% to \$94.79 while WTI dropped nearly 8% to \$91.20. Markets were not celebrating peace; they

were pricing in the possibility that diplomacy might prevent a wider catastrophe.

The IMF's warning makes the stakes even clearer. It cut its 2026 growth forecast for the Middle East and North Africa to 1.1%, with Iran's economy projected to contract 6.1%, and warned that the conflict is already inflicting broad damage through disrupted shipping, damaged infrastructure, and energy insecurity. In other words, this is no longer a regional war with merely regional costs. It has become a global economic threat touching inflation, shipping, fertilizer, fuel, and food systems far beyond the battlefield.

That is why the Strait of Hormuz remains central to everything. About one-fifth of the world's oil trade normally passes through that corridor, and both the war and the subsequent U.S. blockade of Iranian ports have turned it into the most sensitive chokepoint in the global economy. Reuters reported that Britain and France are now preparing a 40-country diplomatic effort focused on restoring freedom of navigation, while refusing to simply fold themselves into the American approach. That alone tells us how far the crisis has widened: even close U.S. allies are now building parallel frameworks to contain the fallout.

Washington's own posture reflects strain. Publicly, U.S. officials remain firm. Vance has repeated that Iran cannot be allowed to retain a path to nuclear weapons capability, and reports from CBS and the Washington Post indicate that Washington pushed a demand for a long suspension of uranium enrichment, alongside wider restrictions. But firmness is not the same as appetite for endless war. The very fact that the White House is signaling renewed talks so quickly after the first round shows that military pressure alone has not delivered closure. It has created leverage, but not resolution.

Iran, for its part, is also signaling that it has not shut the door. Tehran continues to insist on its rights under international law and rejects maximalist U.S. demands, but its willingness to return to talks in Pakistan indicates that it still sees diplomacy as useful, especially if the alternative is a prolonged economic siege and continued strategic pressure. Guterres' remarks, Pakistan's continued engagement, and Trump's own public comments all point in the same direction: neither side believes this crisis can be settled quickly through coercion alone.

Parallel diplomacy is also unfolding on another

front, though with far less certainty. Israel and Lebanon held their first direct talks in decades in Washington on April 14, under U.S. auspices and with Secretary of State Marco Rubio participating. The talks produced agreement to continue discussions, but they also immediately revealed their core weakness: Hezbollah rejects the track, and rocket fire resumed even as diplomacy was being launched. That does not make the talks meaningless, but it does mean they cannot by themselves end the violence unless they eventually alter the military and political calculations of the armed actors on the ground.

So the regional picture is mixed. On one side, there is cautious diplomatic movement: Pakistan trying to bring Washington and Tehran back together, Europe preparing a post-crisis Hormuz framework, and Washington opening a rare direct Israel-Lebanon channel. On the other side, there is still active fighting, deep mistrust, maritime disruption, and a massive humanitarian toll. AP reported that more than 2,100 people have been killed in Lebanon and more than a million displaced, while the broader war has killed thousands in Iran and continued to wound U.S. forces. These realities make optimism necessary, but premature triumphalism dangerous. What Pakistan can claim, however, is substantial. It has shown itself capable of hosting high-risk diplomacy with professionalism and enough credibility that both parties are prepared to consider returning. For a country often described internationally through the language of instability, this is a valuable reversal of narrative. Pakistan is being seen not as a bystander to chaos, but as a facilitator of de-escalation. That does not guarantee success, but it does restore diplomatic relevance.

The next 48 hours matter because they will test whether the first Islamabad round was merely an opening probe or the foundation of a real process. If talks resume, markets will likely read that as the strongest signal yet that a broader settlement remains possible. If they do not, the war economy, maritime insecurity, and political fragmentation now spreading from Tehran to Washington to Europe will deepen. For now, the most important fact is simple: the door is still open, and Pakistan is still holding 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

Darkness by Design

Dr. Muhammad Bilal Tahir

Fuel diversification is equally critical. Pakistan's dependence on imported LNG and furnace oil is not only costly but strategically fragile, exposing the economy to external shocks. Meanwhile, indigenous resources—hydropower, wind, and solar—remain underutilized. Short-term fixes, such as diverting local gas, may ease pressure but fail to alter the long-term trajectory. Compounding this is the persistent burden of circular debt—the sector's silent destabilizer. When payments stall and losses go unchecked, investment collapses and efficiency becomes irrelevant...

PAKISTAN is dimming its lights again—this time by design. The government's decision to enforce roughly 2.25 hours of daily outages during peak evening demand is being framed as a calculated move to prevent a tariff shock. On paper, the logic is defensible: generating electricity through expensive imported fuels during high-demand hours would push prices sharply upward. But when a country must choose between darkness and unaffordable power, it is not managing a fluctuation—it is confronting a structural fault line. Call it what it is: a system under stress.

The immediate trigger is clear. Fuel constraints, worsened by disruptions in liquefied natural gas (LNG) supplies amid global tensions, have tightened Pakistan's already fragile energy balance. For years, the country has leaned heavily on imported fuels to bridge its energy gap. That dependence now stands exposed. When supply chains falter, the grid does not merely strain—it reveals how little control Pakistan has over its own energy security. Compounding this is a familiar seasonal reality: reduced hydropower generation and a sharp surge in evening demand. The system, officials insist, can meet total demand—but only at a cost that would ripple through the economy. Running plants on furnace oil or high-cost imports during peak hours could push tariffs up by Rs5 to Rs6 per unit. Faced with that prospect, the state has opted for controlled outages, limiting the increase to a more manageable range.

So demand is curtailed to protect prices. This is the essence of the so-called "Peak Relief Strategy." It is scheduled, targeted, and, in theory, rational. Yet for households enduring long, humid evenings, for students studying under dim backup lights, and for small businesses watching revenues shrink, the distinction between strategy and load-shedding is academic. An outage—planned or otherwise—still carries a cost. The economy slows, productivity dips, and daily life absorbs the impact in quiet but significant ways. But

the deeper problem lies beyond this immediate policy choice. Pakistan's energy crisis is not cyclical; it is systemic. It is rooted in how electricity is generated, transmitted, priced, and consumed—and in how policy reacts to stress rather than anticipates it. At its core is a mismatch—between when energy is available and when it is needed most. Daytime capacity often sits underutilized, while evening peaks strain the system to its limits. In physics, inefficiency always carries a cost—and Pakistan's grid is paying it through losses, volatility, and repeated crises. Transmission bottlenecks, line losses, and uneven consumption patterns turn manageable fluctuations into persistent instability.

Yet the same logic that explains the problem also points toward solutions. Start with the most underutilized asset in Pakistan's energy landscape: sunlight. The country lies within a high solar irradiance zone, receiving abundant sunlight for most of the year. This is not a marginal advantage; it is a structural opportunity. Distributed solar—particularly rooftop systems—can significantly reduce pressure on the grid during peak hours. Every kilowatt generated at the point of consumption is a kilowatt the system does not have to produce, transmit, and subsidize.

What is missing is policy consistency. Net metering, once a promising driver of decentralized generation, has been clouded by regulatory uncertainty. Without clear incentives and long-term signals, adoption remains slower than it should be. Then there is storage—the critical piece often overlooked. Renewable energy's intermittency is frequently cited as a limitation, but the real issue is not variability; it is the absence of systems to manage it. Battery storage allows energy generated during the day to be used when demand peaks in the evening. In practical terms, it bridges the gap between supply and demand. Without storage, renewable expansion remains incomplete; with it, the entire equation shifts. Demand, too, must be engineered. Peak hours are not inevitable—they are behavioral. Through time-

use tariffs, efficient appliances, and smarter industrial scheduling, demand can be redistributed. Flattening the peak does not require reducing overall consumption; it requires using energy more intelligently. This is where technology and policy must converge.

Fuel diversification is equally critical. Pakistan's dependence on imported LNG and furnace oil is not only costly but strategically fragile, exposing the economy to external shocks. Meanwhile, indigenous resources—hydropower, wind, and solar—remain underutilized. Short-term fixes, such as diverting local gas, may ease pressure but fail to alter the long-term trajectory. Compounding this is the persistent burden of circular debt—the sector's silent destabilizer. When payments stall and losses go unchecked, investment collapses and efficiency becomes irrelevant. No system can improve on a weak financial foundation. There is also an issue of equity. Uneven load management across regions risks deepening perceptions of unfair burden-sharing. Ultimately, controlled outages may limit tariffs, but they reflect a reactive system—one that manages crisis rather than building resilience.

Pakistan does not need better load-shedding. It needs a different energy logic. Rewiring the grid is not a slogan—it is a necessity. It means shifting from centralized, fuel-dependent generation to distributed, renewable systems. It means investing in storage, modernizing transmission, and aligning pricing with efficiency. It means designing an energy system that anticipates demand rather than scrambling to contain it. There are no quick fixes. But there is a clear direction. The present crisis offers clarity. It exposes trade-offs, sharpens choices, and underscores the cost of inaction. Pakistan can continue to manage scarcity—or it can build a system that is stable, sustainable, and secure. Because the real question is no longer whether the lights can be kept on tonight. It is whether the country is willing to build a system that keeps them on—every night.

Briefs

Pakistan plays key role in US...

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efforts to broker a lasting peace between the United States and Iran. According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the delegation is visiting Iran to support ongoing mediation aimed at transforming the fragile two-week ceasefire into a permanent agreement. Iranian officials confirmed that Tehran and Washington continue to exchange messages through Pakistani mediators. The visit comes ahead of a likely second round of US-Iran talks, with sources indicating the next session could be held either in Islamabad or Riyadh by the end of next week. Pakistan has emerged as a central facilitator in the peace process following its successful role in securing the initial ceasefire.

Iran says exchanges with US...

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likely to receive a Pakistani delegation as a continuation of the discussions in Islamabad," he added. Baqaei asserted that Tehran's right to enrich uranium was "indisputable" although the level of enrichment is "negotiable". The Iranian official said the right to peaceful use of nuclear energy could not be "taken away under pressure or through war". "Regarding the level and type of enrichment, we have always stated that this issue is negotiable. We have emphasised that Iran should be able to continue enrichment in accordance with its needs," he added. The remarks come a day after US President Donald Trump said that talks between Washington and Tehran could resume over the next two days and that "we're more inclined to go" to Pakistan, according to The New York Post.

Beijing supports...

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according to a statement released by China's Foreign Ministry. Wang Yi further stated that China is willing to continue playing a "constructive role" in promoting peace and stability in the Middle East. The remarks come after the first round of direct US-Iran talks in Islamabad failed to produce a breakthrough. Meanwhile, the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) has reiterated that its naval blockade of Iranian ports remains fully effective. "No vessels have made it past US forces," CENTCOM stated on X. It added that nine vessels have complied with instructions from US forces and turned back toward Iranian ports or coastal areas in the past 48 hours.

Sri Lanka repatriates...

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rescued 32 Iranian personnel aboard the IRIS Dena warship, which was hit without warning and sunk by an American submarine off Galle, in the Sri Lankan exclusive economic zone on March 4 — days after the beginning of US-Israeli attacks on Iran. More than 100 sailors were killed. The vessel was returning home after taking part in the International Fleet Review 2026 naval exercise hosted by India. "We rescued 32 in the ini84 dead bodies."

Trump claims...

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"essentially" promised not to deliver weapons. "I had heard that China's giving weapons to, I mean — you're seeing it all over the place — to Iran," Trump said. "And I wrote him a letter asking him not to do that, and he wrote me a letter saying that essentially he's not doing that." The conflict in the Middle East has added tension to the already complicated relationship between the world's top economic powers. The Trump-Xi summit had originally been scheduled for March but was delayed due to Trump's decision to launch the war.

Walsh says Shaheen has 'all qualities' to carry forward Pakistan's pace legacy

"It's a lot different because you don't have as much time with the players as you have with the international side"

DNA

KARACHI: The legacy of Pakistan's fast bowling continues to command global respect, and few understand the craft better than West Indies legend Courtney Walsh. From the greats of the past to the rising stars of today, Walsh believes Pakistan's production line of fast bowlers remains as potent as ever, with Shaheen Afridi standing out as a complete modern-day pacer. Speaking to Geo News during the ongoing Pakistan Super League, which is part of Rawalpindi setup as coach, Walsh pointed to conditions and skill development as the foundation of Pakistan's fast-bowling success across generations.

"I think the conditions here," he said when asked what makes Pakistani pacers different from the rest of the world.

"You have to have good skill sets, and you've got quality bowlers here from over the years. I mean, you go back, way back, went from Sarfraz up till now, Wasim, Waqar, those guys. All those guys have been good fast bowlers for Pakistan, and the youngsters have come on, and they've learned their trade as well," he added.

At the heart of the current pace attack, Walsh sees Afridi as a symbol of discipline and consistency, qualities he believes define great fast bowlers. "Shaheen is someone who I've always admired, the way he conducts himself, the way he plays, he's never given that attitude and just his own

skill set and the pride that he plays when he plays for Pakistan and even in franchise cricket. And that's what you want to see in fast bowlers, and he has all those qualities." He also acknowledged the depth in Pakistan's pace resources, naming Naseem Shah and Mohammad Wasim Jr among those carrying the tradition forward. "As you mentioned, Naseem and those guys, yes, they're up there with it, and the quality is always going to be there. But I've always singled him (Shaheen) out for the way he executes, the way he goes about his job, keeping it simple and just trying to do the basics consistently." While Walsh's words reflect admiration for Pakistan's pace culture, his current role in franchise cricket has given him a different perspective on the modern game. Working within the fast-paced environment of the PSL, he highlighted the challenges of coaching in a format where preparation time is minimal. "It's a lot different because you don't have as much time with the players as you have with the international side. You come straight into the competition, so you have to sort of hit the ground running. And it's interesting. It's good to see because you've got professional players as well who know what they want to do and how to go about doing it. So it's more or less guidance and a lot more discussions than actually coaching." Despite not-so-encouraging results for his side, Walsh described his experience in the league as positive, underlining the competitive envi-

ronment and team spirit.

"It's been very good, very happy to be here. It's the first time I've been involved with the Pindiz team as well. So, very good. The results might not be showing that at the moment, but it's good; the guys are looking after us. And we're just trying to put some games together where we can do well. But apart from that, everything, the atmosphere and everything has been good." The evolution of cricket, particularly in the T20 era, has placed bowlers under increasing pressure, a reality Walsh readily acknowledges. Yet, he finds encouragement in how fast bowlers have adapted to survive in a format dominated by batters.

"I'm happy. I'm happy to see what I'm seeing in terms of the number of fast bowlers who have gone through the game and have done well. The game has evolved from the time I played until now. It's good to see. A good skill set has to be used. Consistency and the challenges are out there. But I'm happy that the quality of fast bowlers that we have on the circuit can make a name for themselves. Because, as you mentioned, T20 is a very challenging game and it's more suited for batters. So when you have fast bowlers doing well at that, I'm very happy."

Even so, he believes the balance between bat and ball remains a concern, with surfaces and conditions playing a crucial role. "Give them a more balanced surface to play on in terms of where the ball can do a little bit, comes off the wicket and seam around a little bit. It's a little bit of seam, so it's

a bit challenging. But in today's game, we know that everyone wants to see runs being scored and big sixes being hit. So that's a challenge for the bowlers. But some of them have coped with it pretty well, where they try to minimise the amount of boundaries they go for. And that in itself is a skill set you have to practice."

Beyond the technical aspects, Walsh also addressed a broader shift in cricket, the growing preference among players for shorter formats over Test cricket.

"I think it's going to happen where some guys are just happy to play the shorter format, and they want to be T20 specialists. One, they might not have the ability to play Test cricket and two, they might just want to play as long as they can play. But the T20 cricket is a shorter, faster game. A lot of excitement, and at the end of the day, to be honest as well, you get a decent paycheck, so you can't blame the guys for wanting to do that. I think if Test cricket wants to challenge that, then they have to look to market it more and then a lot more incentives as well." For the next generation of fast bowlers, however, Walsh's message remains rooted in timeless principles: discipline, hard work and consistency. "Be prepared to work hard, be disciplined, be consistent in what you want to do and practice your skill set so that you can be the best at what you want to be at. Nothing beats consistency, and nothing beats hard work. So once you put the work in and you're consistent in what you want to get done, then the execution part will take care of itself."

Sufiyan Muqeem scripts redemption arc amid Zalmi dominance

DNA

KARACHI: When Sufiyan Muqeem marks his run-up at the bowling crease, the fall of opposition wickets appears almost inevitable. Such has been the pattern the left-arm wrist spinner has established this HBL Pakistan Super League season for Peshawar Zalmi. Largely introduced into the attack by captain Babar Azam during the crucial middle overs, Sufiyan has made it a habit of striking regularly. In doing so, the 23-year-old has collected 13 wickets in five PSL outings so far — averaging just under 10 and conceding a miserly 6.45 per over — to sit atop the bowling charts.

Sufiyan's latest masterclass came on Monday night at the National Bank Stadium, where his spell of 3-30 proved decisive in Peshawar Zalmi's 24-run victory over Multan Sultans. Chasing 197, the Sultans looked comfortable at stages, but Sufiyan's variations and control turned the tide. He removed key players including Josh Philippe and Ashton Turner, applying the brakes as the asking rate soared. The southpaw's resurgence in the PSL has been nothing short of a redemption arc after he was dropped from the Pakistan start despite a promising start to his international career two years ago — four ODIs yielding eight wickets at 22.75 and 19 T20Is producing 27 scalps at 14.74. However,

selectors moved on, leaving the young spinner to reassess and rebuild. That setback might have dented confidence. Instead, it triggered a professional response. Back with Zalmi, Sufiyan has displayed the composure and hunger that first caught the selectors' attention.

"Whenever I give him the ball as a captain, I have confidence that he'll pick up a wicket for me somewhere," Babar said after the Multan match. "When he goes for the kill, he's not a bowler who gets hit easily. In my opinion, he's a big asset for Pakistan, and going forward, he'll serve Pakistan a lot with the way he's bowling." Babar added that Sufiyan still needed improvement but was progressing steady-

ly. "He talks to the coaches. After every match, he asks, 'Where can I do better?'" the Pakistan stalwart noted. That attitude — humble, inquisitive and relentless — has been evident in Sufiyan's ability to deliver under pressure, mixing flight, dip and sharp turn on unresponsive surfaces. Zalmi's fielding coach Azhar Ali echoed the skipper's views, highlighting the rarity of left-arm wrist spin and the control Sufiyan has shown. "Left-arm wrist spin is quite rare and it's hard to bowl accurately. The way he has bowled with control and temperament is impressive because in T20 cricket the best batters come after you and you have to be brave — and he has been brave," Azhar said.

Leeds grab win over United as Martinez sees red

DNA

MANCHESTER: Leeds United's Noah Okafor scored twice as his side grabbed a morale-boosting 2-1 Premier League away win over bitter rivals Manchester United, who had Lisandro Martinez sent off in the 56th minute for pulling the hair of Dominic Calvert-Lewin. Manchester United remain third in the table on 55 points, ahead of Aston Villa on goal difference, while 15th-placed Leeds put some more daylight between them and the teams battling relegation by moving up to 36 points, six ahead of Tottenham Hotspur in 18th.

As well as battling for survival, Leeds are through to the FA Cup semi-finals, where they face Chelsea at Wembley on April 26. The Yorkshire club were able to celebrate their first top-flight win against United since 2002 and their first league victory at Old Trafford in 45 years. "Proud of the boys. Fantastic performance. We are in the crunch time of the season and it's important to keep your nerves and stick to your plan," Leeds boss Daniel Farke said. "I think the first half was fantastic, we should have been higher up than 2-0, we missed many many chances."

Tennis: Iga Swiatek banks on Rafael Nadal's former coach

DNA

IIGA Swiatek is hoping to benefit from new coach Francisco Roig's experience and technical expertise when the world number four begins her claycourt season at the Stuttgart Open this week after a disappointing start to the year. The Polish six-times Grand Slam champion lost in the quarter-finals of the Australian Open and tournaments in Doha and Indian Wells before a shock second-round defeat by Magda Linette in the Miami Open last month. That prompted Swiatek to part ways with her coach Wim Fissette and hire Roig, who worked with her idol Rafael Nadal from 2005-22 and more recently with Briton Emma Raducanu. "I'm really happy to start with Francis," Swiatek told a press conference in Stuttgart. "I was basically looking for someone with a good eye, really technical, but also a person that is experienced enough to help me through some different kind of situations. I feel Francisco has lived through everything on tour. "It's going really amazing... I was able to find a new coach pretty fast, which is a positive thing because when you do that in the middle of the season, it's nice to have some security in that." Swiatek, who has won four French Open titles on her favored clay courts, began preparations for the Grand Slam that begins on May 24 with a training block at Nadal's academy in Mallorca.

Atletico survive Barca scare

MADRID: Atletico Madrid reached their first Champions League semifinal in nine years on Tuesday, squeezing past Barcelona 3-2 on aggregate despite a nerve-racking 2-1 home defeat that had the Metropolitan crowd holding its breath until the final whistle. Diego Simeone's side thought they had done much of the heavy lifting with a 2-0 win at the Camp Nou in the first leg but that cushion was wiped out by an early Barca blitz as the visitors struck twice in the first half to level the tie. Lamine Yamal capitalized on a Clement Lenglet error to open the scoring in the fourth minute, finishing neatly past goalkeeper Juan Musso after Ferran Torres set him up. Torres then made it 2-0 in the 24th, racing clear onto Dani Olmo's pass and driving the ball into the top corner. Atletico, rocked but not floored, found a lifeline in the 31st minute. Marcos Llorente burst down the right and drilled a low cross to the far post where Lookman outpaced his marker and fired inside the left post to restore the hosts' aggregate lead. Barcelona dominated possession after the break and had a third goal ruled out for offside against Torres as Pedri and Gavi controlled the midfield. Barca finished with 10 men after a last-man challenge brought a red card for defender Eric Garcia and Atletico held on to secure a place in the last four against Arsenal or Sporting who play on Wednesday with the London side leading 1-0. "We've been dreaming big for a long time," Musso told reporters. "We wanted to get through this stage and we knew we could do it. We remain true to our

dreams. It's a close-knit and lovely group. We deserve great things. The team will give it their all."

SCHOOLBOY ERROR BY LENGLET

Barca silenced a raucous stadium inside four minutes thanks to a schoolboy error from Lenglet, who was deputising in defense with Atletico missing David Hancko and Jose Maria Gimenez through injury and Marc Puel through suspension. Lenglet's attempted pass back to Musso lacked conviction, allowing Yamal to pounce. Torres collected the loose ball and slipped a neat return pass into Yamal's stride. The teenager burst into the box before tucking the ball under Musso. Pushed into further mistakes by Barca's press while trying to play out from the back, Atletico paid the price again.

After another sloppy turnover, Olmo surged through midfield and threaded a precise pass between the center backs. Torres timed his run to beat the offside trap and hammered a rising strike into the top left corner to level the tie on aggregate. Barcelona nearly struck a third moments later when Lenglet misjudged another pass, but Musso produced an extraordinary reflex save at point-blank range to deny Fermin Lopez. Lookman's goal woke the Metropolitan crowd up again and the second half resumed at a calmer tempo. BARCA'S GARCIA SEES RED FOR LAST-MAN CHALLENGE Barca continued to monopolize possession though and thought they had a third when Torres converted from close range after a Gavi effort deflected into his path, but VAR ruled him offside. — DNA

Penalty at the death sends Al-Ittihad into AFC

The goalkeepers were rarely called into action, however. Over the course of 120 minutes, Al-Wahda's Zayed Ahmed made just two saves, while Predrag Rajkovic was only tested once

DNA

RIYADH: The AFC Champions League Elite Round of 16 has officially concluded after a turbulent period for the competition. Initially delayed due to the war in the Middle East, clubs from West Asia saw their Round of 16 matches postponed before the Asian Football Confederation decided to stage the ties as one-leg fixtures in Jeddah as part of the centralised Final Stage format. The UAE's Shabab Al-Ahli progressed to the final eight after a comfortable 3-0 victory over Iran's Tractor.

Meanwhile, Al-Ittihad and Al-Wahda played out 129 minutes of tense football before a Fabinho penalty with the final kick of the game secured a 1-0 win for the Saudi Arabia side. The victory also avenged Al-Ittihad's 2-1 defeat to the Emirati club in the league stage. Al-Ittihad and Al-Wahda played out a similarly tense encounter to Monday's clash between Al-Ahli and Al-Duhail, although clear chances were far fewer in comparison. Sergio Conceicao's side

dominated the early proceedings. Playing with Danilo in the heart of the pitch, and Youssef En-Nesyri drifting into the left side of midfield when they were without the ball, it appeared only a matter of time before Al-Ittihad found the breakthrough. The goalkeepers were rarely called into action, however. Over the course of 120 minutes, Al-Wahda's Zayed Ahmed made just two saves, while Predrag Rajkovic was only tested once. Al-Wahda's compact defensive set-up ensured their opponents struggled to find a clear route into the penalty area. Al-Ittihad were largely limited to crosses, with Moussa Diaby unable to break past Ruben Amaral on multiple occasions.

The Emirati side fluctuated between a 4-2 diamond and a 4-5-1, depending on the positioning of Omar Khrbin and Dusan Tadic. Khrbin often dropped deeper into midfield to help Al-Wahda progress through Al-Ittihad's midfield, before pulling defenders out of position to free up Christian Benteke to receive crosses in the area. Yet, unlike their back-and-forth encounter in the league stage, caution took over this

contest. Last-ditch tackles and clearances defined much of the match, as both En-Nesyri and Benteke were limited to a shot each. It seemed the encounter was heading for penalties until Abdulrahman Al-Obud was brought down by Bader Nasser in the area during the final attack of the game. A VAR review followed, with the Al-Inma Stadium erupting once the referee pointed to the spot. As the clock ticked into the 10th minute of added time in extra time, Fabinho stepped up and calmly slotting the penalty past Zayed Ahmed to send Al-Ittihad into the quarterfinals. Al-Wahda's staff and players vainly protested the decision once the final whistle blew.

After a turbulent season in domestic football that saw them struggle to defend their league title and exit in the Saudi King Cup semifinals, Al-Ittihad are now three games away from claiming their third AFC Champions League Elite title — a tournament they won in 2005 and 2006. Elsewhere, Shabab Al-Ahli defeated Iran's Tractor. Yuri Cesar opened the scoring in the 65th minute from the spot, before Saïd

Ezatolahi doubled the lead after meeting Waleed Juma's low cross in the 80th minute. Mateusao completed the scoring in stoppage time after Shabab Al-Ahli capitalised on Tractor's high line on the counter. Shabab Al-Ahli remain in search for their first continental title — the Dubai-based club would become just the second Emirati team to win the competition after Al-Ain. Their best remains a run to the final in 2015, where they eventually lost 1-0 over two legs to Guangzhou Evergrande. On Tuesday, Al-Ahli defeated Al-Duhail 1-0 in the first of West Asia's Round of 16 matches after a Riyad Mahrez winner in the 117th minute. What followed was a shock result, as Al-Sadd held Al-Hilal to a 3-3 draw before edging out a victory on penalties. The AFC Champions League Elite resumes with the quarterfinals on Thursday, with Al-Sadd facing Visel Kobe in the first of four matches. Al-Ahli clash with Malaysia's Johor Darul Ta'zim on April 17, and Machida Zelvia against Al-Ittihad later that evening. The quarterfinals conclude on April 18 when Buriram United and Shabab Al-Ahli go head-to-head.

Pakistan to receive...

FROM PAGE 01

that Pakistan was in talks with Saudi Arabia and China to secure financial support as it prepares to repay a roughly \$3 billion loan to the United Arab Emirates. The talks, The News reported, citing Bloomberg, involve loans and investment, the people said, asking not to be identified because the talks are private. The amount of support under discussion is more than \$3.5 billion, one of the people said.

IMF keeps Pak growth outlook...

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growth, according to the IMF, is projected to reach 3.4%, reflecting a 0.2% decline due to geopolitical tensions, particularly the war in the Middle East. The IMF noted that disruptions to global energy supplies and financial markets have weighed on the economic prospects of countries worldwide. For Pakistan, the IMF forecasts economic growth at 3.6% for the current fiscal year, falling short of the government's target of 4.2%. The report indicates that while economic activity is expected to continue recovering, growth remains constrained by structural challenges and external risks.

US-Iran ceasefire remains...

FROM PAGE 01

tankers have continued to transit the strait. Traffic remains far below pre-war levels, though US officials assert the blockade has largely halted Iranian sea-borne trade, with several vessels turned back. On the regional front, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated Wednesday that Turkey is actively working to extend the ceasefire, ease tensions, and keep negotiations alive. Erdogan specifically warned that "the Israeli government, which is known to be unhappy with the ceasefire process, must not be allowed to sabotage it," while urging all parties to seize the current window of opportunity.

EU warns of prolonged energy...

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Diesel and jet fuel prices would ease later, by the end of summer, while the global market for LNG would remain tightened until 2030, due to damage to infrastructure in Qatar, it added. But if tensions continue, energy markets would face a prolonged supply shock and extreme price spikes, with ripple effects across industries' supply chains. Continued oil supply disruption would increasingly force "demand destruction" — meaning reduced fuel use, the Commission said.

PTI Secy Gen rejects Imran...

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a city with 10,000 to 20,000 people would yield nothing but casualties. He clarified that he never sought his current position and had previously tendered his resignation. He revealed that, on the instructions of Imran Khan, the founder's three sisters visited his office to ask him to withdraw that resignation.

Ceasefire between Lebanon...

FROM PAGE 01

condition for moving forward. "Lebanon is insisting on a full ceasefire before entering any formal negotiations," the source said, adding that the government "will not relinquish a single inch of Lebanese territory." The push comes after a rare meeting on Tuesday between the Lebanese and Israeli ambassadors at the US State Department in Washington, an encounter that marked a significant diplomatic shift.

Briefs

Gold price surges by Rs 3,500 per tola

ISLAMABAD: The prices of gold increased in the local market on Wednesday, with 24 karat gold per tola rising by Rs 3,500 to settle at Rs 503,462 compared to Rs 499,962 on the previous trading day, according to rates issued by the All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association. Similarly, the price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold increased by Rs 3,001 to Rs 431,637 from Rs 428,636, whereas 10 grams of 22 karat gold went up by Rs 2,751 to Rs 395,681 against Rs 392,930. In the international market, the price of gold increased by \$35 to \$4,811 per ounce from \$4,776. Meanwhile, the price of silver per tola increased by Rs 144 to Rs 8,404 from Rs 8,260, while the price of 10 grams of silver also increased by Rs 124 to Rs 7,205 from Rs 7,081. The price of silver in the international market increased by \$1.44 to \$79.20 per ounce from \$77.76.—APP

RDA inflows rise to \$12b in March 2026

ISLAMABAD: The inflow of remittances under Roshan Digital Account (RDA) has risen to US \$12.426 billion by the end of March 2026, as compared to US \$12.165 billion by February (2026) end. The data showed that inflows of remittances during March were recorded at US\$261 million as compared to US\$242 million in February and US\$ 216 million January 2026, according to the data released by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). These accounts provide innovative banking solutions to millions of Non-Resident Pakistanis (NRPs), including Non-Resident Pakistan Origin Card (POC) holders, seeking to undertake banking, payment, and investment activities in Pakistan. The number of accounts registered under the programme also rose to 917,400 in March 2026 from 909,407 accounts in February 2026. By the end of March, overseas Pakistanis have invested US \$538 million in Naya Pakistan Certificates, US \$1,093 million in Naya Pakistan Islamic Certificates, and US \$106 million in Roshan Equity Investment.—APP

Israeli bulldozes Palestinian factory in Hebron

LONDON: Israeli authorities demolished on Wednesday a factory and several industrial facilities in Beit Ula, in the southern West Bank, that employed several Palestinian workers and blacksmiths. The metal factory owned by Murad Al-Amleh was one of the largest of its kind in Palestine, according to the Wafa news agency. It specialized in metal shaping, ornamentation, and the production of solar panel mounting structures. Israel's forces stormed the Al-Mikhda road west of Beit Ula, a town northwest of the Hebron governorate, where they leveled the factory and destroyed equipment, machinery, sheds, merchandise, offices, and other structures over an area of approximately 1.5 acres. Al-Amleh has incurred financial losses estimated at millions of dollars, according to Wafa. Since the occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem in 1967, Israel has implemented a demolition policy aimed at preventing the merging of Palestinian villages into larger cities and establishing settlements between them. The demolitions have included commercial facilities and industrial areas under the pretext of charges that residents were building without permits. In the Gaza Strip, Israel has destroyed nearly 92 percent of the buildings, including hospitals, schools, homes, and commercial facilities, since October 2023, according to UN data. Several international organizations have accused Israel of committing genocide in Gaza, where the regime has killed over 70,000 people.—APP

CFMCA ministerial meeting

Aurangzeb, highlights climate resilience, green transition

The Finance Minister expressed appreciation to Pakistan's international partners for their continued support in advancing climate finance initiatives, specifically acknowledging the Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF) extended by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Country Partnership Framework with the World Bank Group

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, commenced his engagements for the day at the World Bank-IMF Spring Meetings 2026 by participating in the 15th Ministerial Meeting of the Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action (CFMCA), held under the theme "Climate Action as an Engine of Growth, Jobs and Competitiveness." In his intervention, the Finance Minister underscored Pakistan's evolving climate resilience, noting that during the devastating floods of 2022, the country had to immediately seek international support. In contrast, he highlighted that when a similar disaster struck in 2025, Pakistan was able to mobilize relief through its own resources reflecting the strengthened fiscal buffers built over the intervening period. Senator Aurangzeb outlined key measures undertaken to green Pakistan's financial architecture, including the issuance of Green Taxonomy Guidelines by the State Bank of Pakistan. He informed participants that Pakistan currently has approximately 8,000 MW of installed solar capacity and is pursuing an ambitious target of sourcing 90 percent of its energy from renewables within the next decade.

The Finance Minister expressed appreciation to Pakistan's international partners for their continued support in advancing



climate finance initiatives, specifically acknowledging the Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF) extended by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Country Partnership Framework with the World Bank Group.

Pakistan envoy to mobilize B2B investments with China

BEIJING: Pakistan's Ambassador to China Khalil Hashmi visited Ningbo, a coastal city in eastern China as part of efforts by Pakistan Embassy and its Consulates in China to mobilize investments in 21 priority areas. The Ambassador delivered a keynote address at Pakistan-China (Ningbo) Industrial Cooperation Summit and spoke at two B2B Investment Roundtables in the ICT and Pharmaceutical sectors. These events were organized in collaboration with Pakistan Consulate General in Shanghai and by IBI Group. During his keynote address at the summit, Ambassador Hashmi highlighted Pakistan's key advantages of location, competitive labour costs, favorable investment policy and strong government support for China's investors. The Ambassador welcomed the decision of the IBI Group to establish its regional office in Islamabad and encouraged Chinese enterprises in Ningbo to join over 60 business leaders scheduled to visit Pakistan for the inauguration of its regional office and matchmaking meetings and interactions with Pakistani

counterparts from 8-14 May 2026. Earlier in the day, Ambassador Hashmi also spoke at Investment Roundtables on pharmaceuticals and healthcare as well as ICT. Apart from sharing details of facilitation measures and incentives in the ICT sector, Ambassador Hashmi encouraged participants to attend the Pakistan-China B2B Investment Conference on ICT in Hangzhou, capital city of Zhejiang province next month. The Ambassador also invited the participants to attend the Pakistan-China B2B Investment Conferences on Home Appliances, Electric Equipment, Battery energy Storage in Lahore on 9-10 May 2026 and separately on Pharmaceuticals and Healthcare, scheduled in June 2026 in Pakistan. 100 Chinese enterprises from home appliances, IT, chemicals and textiles sectors attended the industrial cooperation summit, while nearly two dozen leading companies participated in the two roundtables each. Ningbo is a vibrant city in Zhejiang province, contributing over \$275 billion to its national GDP and stands out as a dynamic hub of innovation and entrepreneurial culture.—DNA

Lanka repatriates Iranian sailors rescued

COLOMBO: Iranian sailors rescued by Sri Lanka following a US submarine attack have been sent back home, officials said on Wednesday. The Sri Lanka Navy rescued 32 Iranian personnel aboard the IRIS Dena warship, which was hit without warning and sunk by an American submarine off Galle, in the Sri Lankan exclusive economic zone on March 4 — days after the beginning of US-Israeli attacks on Iran. More than 100 sailors were killed. The vessel was returning home after taking part in the International Fleet Review 2026 naval exercise hosted by India. "We rescued them as per the provisions given in the Rescue Convention, and we swiftly admitted them to the Karapitiya Hospital for medical attention," Sri Lanka Navy spokesman, Commander Buddhika Sampath, told Arab News. "We rescued 32 in the initial stage. And we recovered 84 dead bodies." Following the incident, another Iranian ship, IRINS Bushehr, which was also returning from India, from MILAN 2026 drills, received permission to enter port in Sri Lanka and was docked in Trincomalee in Sri Lanka's northeast. Sampath said that 206 Iranian personnel were disembarked from the ship. Sri Lanka's Deputy Defense Minister Aruna Jayasekara told Reuters and AFP that sailors from both groups returned to Iran on a chartered aircraft on Tuesday evening. "A few sailors from the IRIS Bushehr are staying back to operate the vessel," he said. The Sri Lankan government granted the stranded sailors 30-day entry visas and accommodated them in navy and air force camps. Survivors from Dena stayed at the Sri Lanka Air Force's station in Koggala, near Galle, while those from Bushehr stayed in Welisara, a major naval base near Colombo. President Anura Kumara Dissanayake said that Sri Lanka provided the protection on humanitarian grounds. "This is not military support for any party," he said in a statement. "Our actions are guided by the international agreements we have signed, including the 1907 Hague Convention and conventions relating to maritime activities and resources." The torpedoing of the Dena by the USS Charlotte in Sri Lankan waters was the first such attack by a US Navy submarine since the Second World War, setting a 21st-century precedent for blue water naval warfare.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Farmers busy in harvesting wheat crop at Golra area, in the Federal Capital.

Call for 'urgent' support to Lebanon during war

BEIRUT: United Nations refugee chief Barham Salih on Wednesday called on the international community to provide urgent support to Lebanon, with a fifth of the country's population displaced by the Israel-Hezbollah war. "I call upon the international community to provide urgent support and relief to Lebanon," he said after meeting Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam. "The humanitarian consequences of this war are immense, and I emphasize the need to spare civilians and civilian infrastructure from the ravages of attack. Lebanon does not deserve to be trapped in a recurring cycle of violence, it deserves support and stability." He added that UNHCR has received "a portion" of the \$61 million it had appealed for during the war to support Lebanon in its "unprecedented" displacement crisis, as more than a million people, or a fifth of the Lebanese population, are displaced by the conflict. Of them, more than 140,000 are in government shelters. The \$61 million is part of the Lebanon Flash Appeal, launched by UN chief Antonio Guterres last month to gather \$308 million to help the country. War-ravaged Lebanon has been dealing with an unprecedented financial crisis since 2019 and was still reeling from the 2024 Israel-Hezbollah war when the Iran-backed group drew it into the Middle East conflict last month.—APP

Erdogan says Turkiye working to extend Iran ceasefire

ANKARA: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Wednesday that Ankara was working to extend a ceasefire between the US and Iran, ease tensions, and ensure the continuation of talks, and added Turkiye was hopeful of negotiations despite stumbling blocks. Turkiye, a neighbor of Iran, has been in close touch with the US, Iran, and mediator Pakistan. It has repeatedly called for an end to the war that it says is unjustified. Speaking to lawmakers in parliament, Erdogan said Israel's attacks in Lebanon were harming hopes for peace, and added the window of opportunity created by the ceasefire must be seized. "Statements by the sides show that, while the negotiation table has not been toppled, they have reached a road bump on the nuclear issue," he said, adding tensions were also flaring again over the Strait of Hormuz. "We are conveying the necessary suggestions and carrying out initiatives to ease tensions, extend the ceasefire, and maintain talks. There can be no negotiating with clenched fists," Erdogan added. US President Donald Trump said talks with Iran could soon resume and end in a deal, after weekend negotiations in Pakistan ended with no breakthrough, while telling the world to watch out for an "amazing two days." A Turkish diplomatic source has said foreign ministers from Turkiye, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt will meet on the margins of a diplomacy forum in the southern Turkish province of Antalya at the weekend. Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is also due to attend.—APP

EU ready to implement Ukraine loan when green light comes

BRUSSELS: The European Union stands ready to supply Ukraine with its promised 90 billion euro (\$106 billion) loan as soon as Hungary drops its veto after last Sunday's election, EU Defense Commissioner Andrius Kubilius said on Wednesday. "The people have spoken. A new wind is blowing," Kubilius said about the election that was convincingly won by Hungary's opposition leader Peter Magyar. "In any case, we are ready to implement the loan as soon as we get the green light," the commissioner said.—APP

Special patrols launched to monitor foreigners in Bali

JAKARTA: Indonesian immigration officers in Bali have started special patrols to monitor foreign nationals visiting the holiday island, officials said on Wednesday, following a rise in criminal activity involving tourists. More than 6.9 million foreigners visited Bali in 2025, making up over 44 percent of international tourists visiting Indonesia last year. Legal cases involving foreign travelers surged during that period, with immigration officials deporting around 2,600 foreign nationals and placing some 2,000 others in detention between January and July 2025, compared to the hundreds recorded in 2024, government data showed. "The formation of this Immigration Patrol Task Force is a concrete step to maintain stability and security in Bali, Indonesia's leading tourist destination," Hendarsam Marantoko, director-general of immigration in Indonesia, said on Wednesday. The patrols will be focused on areas popular among foreign tourists, including Canggu, Kerobokan, Kediri and Ubud, the Bali Regional Office of Immigration told Arab News in a statement. The task force will provide a quick response to any potential crime and is aimed at reducing the number of legal violations by foreign nationals, it added. Immigration officers in Bali have deported at least 165 foreign nationals this year, with another 62 people placed in detention. Indonesia's top tourist destination has had a series of brutal crimes and cases of misbehaving tourists in recent weeks, including the kidnapping and murder of a Ukrainian man, whose dismembered remains were discovered last month in Bali's Gianyar regency. Bali police have named seven foreign suspects in the case, but only one, a Nigerian national, has so far been arrested, while the others, who are reportedly from Ukraine, Russia and Kazakhstan, remain at large outside Indonesia. Other cases in March alone include the fatal stabbing of a Dutch national near Kerobokan village, a popular tourist area, involving two Brazilian suspects, and the arrest of Scottish crime boss, Steven Lyons, at Bali's Ngurah Rai International Airport. Lyons, who is wanted in Spain and the UK in connection with organized crime, drug trafficking and money laundering, was named in a red notice issued by the global police agency Interpol. A Swiss national was also arrested last month on charges of hate speech. He faces up to five years in prison for insulting a Hindu religious holiday, Nyepi, that was observed island-wide by the Balinese.—DNA

Briefs

Four killed, 20 wounded in school shooting in Turkiye

DNA

ISTANBUL: Four people were killed and 20 others were wounded when a middle school student opened fire at a school in the Turkiye's southeastern province of Kahramanmaraş on Wednesday, Governor Mukerrem Unluer told reporters. Unluer said a teacher and three students were among those killed, and added the shooter was a student who used his father's weapons, concealed in a backpack, to carry out the attack. The shooter also died, he added.

Footage released by IHA private news agency showed a person, body and face covered, being evacuated in an ambulance, as well as tearful parents who had rushed to the school in the southern province's main city, Kahramanmaraş. Witnesses quoted by media said intense gunfire was heard. Police have increased security around the building, and television footage showed ambulances present in the area. Justice Minister Akin Gurlek said prosecutors had launched an immediate investigation into the shooting. On Tuesday, an ex-student opened fire at his former high school, wounding 16 people including students before killing himself in a showdown with police, officials said.

Mpox more cases reported in Sindh

DNA

SUKKUR: The Sindh Health Department has said a total of 122 suspected cases of Mpox have been reported across the province till April 14, 2026, of which 25 have been laboratory confirmed while nine deaths have been recorded. According to a handout issued here on Wednesday, two new cases were reported in the last 24 hours one from Karachi and one from Khairpur. District wise data shows the majority of confirmed cases have been reported from Khairpur with 18 cases, followed by four from Karachi and three from Sukkur. In response to the situation, the Sindh Health Department said it has taken immediate measures, including the establishment of isolation wards in all district and major hospitals, a coordinated system for timely transport of samples, and the activation of Disease Surveillance and Response Units across Sindh.

Govt apologises for excessive loadshedding

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The government on Wednesday apologised to power consumers for higher than promised "load management" arising out of lower water availability for power generation. In a statement, the Power Division said it was "apologising for the additional load management necessitated by reduced hydropower availability". A spokesman for the Power Division also urged consumers to conserve electricity, particularly during nighttime hours, and to adopt energy-saving practices. The statement followed complaints from various parts of the country about excessive loadshedding on Tuesday, instead of only 2.25 hours promised a day earlier in an effort to avoid an increase in electricity prices. The power ministry reported a temporary increase in load management and attributed it to a sharp decline in hydropower generation during peak hours last night, which it said strained the electricity supply and widened the demand-supply gap. "Hydropower production dropped by 1,991 megawatts during the night, contributing to a total shortfall of around 4,500MW at peak demand."

Iran used Chinese spy satellite to target US bases

IRGC's Aerospace Force acquired TEE-01B satellite after it was launched into space from China, alleges report

TEHRAN: Iran secretly acquired a Chinese spy satellite in late 2024 that allowed it to target US military bases across the Middle East during the recent war, the Financial Times reported on Wednesday. The TEE-01B satellite, built and launched by the Chinese company Earth Eye Co, was acquired by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Aerospace Force after it was launched into space from China, the report said, citing leaked Iranian military documents. Iranian military commanders directed the satellite to monitor major US military sites, the newspaper said, citing time-stamped coordinate lists, satellite imagery and orbital analysis. The images were taken in March, before and after drone and missile strikes on those locations, the FT added. As part of the deal, the IRGC received access to commercial ground stations operated by Emposat, a Beijing-based provider of satellite control and data services with a network extending across Asia, Latin America and other regions, according to

China dismisses claims of aiding Iran

BEIJING: China has dismissed a Financial Times report as "fabricated", rejecting claims that Beijing provided covert satellite support to Iran enabling it to target US military bases across the Middle East during the ongoing conflict. The report claims Iran secretly acquired a Chinese-made spy satellite in late 2024, which it has used to monitor and strike US military installations across the region. The TEE-01B satellite, built and launched by the Chinese company Earth Eye Co, was acquired by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Aerospace Force after it was launched into space from China, the report said, citing the report. The White House, CIA, Pentagon, as well as China's foreign affairs min-

istry, defence ministry and its embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to Reuters' requests for comment. Earth Eye Co and Emposat also did not immediately respond to Reuters' queries. The FT said the White House did not comment on the relationship between Emposat and the IRGC, but a spokesperson referred to comments US President Donald Trump made at the weekend when he warned that China would face "big problems" if it provided Iran with air defence systems. When asked about the matter, the Chinese embassy in Washington told the FT: "We firmly oppose relevant parties spreading speculative and insinuating disinformation against China." The satellite captured images of Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia on March 13, 14 and 15, the FT said. On March 14, Trump confirmed US planes at the base had been hit. According to the report, the satellite also monitored the Muwaffaq Salti Air Base in Jordan and locations close to the US Fifth Fleet naval base in Manama, Bahrain, and Erbil airport, Iraq, around the time of IRGC-claimed attacks on facilities in those areas. - Agencies

EU ready to implement Ukraine loan

DNA

BRUSSELS: The European Union stands ready to supply Ukraine with its promised 90 billion euro (\$106 billion) loan as soon as Hungary drops its veto after last Sunday's election, EU Defense Commissioner Andrius Kubilius said on Wednesday. "The people have spoken. A new wind is blowing," Kubilius said about the election that was convincingly won by Hungary's opposition leader Peter Magyar. "In any case, we are ready to implement the loan as soon as we get the green light," the commissioner said. The defeat of Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban, Ukraine's harshest EU foe, could pave the way for the loan that Kyiv urgently needs to fund the war with Russia, and that was originally agreed on by all EU member states in December.

BBC to cut 2,000 jobs

LONDON: The BBC is set to cut 2,000 jobs, British media reported Wednesday, citing sources. The cuts will be the biggest round of redundancies at the broadcasting corporation in almost 15 years, ITV News and The Press Association news agency reported. The BBC has not confirmed the planned job losses and did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The reported cuts come as the broadcaster prepares for a leadership transition, with Matt Brittin set to take over from Tim Davie following his departure in April. Davie stepped down after an edited BBC Panorama clip involving Donald Trump triggered a controversy that later led the US president to sue the corporation for \$10 billion. Brittin, a former Google executive, is expected to face a difficult agenda, including questions over BBC coverage of the Gaza war, as well as mounting pressure from streaming platforms and YouTube's growing influence. According to the Financial Times, about one in 10 staff could lose their jobs, with the announcement expected at an all-staff meeting on Wednesday afternoon. The BBC employs about 21,508 people across the UK. The job cuts are part of plans unveiled in February to reduce costs by about 10 percent over the next three years, or roughly \$500 (\$678) million, amid what the BBC described as "substantial financial pressures." - Agencies



TEHRAN: Field Marshal Asim Munir, NI(M), HJ, COAS & CDF and Mr Mohsin Naqvi, Interior Minister along with the delegation arrives at Tehran as part of the ongoing mediation efforts. - DNA

North Korea intends to produce atomic weapons

"In our periodic assessments, we have been able to confirm that there's a rapid increase in the operations" of the Yongbyon reactor, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Rafael Grossi told reporters in Seoul

NEWS DESK

SEOUL: North Korea is showing a "very serious increase" in its ability to produce atomic weapons, the head of the UN nuclear watchdog said on Wednesday on a visit to Seoul. The diplomatically isolated north is believed to operate multiple facilities for enriching uranium, a key step in making nuclear warheads, South Korea's spy agency has said. They include one at the Yongbyon nuclear site, which Pyongyang purportedly decommissioned after talks but later reactivated in 2021. "In our periodic assessments, we have been able to confirm that there's a rapid increase in the operations" of the Yongbyon reactor, International

Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Rafael Grossi told reporters in Seoul. The agency also observed a rise in operations at Yongbyon's reprocessing unit and light-water reactor, as well as the activation of other facilities, Grossi said. "All that points to a very serious increase in the capabilities of (the) Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the area of nuclear weapons production, which is estimated at a few dozen warheads," he said, using North Korea's official name. North Korea, which conducted its first nuclear test in 2006, is under rafts of UN sanctions for its banned weapons programmes. It has declared that it will never surrender its nuclear weapons, and cut off access to IAEA inspectors in 2009. The agency has noted the construction of a "new facility similar to the enrichment facility in Yongbyon", Grossi said. It was "not easy to calculate" any production increases without visiting the site. However, "we consider, looking at external features of the facility, that there will be significant increase in the enrichment capacity of the DPRK", he said. Asked whether Russia was assisting North Korea's nuclear development, Grossi said the IAEA had not seen "anything in particular in that regard". North Korea has sent ground troops and artillery shells to support Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and observers say Pyongyang is receiving military technology assistance from Moscow in return.

Pakistan calls for abolition of UNSC veto power

DNA

NEW YORK: Reaffirming its consistent policy, Pakistan has called for the abolition or severe restriction of the veto power and strongly opposed any expansion of permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The stance was expressed by Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, at a resumed session of the long-running Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) aimed at reforming the 15-member UNSC. "Pakistan's policy position remains clear and consistent - veto should either be abolished or, at a minimum, its use by the current permanent members severely restricted," Ambassador Ahmad stated. He expressed Pakistan's firm opposition to "any expansion of the veto or addition of new individual permanent members", contending that more vetoes would only aggravate the problem. "This is a position of principle," he said, noting that Pakistan aligned itself with the statement delivered by the permanent representative of Italy on behalf of the Uniting for Consensus Group. The UNSC comprises five permanent members - China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States - and 10 non-permanent members elected for two-year terms by the General Assembly. The UNSC often sees resolutions failing to pass due to the veto power being used by one or more of its

permanent members. This was particularly witnessed during Israel's war on Gaza, when the US repeatedly vetoed resolutions calling for an immediate ceasefire. In his remarks, Ambassador Ahmad said: "Together with a very large majority of member states, we firmly believe that the paralysis that we see often at the Security Council, leading to inaction on crucial matters related to international peace and security, stems from the misuse or abuse of the veto power by the permanent members." The envoy highlighted that this point of view was widely shared outside the UN in think tanks, academia, media and civil society. "There is an overwhelming sentiment against the veto, and how actually this privilege is anachronistic today, along with the permanent membership. Yet, proposals to expand veto-wielding members persist," he said. "How can this dichotomy be defended? The problem cannot be the solution," the ambassador remarked. At the same time, he acknowledged that the power of veto remained a reality and the permanent members were "largely united in preserving this privilege, and would resist any dilution". Therefore, he said, Pakistan supported efforts to enhance accountability and transparency in the use of the veto. The envoy underscored that UNSC reform "must be comprehensive and addressed as a single undertaking, including the question of veto, which is intricately linked to the other four clusters".

PSX rallies sharply, gains over 4,000 points

KSE-100 index surges to 170,179.03 points after registering a rise of 4,544.19 points

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) rallied sharply on Wednesday, with the benchmark KSE-100 Index gaining over 4,000 points as investor sentiment strengthened on optimism surrounding potential US-Iran talks. US President Donald Trump has said negotiations between US and Iranian officials could resume in Pakistan in the next two days and Vice President JD Vance, who led weekend talks last week that ended without a breakthrough, said he felt positive about where things stood. "I think you're going to be watching an amazing two days ahead," Trump told ABC News reporter Jonathan Karl, adding he did not think it would be necessary to extend a two-week ceasefire that ends on April 21. KSE-100 index, the benchmark of the PSX, surged to 170,179.03 points after registering a rise of 4,544.19 points or 2.74%, up from the previous close of 165,634.84 points. Ahfaz Mustafa, CEO of Ismail Iqbal Securities, told Geo. tv: "The expectations of the Middle East conflict resolving by the weekend, and lower oil prices have given new confidence to investors." "This, coupled with Saudi deposits, and an overall feel-good sentiment due to Pakistan taking centre stage, is fueling the rally," the analyst added. Arif Habib's Ahsan Mehtti said that the stocks staged a sharp recovery as investors weighed a second round US-Iran peace talks and Trump affirmed that the war was very close to being over. "Surging global equities, \$3bn expected receipt for financial support from KSA played catalyst role in bullish activity at PSX," he added. Saudi Arabia will provide \$3 billion in additional support for Pakistan to help the South Asian nation bridge a multibillion-dollar gap in its finances linked to an upcoming debt repayment to the United Arab Emirates.