



Islamabad POST

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UN Secy General welcomes Israel Lebanon ceasefire

Detailed News On Page-08

Pakistan talks about Iran, US peace

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Turkey envoy meets with ZLK team

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Trump thanks Pak leadership

Strait of Hormuz opened

Trump says US blockade to remain in place until deal reached with Iran; Israel 'prohibited' from bombing Lebanon

NEWS DESK / DNA

TEHRAN: Iran's foreign minister and US President Donald Trump have said the Strait of Hormuz is fully open to commercial vessels. In a social media post, Mr Trump said Iran announced that the strait "is fully open and ready for full passage." President Donald Trump thanked Pakistan leadership especially Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Field Marshal Asim Munir. Minutes earlier, Iranian foreign minister Abbas Araghchi posted on X that the passage for all commercial vessels through the strait "is declared completely open" in line with the ceasefire in Lebanon. He said it would stay open for the remaining period of the ceasefire. Mr Trump claimed the US blockade of Iran "will remain in full force" until Iran reaches deal to end the war.

Meanwhile in Beirut, barrages of gunshots rang out across the city as residents fired into the air just after midnight to celebrate the beginning of the truce, and displaced families began moving toward southern Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs despite warnings by officials not to attempt to return to their homes until it became clear whether the ceasefire would hold. Iran closed the crucial waterway, through which a fifth of the world's oil normally passes, shortly after the war began. Europe has "maybe six weeks or so" of jet fuel left and broader economic consequences will grow the longer the strait is closed, IEA executive director Fatih Birol told The Associated Press on Thursday. The fighting has killed at least 3,000 people in Iran, more than 2,100 in Lebanon, 23 in Israel and more than a dozen in Gulf Arab states. Thirteen US service members have also been killed. Israel's hard-line defence Minister Israel Katz warned on Friday that Israel

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PM welcomes ceasefire announcement in Lebanon

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday welcomed the announcement of a ceasefire in Lebanon, facilitated through bold and sagacious diplomatic efforts led by President Donald Trump. In his post on 'X', the prime minister expressed the hope that the announcement of ceasefire will pave the way for sustainable peace in the region. "Pakistan reaffirms its unwavering support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon, and will continue to support all efforts aimed at lasting peace in the region," the prime minister added.

THREE BROTHERS-ONE HEART



ANTALYA: Prime Minister of Pakistan Shehbaz Sharif, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Türkiye, President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan, and Pakistan's Deputy share a warm moment together at the Antalya Diplomacy Forum. - DNA

Pak re-enters global bond market

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has successfully re-entered international financial markets after a gap of four years, issuing a \$500 million Eurobond, according to an official statement. The bond has been issued for a three-year tenure, marking a significant step in the country's efforts to restore investor confidence and strengthen its external financing position. Despite challenging global economic conditions, the Eurobond received a strong response from international investors, reflecting renewed trust in Pakistan's economic outlook, the statement said. Officials noted that the successful issuance has further enhanced Pakistan's standing in international bond markets.

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Diplomacy at its best PM Shehbaz holds high-level meetings with global leaders

The Prime Minister met Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, and Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa

DNA

ANTALYA: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif held a series of important informal meetings with several world leaders on the sidelines of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum. The Prime Minister met Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, and Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa. He also held separate meetings with Qatar's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin

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Pakistan & Austria reaffirm strong bilateral ties

NEWS DESK

ANTALYA: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar held a productive bilateral meeting with Austrian Foreign Minister Beate Meini-Reisinger on the sidelines of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum (ADF) 2026.

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Briefs

French security arrests key suspect

NEWS DESK

LONDON: French authorities have detained a 72-year-old man considered a key suspect in a grenade and gun attack on a Jewish restaurant in Paris in 1982, in which six people were killed. Hicham Harb was extradited by the Palestinian National Authority on Thursday, in response to a request last September by France's National Anti-Terrorism Prosecutor's Office (PNAT). Harb, whose real name is Mahmoud Khader Abed Adra, is suspected of directing the attack in the Rue des Rosiers and acting as one of the gunmen who shot at diners.

Mugabe's son pleads guilty

DNA

JOHANNESBURG: The youngest son of Zimbabwe's former leader Robert Mugabe pleaded guilty on Friday to pointing a gun and illegally being in South Africa but denied shooting and badly wounding his gardener after an altercation. Bellarmine Chatunga Mugabe, 29, had been in police custody with his cousin and co-accused, Tobias Mugabe Matonhodze, on attempted murder charges following the incident in Johannesburg's posh Hyde Park district.

Holiday Notice

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

Tussle with Iran

Trump slams NATO as 'useless alliance'

The strong criticism has sparked concern among European allies and renewed debate about the future of transatlantic security

DNA

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump has launched a fresh and blistering attack on NATO, describing the 77-year-old military alliance as a "useless alliance" that failed America when it needed support most. Speaking to reporters and in posts on Truth Social, President Trump revealed that NATO officials had reached out to him, but he bluntly told them the United States no longer needs their assistance. "I gave them a shut-up call," Trump said. "They called me, but I told them - we don't need them anymore. NATO is a useless alliance. They did not help us when we needed it." Trump's remarks come amid ongoing tensions following the US-led military operations against Iran. He has repeatedly accused European NATO allies of refusing to provide meaningful support, particularly in securing the Strait of Hormuz and broader Middle East operations. The President has repeatedly called NATO a "paper tiger," claiming the

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Lebanese return to unlivable areas

DNA

BEIRUT: In the Hezbollah-controlled southern suburbs of Beirut, hills of rubble stood where there had once been apartment blocks and the smell of death hung in the air. Ali Hamza said he found his home intact, but that people were scared to return for now. "It is impossible to live in these circumstances, and with these smells. A full return is difficult now, despite the hardship of displacement." He had gathered school books from the house: "We lost everything; we don't want them to lose the school year." In Qasmieh in southern Lebanon, cars were driving across a makeshift crossing over the Litani River, hastily erected after the cease

Continued on Page 06

Sharp cut in global fuel prices witnessed

The move brings major relief to energy markets after weeks of disruption caused by the 2026 Iran conflict. The Strait of Hormuz, through which nearly 20% of global oil passes, had seen severely restricted traffic due to military tensions

DNA

LONDON: Global fuel prices plunged sharply on Friday following Iran's announcement that the Strait of Hormuz is now completely open to commercial traffic. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi declared the vital waterway "completely open" for all commercial vessels, in line with the ongoing ceasefire in Lebanon. The announcement was quickly confirmed by US President Donald Trump, triggering an immediate market reaction. Oil prices dropped more than 10-11% in early trading. Brent crude fell sharply, while West Texas Intermediate also recorded significant losses. This marks one of the largest single-day declines in recent weeks. The move brings major relief to energy markets after weeks of disruption caused by the 2026 Iran conflict. The Strait of Hormuz, through which nearly 20% of global oil passes, had seen

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Pete Hegseth faces backlash

DNA

WASHINGTON: During a Pentagon worship service, US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth recited what he called 'CSAR 25:17,' a prayer used by combat search-and-rescue crews, notably during a recent mission to rescue U.S. airmen in Iran. The language closely resembled the fictional Ezekiel 25:17 speech delivered by Samuel L. Jackson's character in Quentin Tarantino's 'Pulp Fiction.' Hegseth replaced religious references with military terminology, such as 'my call sign is Sandy One,' framing the passage as a unit identity marker.

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CM KP reviews uplift of urban mobility system

The Chief Minister further approved the associated terms and conditions, budgetary provisions, and related expenditures. Additionally, the Chief Minister also directed that the preliminary feasibility study for the Peshawar-Torkham railway project be expedited on a priority basis, highlighting its critical role in enhancing regional trade and strengthening cross-border connectivity

APP

PESHAWAR: The 20th meeting of the Board of Directors of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Urban Mobility Authority was held in Peshawar under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Muhammad Sohail Afridi on Friday. The meeting undertook a comprehensive review of key issues pertaining to the improvement of urban mobility systems across the province, with a particular focus on sustainable solutions to traffic congestion and the promotion of modern transport infrastructure. Participants were briefed in detail on ongoing initiatives as well as the forward roadmap. A range of proposals were presented to enhance the efficiency, integration, and modernization of the urban transport ecosystem in line with emerging mobility needs.

During the meeting, the Chief Minister approved the initiation of a pre-feasibility study for the railway section connecting Peshawar, Nowshera, and Jahangira, along with the allocation of Rs 13.162 million for this purpose. Emphasizing the strategic importance of the project, he noted that it would significantly improve regional connectivity and facilitate more efficient movement of people and goods. He directed the relevant authorities to ensure timely completion of the feasibility study in accordance with technical and professional standards. The Chief Minister also granted approval to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Urban Mobility Authority to enter into a consultancy agreement with Pak Austria Fachhochschule Institute of Applied Sciences. The collaboration aims to leverage advanced technical expertise and international best practices to strengthen project design and implementation.

The Chief Minister further approved the associated terms and conditions, budgetary provisions, and related expenditures. Additionally, the Chief Minister also directed that the preliminary feasibility study for the Peshawar-Torkham railway project be expedited on a priority basis, highlighting its critical role in enhancing regional trade and strengthening cross-border connectivity. Reiterating the government's commitment to sustainable urban development, the Chief Minister instructed the Authority to proactively develop innovative, data-driven, and forward-looking proposals to address growing traffic challenges and improve both intra-city and inter-district connectivity. He underscored the need to align urban mobility systems with contemporary standards to ensure safe, efficient, and accessible transport services for the public.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Pakistan Khazar Farhadov Had a productive meeting with Sohail Ashraf, Chairman of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) Islamabad. We exchanged views on urban planning, with a focus on architecture and the continued beautification of Islamabad, as well as upcoming WUF13 to be held in Baku. – DNA

Gilani, Kundi discuss political situation

MULTAN: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi called on Senate Chairman Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani here Friday and discussed ongoing political and economic situation in the country. Nadeem Afzal Chan was also present during the meeting. During the meeting, the leaders held a detailed discussion on the overall political landscape, economic challenges and matters related to national stability. Both agreed that political harmony and continuity of the democratic process are essential in the current circumstances, according to the statement.

Faisal Karim Kundi said all political forces must play a collective role to tackle the challenges facing the country and prioritise resolving public issues. Gilani said Parliament is the guarantor of democratic stability in the country and all institutions must perform their roles within constitutional limits in the national interest. He added that consultation and dialogue remain the only way forward to resolve issues. The meeting also emphasised importance of improving law and order, public welfare and accelerating the development process, while stressing the need for joint efforts to ensure political stability. – APP

Compensation for gas pipeline explosion victims

PESHAWAR: Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs, Gilgit-Baltistan and SAFRON, and President of PML-N Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Engineer Amir Muqam here Saturday visited the site of the tragic gas pipeline explosion near Hattar Industrial Estate in Haripur and announced financial assistance for the families of the deceased. The Federal Minister said that, on the directions of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, each bereaved family will be given 1 million rupees, while the injured will receive 500,000 rupees as compensation. During the visit, Federal Minister Engineer Amir Muqam conducted a detailed inspection of the affected area and received a briefing from the authorities at the spot. – APP

US CG lauds PM, FM's efforts for peace

KARACHI: The Governor of Sindh Syed Muhammad Nehal Hashmi met with U.S. Consul General Charles Goodman at the Governor House on Friday. They discussed Pakistan-U.S. relations and matters of mutual interest. Detailed talks were held on the region's geopolitical situation and peace and stability. The Governor of Sindh stated that Pakistan's consistent policy is based on dialogue, diplomacy and peaceful resolution. He put emphasis on promoting bilateral cooperation on the basis of mutual respect and equality. The Governor highlighted vast opportunities for U.S. investment in Karachi. Both sides agreed to enhance

cooperation in IT, energy, infrastructure and logistics sectors. The need for joint efforts to address environmental challenges was stressed. They also agreed to strengthen educational linkages, scholarships and people-to-people contacts. The Governor said Pakistan seeks a balanced and constructive partnership with the United States. The U.S. Consul General appreciated the efforts of the Prime Minister of Pakistan and the Field Marshal for promoting peace, stating that the U.S. values these initiatives. The Governor noted that the people of Pakistan and the United States were peace-loving and committed to promoting global and

regional stability. The Consul General mentioned that Karachi and Houston were sister cities. Both sides emphasized enhancing trade, economic and people-to-people ties. It was noted that the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir and U.S. President Donald Trump are taking steps for global peace and stability. They reaffirmed their commitment to further expand cooperation and strengthen relations. The Governor said that under the Prime Minister's Youth Program, modern training was being provided to young people in more than 200 fields. – APP

Over Rs 73b spent on 148 projects in Balochistan

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has spent Rs73.5 billion on 148 projects in Balochistan under PSDP 2025-26 by the end of March 2026. According to official documents available with Wealth Pakistan, during the year 2025-26, an amount of Rs206 billion was allocated for these projects with an approved cost of Rs1.365 trillion. Out of 148 projects, 137 are ongoing, while 11 newly approved projects carry a total cost of Rs152.4 billion. Out of the total portfolio,

137 ongoing projects account for the bulk, with an approved cost of Rs1,212.1 billion and an allocation of Rs204.8 billion for 2025-26, while the 11 new projects costing Rs152.4 billion have received a token allocation of Rs1.2 billion. The Finance Division, in coordination with the Planning Commission, has authorized upfront one-line releases to executing ministries and divisions under a quarterly disbursement strategy for FY2025-26. Sectoral allocations show that the National Highway Authority (NHA) leads with 19 projects worth Rs625.3

billion, followed by the Government of Balochistan, through the Finance Division, which is managing 68 projects costing Rs233.9 billion. Key contributions have also been made by the Water Resources Division, Power Division, and Higher Education Commission, reflecting a diversified development approach. As per the document, 80 out of the 148 projects are of provincial nature, carrying a total cost of Rs413 billion, with Rs36 billion allocated for these projects. These projects aim to strengthen local infrastructure and service delivery mechanisms

across the province. Region-specific development efforts remain a priority, particularly in Gwadar and Quetta. In Gwadar, 22 projects with a total cost of Rs184 billion are underway. Meanwhile, Quetta hosts 15 projects costing Rs28 billion. The Planning Commission has emphasized that these initiatives are integral to enhancing connectivity, boosting economic activity, and addressing long-standing development gaps in Balochistan, aligning with broader national development priorities. – APP

Commissioner reviews Peshawar varsity's security

COMMISSIONER Peshawar Division, Riaz Khan Mehsud here on Friday visited University of Peshawar where he inspected proposed locations for modern entry and exit points aiming enhancing campus security. During the visit, officials told that advanced scanners would be installed at the University and the entry and exit system would be upgraded to meet international standards. The Commissioner directed that entry and exit points should be established at appropriate distances within the university premises to ensure that traffic flow on Jamrud Road remains unaffected and citizens do not face inconvenience. He emphasized that maintaining a balance between security measures and traffic management is essential. Later, the Commissioner visited Palosi Road and Forest Bazaar and instructed the concerned authorities to take immediate steps for road construction, effective drainage systems and smooth traffic flow in the area. – APP

Missed 'Hemophilia' signs increasing health risks

ISLAMABAD: Director, Hemophilia Treatment Center (HTC) Rawalpindi, Tahira Zafar Friday stressed awareness among healthcare providers, patients and the public about 'Hemophilia', a rare inherited bleeding disorder commonly affecting males but also present in females, saying lack of awareness results in late diagnosis and preventable complications, so timely diagnosis is essential. While speaking exclusively with PTV News, Tahira Zafar, Director of the Hemophilia Treatment Center Rawalpindi. – APP

CJP chairs meeting on tax legislation reforms

ISLAMABAD: The Chief Justice of Pakistan, in his capacity as the Chairman, National Judicial (Policy Making) Committee (NJPMC), chaired a high-level consultative meeting here on Thursday to deliberate on measures aimed at enhancing efficiency and strengthening coordination to ensure the timely resolution of tax litigation. The meeting, held at Supreme Court of Pakistan, was attended by Mr. Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb, Judge, Supreme Court of Pakistan, Mr. Shad Muhammad Khan, Chairman of the Prime Minister's Task Force on Tax Litigation Framework, Mr. Rashid Mahmood Langrial, Chairman, Federal Board of Revenue; senior officials of the FBR; the Registrar, Supreme Court of Pakistan; the Secretary, Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan; and the Director General, IT of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. The nominated Judges of the High Courts, Mr. Justice Abid Aziz Sheikh (Lahore High Court), Mr. Justice Agha Faisal (High Court of Sindh), Mr. Justice Arshad Ali (Peshawar High Court), Mr. Justice Muhammad Aamir Nawaz Rana (High Court of Balochistan), and Mr. Justice Inaam Ameen Minhas (Islamabad High Court), participated through video link, along with the respective Registrars and Directors IT of the High Courts. The Chief Justice of Pakistan remarked that the efficient resolution of tax disputes was critical to strengthening public confidence, improving governance standards, and fostering a

predictable legal environment, adding that it carried significant implications for fiscal governance and economic stability. His Lordship emphasized that the NJPMC provided an effective institutional platform for coordinated reform efforts involving the judiciary, executive agencies, and other stakeholders to address complex legal and procedural challenges. Hon'ble Mr. Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb apprised the forum of his recently authored judgment addressing procedural bottlenecks in tax-related litigation and proposing mechanisms for reform. His Lordship underscored that government departments should refrain from filing appeals on issues already settled by superior courts, noting that repetitive litigation undermined legal certainty, burdened judicial institutions, delayed the adjudication of genuine matters, and led to avoidable expenditure of public resources. He further emphasized that the state must act as a fair and responsible litigant, supported by rigorous legal scrutiny prior to filing appeals. Participants engaged in a comprehensive discussion on key reform areas, including legislative and procedural gaps affecting tax litigation; strengthening litigation management through improved representation and strategic case handling; enhancing coordination among adjudicatory forums and relevant institutions; leveraging technology, data integration, and information-sharing systems; and developing practical, implementable recommendations to improve tax litigation processes. – APP

GIS records 135 dolphins in 154 km stretch of Indus river

The stretch of Indus River between Guddu and Sukkur Barrages is of international importance due to its hosting of the largest population of the endangered fish

PESHAWAR, Apr 17 (APP): A historic GIS-based scientific census by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Wildlife Department has recorded a stable population of Indus Dolphins in D.I. Khan section of the mighty Indus River, reflecting success of the ongoing efforts for conservation for this rare aquatic species. "The six days survey conducted from February 19 to 24, 2026 registered 135 number of Indus Dolphins in 154 kilometre stretch of Indus river from Chasma Barrage to Ramak Boundry", disclosed Khan Malook, Deputy Conservator Wildlife D.I.Khan Division on Friday. The survey was conducted by a team of nine experts under the supervision of Khan Malook and SDFO Malik Saqib, employing a systematic scientific methodology based on direct field observation. The team was strategically deployed, with three observers positioned at the front and two at the rear to ensure comprehensive coverage. All observation points were accurately identified, geo-referenced, and recorded using GPS coordinates and GIS technology. Sharing details of the survey, Khan Malook informed that on the first day 27 km area was covered, recording presence of 18 dolphins. On second day of survey, 26 km area covered and 18

dolphins were found. On the third day, 23 dolphins were recorded across a 28 km area. This was followed by 30 dolphins observed in a 27 km area on the fourth day, which accounted for approximately 22.3% of the total population. On the fifth day, around 22 dolphins were recorded after covering 26 km, while on the final day of the survey, 24 dolphins were observed over a 20 km stretch. Locally known in Seraiki language as 'Bholan' with scientific identity as 'Platanista minor', around 99 percent of Indus Dolphin is found in Pakistan exclusively within the Indus River basin. The stretch of Indus River between Guddu and Sukkur Barrages is of international importance due to its hosting of the largest population of the endangered fish. Apart from Pakistan, a very small population of the Indus River dolphin is also found in India's Beas River, where a 2025 survey recorded only three fish. Khan Malook informed that WWF-Pakistan conducted surveys of the Indus River dolphin in 2001, 2006, 2011, and 2017. The results showed a steady increase in population, with approximately 1,200 dolphins recorded in 2001, rising to 1,550 in 2006, 1,665 in 2011, and 1,987 in 2017, respectively. The

Indus river dolphin was once found throughout a long stretch of about 3,400 kilometres of the Indus River. However, over time, especially after 1870, its habitat has drastically declined. Today, it has been reduced by nearly 80%, leaving only about 680 kilometres of suitable river habitat, mostly within Pakistan. "The scientific census on one side found better results of conservation but on the other side also brought into light several threats posed to Indus Dolphin survival," Khan Malook shared. The survey team, he continued, found fixed gillnets at various sites along the river, which pose a serious threat of dolphins becoming trapped in the nets. In case of trapping into a net, the dolphin fish drowns in water or become badly injured. Pollution of Indus river due to industrial waste, domestic waste water and chemical mixing is affecting the health of dolphin fish. Similarly, increasing boat noise in the Indus river can interfere with the dolphin's eco-location ability, which it uses to navigate, hunt and protect its fry (baby fish). "Due to climate change, variations in river flow and temperature occur. Low water levels and flooding both negatively affect the dolphins' feeding patterns and habitat," Malook observed.

Fish sometimes enter irrigation canals after being drifted by swift currents where they become trapped and face a serious threat to their survival. Khan Malook said Wildlife department and organizations working for conservation are jointly working for protection of rare Indus Dolphin fish. He suggested for declaring river stretch from Chasma Barrage to Sukkur Barrage as Biodiversity Protected Area which can serve as very important step in conservation of Dolphin fish by giving constitutional protection to this areas of river Indus. He also suggested establishing rescue centers at different sites for injured and ill dolphin fish so that effective measures could be taken in case of emergency. Khan Malook said installation of pinger device on net can protect dolphin from coming in proximity of net and protect them from being trapped. Involvement of local people including fishermen, people living on the embankment of river is of vital importance for protection of dolphin fish. Terming conservation of rare fish as national responsibility, Khan Malook remarked that dolphin is far more than just a river creature, it serves as a living indicator of the ancient Indus River's ecological health and stands as a powerful symbol of our culture, water and land. – APP

People's Bus Service inaugurated in Sindh

SUKKUR: Sindh Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon on Friday said the launch of the People's Bus Service from Shikarpur to Sukkur was a gift for the people of Shikarpur from Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and President Asif Ali Zardari. Addressing the inaugural ceremony, he said that the bus service was now being launched and it was the responsibility of the public to protect it. "These buses are the property of the people, and the people must take care of them," he added. He said that half of the bus fare would be borne by the Sindh government and the remaining half by passengers. Sharjeel Memon said the Sindh government had carried out record development work. He alleged that a "deliberate conspiracy" was being hatched against the Sindh government and the Pakistan Peoples Party was being subjected to a media trial. He claimed that roads in rural areas of Sindh under the provincial govern-

ment's management were the best in the province. "We have the best hospitals in Pakistan," he said, adding that the facilities being provided by the Sindh government at the Autism Center were unmatched by any institution in Pakistan and could only be compared with international institutions. He said that the Pakistan Peoples Party is working for every member of society adding that when petroleum product prices increased, the Sindh government launched a monthly subsidy of Rs 2,000 for motorcyclists. He said farmers owning less than 25 acres of land were registered and their data collected, after which they were provided free DAP and urea fertilizer bags for wheat cultivation. Memon said more than 300,000 people had recently been given a subsidy of Rs 1,500 per acre for operating threshers, and the amount had already reached the farmers. – APP

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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ZLK Islamic Financial Services engages with Turkish envoy

Key areas of discussion included the potential for joint ventures and strategic partnerships, as well as the promotion of Shariah-compliant investments. Both sides acknowledged the growing importance of Islamic finance as a catalyst for sustainable economic development and financial inclusion



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Mr. Zahid Latif Khan, Chairman of ZLK Islamic Financial Services (Pvt.) Limited, along with Mr. Muhammad Abdullah Khan, Business Executive Manager, held a meeting with His Excellency Dr. Irfan Neziroğlu, Ambassador of the Republic of Türkiye to Pakistan, to explore avenues for collaboration in the field of Islamic finance and capital markets. The meeting served as a platform to strengthen bilateral engagement and discuss opportunities for economic cooperation between

Pakistan and Türkiye. During the discussion, Mr. Zahid Latif Khan introduced ZLK Islamic Financial Services as Pakistan's first Shariah-compliant brokerage firm licensed by the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP), highlighting its commitment to providing ethical, interest-free investment solutions in the capital market. Key areas of discussion included the potential for joint ventures and strategic partnerships, as well as the promotion of Shariah-compliant investments. Both sides acknowledged the growing importance of Islamic finance as a catalyst for sustainable economic development and financial inclusion.

His Excellency Dr. Irfan Neziroğlu appreciated the efforts of ZLK Islamic Financial Services in advancing Islamic finance in Pakistan and emphasized the significance of such initiatives in strengthening the financial ecosystem. He also expressed keen interest in visiting the Islamabad Stock Exchange Tower to gain further insight into Pakistan's capital market landscape. The meeting underscored the strong cultural affinity, shared values, and mutual respect between Pakistan and Türkiye, which continue to provide a solid foundation for long-term cooperation in Islamic finance and capital markets. As a gesture of goodwill, Mr. Zahid Latif Khan pre-

sented a token of appreciation to His Excellency Dr. Irfan Neziroğlu.

About ZLK Islamic Financial Services (Pvt.) Limited

ZLK Islamic Financial Services (Pvt.) Limited is Pakistan's first Shariah-compliant brokerage firm, licensed by the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP). As a subsidiary of Zahid Latif Khan Securities (Pvt.) Limited, the company is dedicated to offering innovative and ethical investment solutions aligned with Islamic principles, facilitating participation in the Pakistan Stock Exchange while promoting financial inclusion.

PM Shehbaz's diplomatic drive to foster ME peace

Islamabad has consistently positioned itself as a trusted and neutral mediator, repeatedly offering to host and broker talks between conflicting parties—including the United States and Iran

DNA

BEIJING: Against a backdrop of simmering regional tensions and persistent conflicts, Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has launched an intensive diplomatic tour across key Middle Eastern nations, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Türkiye. This proactive shuttle diplomacy is more than a routine visit—it embodies Pakistan's unwavering commitment to acting as a neutral bridge-builder and a vocal advocate for peaceful dialogue in one of the world's most volatile regions. This was stated by Prof Cheng Xizhong, Senior Research Fellow at the Charhar Institute, a non-governmental Chinese think-tank on diplo-

macy and international studies based in Beijing. In statement on Friday, he said that at the core of PM Shehbaz Sharif's itinerary lies a clear focus: de-escalation, multilateral coordination and long-term stability. In Jeddah, he held in-depth strategic consultations with Saudi leaders, touching on Gulf security dynamics and exploring ways to deepen bilateral cooperation across various sectors. In Doha, his talks with the Emir of Qatar underscored the urgency of de-escalating tensions, enhancing regional solidarity, and charting a path toward inclusive and constructive dialogue. The tour will culminate in Türkiye, where he will participate in the Antalya Diplomacy Forum to artic-

ulate Pakistan's vision for a peaceful, prosperous and interconnected Middle East. What elevates this mission is Pakistan's proactive offer to facilitate dialogue between rival factions. Islamabad has consistently positioned itself as a trusted and neutral mediator, repeatedly offering to host and broker talks between conflicting parties—including the United States and Iran. By engaging closely with key Gulf states and regional powers, PM Sharif seeks to align diplomatic efforts, minimize strategic miscalculations, and create much-needed space for negotiated settlements rather than prolonged confrontation, he added. Prof Cheng remarked that beyond its peace-building mandate, the tour also serves Paki-

stan's vital economic and security interests. The country relies heavily on Gulf investments, remittances from its diaspora in the region, and energy supplies—making a stable Middle East integral to its own socio-economic development and national security. Balancing principled mediation with pragmatic statecraft, PM Shehbaz Sharif is working to translate diplomatic goodwill into tangible cooperation that yields mutual benefits for both Pakistan and the broader Middle Eastern region. In a region too often defined by division and conflict, Pakistan's diplomatic push is a refreshing reminder that dialogue and diplomacy are the only sustainable path to lasting peace.

FGEHA uplift work in sectors F-14, F-15 picks up pace

In Sector F-14, development work is also in full swing. Access roads have been developed, while heavy machinery remains actively engaged across the site

ISLAMABAD: Rapid development is underway in Islamabad's Sectors F-14 and F-15, where road construction and nullah channelization continue apace, and the grid station location has already been finalized. Talking to APP, a spokesperson for the Federal Government Employees Housing Authority (FGEHA) said major work in Sector F-15 has commenced, with internal linking roads and nullah channelization advancing steadily as part of the broader infrastructure push.

In Sector F-14, development work is also in full swing. Access roads have been developed, while heavy machinery remains actively engaged across the site. Work on a significant portion of the sector has already been initiated. The total land area for the project spans approximately 10,875 kanals. The grid station location has been finalized within the overall planning framework. Meanwhile, in Sector F-15/4, notable progress has been made on critical infrastructure. Culvert No. 6 has already been concreted, and work is currently in progress on the base of the structure. Alongside this, nullah channelization is continuing at full pace, with machinery actively operating on-site. He added that development work across various sections is progressing rapidly, reflecting the authority's commitment to the timely completion of the project.

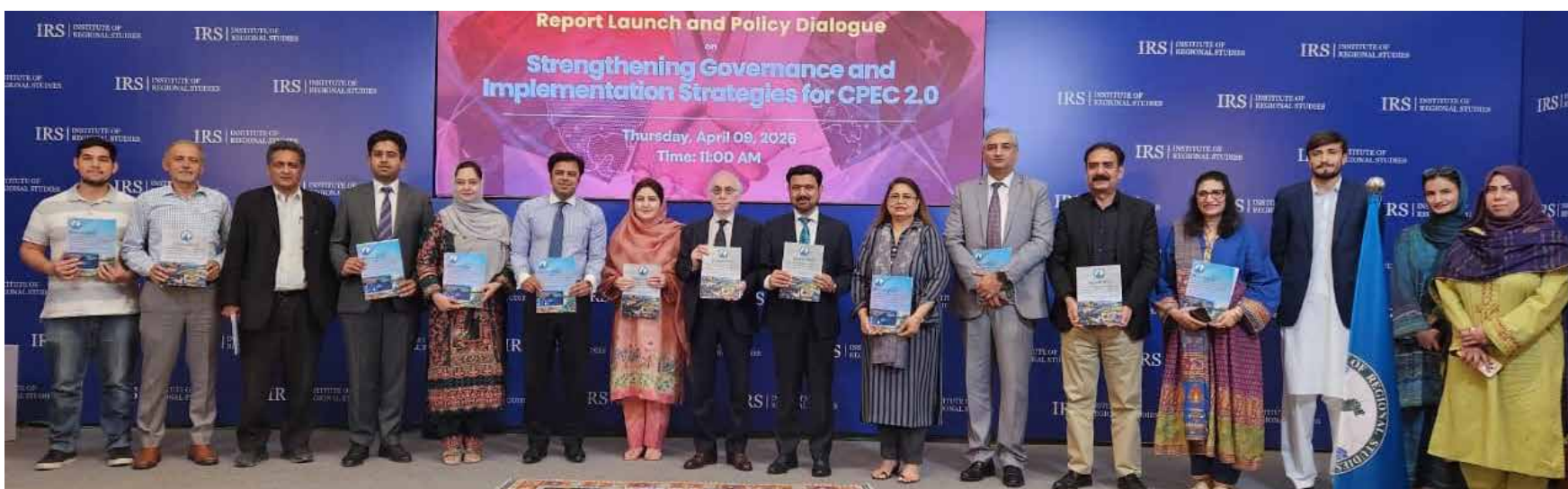
ICT Police detain 56 suspects

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police conducted large-scale joint grand combing operations across multiple areas of the federal capital, detaining 56 suspects including 20 Afghan nationals, along with two vehicles and 47 motorcycles during search activities. An official told APP on Friday that the operations were carried out in the jurisdictions of Kirpa, Sumbal, Secretariat, Khanna, Industrial Area, Bani Gala and Tarnol police stations. He said the operations were conducted under the supervision of SSP Operations Qazi Ali Raza and zonal SPs. The official said lady police officials also participated in the operations to ensure effective checking. During the operations, a total of 712 individuals and 1,108 households were checked. He said 182 shops and 32 hotels were also inspected during the search. The official said 381 motorcycles and 141 vehicles were examined during the drive. He said suspects, vehicles and motorcycles were shifted to relevant police stations for further verification. The official said individuals involved in illegal weapons possession were also arrested and four pistols of different calibers along with ammunition were recovered. — APP

ANF seizes over 153 kg drugs in 7 operations

ISLAMABAD: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) conducted 7 operations across the country against drug traffickers and recovered over 153 kg drugs worth more than Rs 14.4 million while four accused were also rounded up during the operations. According to an ANF Headquarters spokesman, in an operation at a courier office in Chaklala, Rawalpindi, 556 grams ice was recovered from internet devices in a parcel booked for America. In another operation at Chaklala, 10 Vapes filled with hashish oil weighing 248 grams were recovered from a parcel arrived from the UK. At a courier office on Ring Road, Peshawar, 2.4 kg opium, 8.3 kg hashish and 500 grams heroin were recovered from a parcel. In Sambrial, District Sialkot, 9.6 kgs opium, 7.2 kgs hashish, 2 kg ice and 1 kg heroin were recovered from the possession of 2 accused riding a motorcycle. Near a bus terminal in Sialkot, 12 kg hashish was also recovered from 2 accused riding a motorcycle. — APP

IRS hosts dialogue on strengthening governance for CPEC 2.0



DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Institute of Regional Studies (IRS), Islamabad, convened a high-level policy dialogue titled "Strengthening Governance and Implementation Strategies for CPEC 2.0," alongside the launch of two reports: "Unlocking CPEC Phase II: Building Capacity for Business-to-Business Cooperation with China and Central Asia" and "From Infrastructure to Impact: Conceptualizing the Strategic Corridors (5Cs) Under CPEC 2.0." In his keynote address, Federal Minister for the Board of Investment, Qaisar Ahmad Shaikh, outlined key lessons from China's economic transformation, highlighting Pakistan's widening trade gap and the need to boost exports. He noted that nearly 70% of regulatory reforms—eliminating redundant approvals and red tape—have been completed,

and urged businesses to move beyond imports toward technology transfer and investment partnerships with China. Ambassador Jaubar Saleem, President IRS, underscored that Pakistan stands at a critical juncture, with CPEC 2.0 offering significant opportunities for economic transformation. He identified institutional coherence, human capital development, private sector centrality, and a stable, credible investment climate as essential pillars for the success of the next phase. Mr. Shi Yuanqiang, Deputy Head of Mission at the Chinese Embassy, highlighted CPEC Phase I's role in easing Pakistan's energy shortages and upgrading infrastructure, and outlined the five corridors of CPEC 2.0—Growth, Livelihood, Innovation, Green, and Open. He noted over \$20 billion in energy investments, \$400 million in revenue and 6,000 jobs from the Haier-Ruba Economic Zone, 27 firms

at Rashakai SEZ, and over 1,000 daily patients at Gwadar Friendship Hospital. He also pointed to space cooperation, with Pakistani astronauts training in China, and emphasized alignment between China's 15th Five-Year Plan and Pakistan's Uraan Pakistan initiative, reaffirming commitment to cooperation in industry, agriculture, and mining. Ambassador Masood Khalid emphasized removing regulatory bottlenecks, improving federal-provincial coordination, and strengthening institutional coherence to attract FDI into SEZs and operationalize CPEC 2.0. He also highlighted the importance of the ML-1 track in modernizing Pakistan's railway, which is key to development. Mr. Asim Khan Niazi stressed that Phase II success hinges on governance efficiency, calling for digital approvals, delivery units, real-time monitoring, and clear accountability to ensure timely policy

implementation. Ms. Anna Munawwar Awan highlighted the shift to a business-to-business model, identifying gaps in financial facilitation, the need for a single-window system, workforce training, and greater focus on value addition, technology, and inclusive participation. Mr. Shehryar Khan underscored Pakistan's credibility deficit driven by policy inconsistency and weak enforcement, urging cluster-based SEZ development, supply chain integration, and inclusive resource management to avoid a resource curse. The event convened policymakers and representatives from the Chinese diplomatic mission to examine governance and regulatory reforms for CPEC Phase II, identify pathways for B2B investment and technology transfer, and strengthen public-private policy dialogue. The session was moderated by Ms. Nabila Jaffer, Lead, China Program at IRS.

Briefs

Expired CNIC holders face ongoing SIM blockage

ISLAMABAD: NADRA spokesperson Syed Shabhat Ali Jaffery Friday issued strict warning to the public, urging immediate renewal of expired Computerized National Identity Cards (CNICs), particularly among housewives in rural areas and beneficiaries of BISP and other health programmes, cautioning that SIMs linked to expired CNICs may soon be blocked. While speaking to a local media channel, the spokesperson of NADRA stated that the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) with collaboration of NADRA has initiated a nationwide process to block mobile SIMs registered against expired, canceled or invalid Computerized National Identity Cards (CNICs), as well as SIMs issued in the names of deceased individuals. He said the move is aimed at strengthening digital security and ensuring clean, verified telecom records across Pakistan. He further clarified that many SIMs are still active under CNICs that have expired or belong to deceased persons, including cases where family members have not updated or canceled records of their parents or relatives. - APP

Weekly inflation declines by 0.69pc

ISLAMABAD: The Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI) based weekly inflation decreased by 0.69 percent during the week ended on April 16, 2026 for the combined consumption group, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported Friday. According to PBS data, SPI for the week under review for the group fell to 353.21 points as compared to 355.66 points recorded in the previous week. On year-on-year basis, the SPI increased by 12.16 percent. The weekly SPI with base year 2015-16 = 100 covers 17 urban centres and 51 essential items for all expenditure groups. The SPI for the lowest consumption group (up to Rs 17,732) decreased by 0.36 percent to 332.97 points from 334.17 points. The SPI for consumption groups of Rs 17,733-22,888; Rs 22,889-29,517; Rs 29,518-44,175; and above Rs 44,175 decreased by 0.44 percent, 0.48 percent, 0.59 percent and 0.84 percent, respectively. - APP

Regular increase in tobacco taxation demanded

ISLAMABAD: Health and economic policy experts have urged the government to introduce a regular increase in tobacco taxes and gradually transition to a single-tier taxation structure, as consistent fiscal measures are essential to reduce cigarette consumption and enhance public health outcomes. Speaking at a webinar titled: "Stagnant Tobacco Taxes in Pakistan: Implications for Affordability, Public Health, and Revenue Mobilization" organized by Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) here Friday, the experts called for predictable long-term tax policy to address affordability of cigarettes and structural weaknesses in Pakistan's taxation framework. Presenting findings from a tobacco taxation scorecard analysis, Dr Waseem Iftikhar Janjua, Visiting Researcher at SDPI, said tobacco taxes in Pakistan had not been increased since 2023, which had impacted the effectiveness of earlier gains achieved through a major tax hike that year. Pakistan's tobacco taxation scorecard stood at 2.38 compared with the global average of 2.01, while the Eastern Mediterranean region averaged 1.58, indicating room for further policy improvement, he pointed out. He further said that affordability of cigarettes declined sharply after the 2023 tax increase, but the absence of subsequent adjustments allowed cigarettes to gradually become more affordable again due to inflation and rising incomes. - APP

PRCS, TRC cash assistance for flood-affected families

Chairperson PRCS, Mrs. Farzana Naek, emphasized the strength of the longstanding partnership between the two National Societies. She stated that this collaboration reflects a shared commitment to alleviating human suffering and responding swiftly to the needs of the most vulnerable communities



DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) and the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) formalized a significant humanitarian partnership today by signing an agreement to deliver cash assistance to vulnerable families affected by recent floods in multiple districts of Pakistan. The agreement was signed by Secretary General PRCS, Mr. Muhammad Abaidullah Khan, and Head of Delegation Turkish Red Crescent in Pakistan, Ms. Beyza Taner, in the presence of Chairperson PRCS, Mrs. Farzana Naek. The ceremony was also attended by senior officials and program representatives from both National Societies. Under this agreement, cash assistance will be provided to 2,000 vulnerable families across the flood-affected districts of Qambar Shahdadkot, Khairpur, Shigar, and Neelum. Each selected household will receive PKR 25,000 to help meet their immediate needs including health and also support early recovery. The initiative will be implemented over a period of five months, from April to August 2026. Speaking on the occasion, Chairperson PRCS, Mrs. Farzana



Naek, emphasized the strength of the longstanding partnership between the two National Societies. She stated that this collaboration reflects a shared commitment to alleviating human suffering and responding swiftly to the needs of the most vulnerable communities. "This agreement is a testament to the enduring relationship between PRCS and the Turkish Red Crescent. Together, we continue to stand with communities affected by disasters, ensuring that timely and dignified assistance reaches those who need it most. Cash assistance empowers families to prioritize their own needs and supports their path towards recovery," she said. On the occasion, Head of Delegation Turkish Red Crescent in Pakistan, Ms. Beyza Taner, stated, "We highly value our strong partnership with PRCS and remain committed to continuing our joint humanitarian efforts to support vulnerable communities in need." The initiative will be implemented by PRCS in close coordination with relevant stakeholders, ensuring transparent beneficiary selection and efficient delivery mechanisms through financial service providers. Both organizations will jointly monitor the progress and impact of the project to ensure that assistance is delivered effectively and in line with humanitarian standards.

Google to provide free Google certification courses

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif chaired a special meeting for a detailed review of progress on various projects of School and Higher Education Departments, including Honhar Scholarship and Laprop programmes. She was happy to note that 98% of Punjab's students express strong satisfaction with CM Punjab Laptop Scheme. She directed the authorities concerned to issue scholarships to all eligible students under Honhar Scholarship program, and noted that for the first time in Punjab's history, 62,949 students will receive Honhar Scholarships at once. The Higher Education Department had submitted a summary for Honhar Scholarships for 30,000 students. She said that a total of Rs 23.80 crore were allocated for Honhar Scholarships for 5,282 students in 262 government colleges in Punjab during Phase-I; while in Phase-II, scholarships worth Rs 19.40 crore have been set aside for 4,310 students in 200 government colleges. She added that 25,000 scholarships will be given in 365 graduate, visually-impaired and other special students. Chief Minister Punjab said that over 38,000 students benefited from CM Punjab Laptop Program Phase-I; whereas 142,000 students have applied under Phase-II of the program. She directed the relevant authorities that minority students should also be given laptops on open merit and equal footing. She added that for the first time in Punjab, a principled decision has been taken to raise standard of college education,

besides giving electrobus facility to college students in the province. She directed the relevant authorities to work on war footing to improve schools in Sargodha and other districts. She highlighted that for the first time in Punjab's colleges, KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) have been set for principals, teachers, and colleges; and performance of vice-chancellors of public sector universities will also be evaluated according to standard KPIs. She directed the relevant stakeholders to establish new, state-of-the-art IT labs in 166 government colleges in Punjab, where students from both government and private educational institutions will be offered courses in cybersecurity, AI, business intelligence, and other 3-6 month courses. She underscored that Google will also provide free Google certification courses to over 100,000 students in Punjab, which typically cost between \$400 and \$1,000 per course. Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif directed to affiliate all 36 commerce colleges in 29 districts of Punjab with 19 public sector universities, as each commerce college will be affiliated with the public university located in its district. She said that 14 BS disciplines, including business, accounting, finance, banking, IT, and e-commerce will be taught in the province. She added that under PECTA (Punjab Examination Commission), 994,000 students participated in Grade 8 assessment exams in Punjab; the success rate for female students was 92%, while for male students it was 84%. She expressed with satisfaction that the top three positions were secured by female students.



ISLAMABAD: British High Commissioner to Pakistan, Ms. Jane Marriott CMG OBE called on Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi. - DNA

Aleem visits Turkish embassy

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Communications Abdul Aleem Khan on Friday visited the Turkish Embassy to express profound grief and offer condolences over the tragic school shooting incidents in the Turkish provinces of Sanliurfa and Kahramanmaraş that claimed several lives. During the visit, the minister met with Turkish Ambassador Dr. Irfan Neziroglu and conveyed that the entire Pakistani nation stands in unwavering solidarity with their Turkish brothers in this hour of immense sorrow. He described the act of targeting innocent children as an extremely brutal and barbaric deed that defies humanity, said a press release. During the conversation, Abdul Aleem Khan empha-

sized that addressing psychological issues and implementing measures to prevent gun violence must be a collective priority. Both leaders reached a consensus that a strong and stable family system plays a vital role in preventing such tragic occurrences in society. The minister further remarked that Türkiye and Pakistan are like "one soul in two bodies," sharing each other's joys and sorrows as inseparable partners. He offered special prayers for the deceased, requesting that Allah Almighty grant the bereaved families courage and patience, and wished for the swift and complete recovery of those injured in the incidents. On the occasion, Ambassador Dr. Irfan Neziroglu thanked the minister for his visit and appreciated the solidarity extended by the people of Pakistan. The two sides also exchanged views on the prevailing regional situation and common challenges faced by both countries. - APP

ICT admin denies closure of transport terminals

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad and Rawalpindi administrations on Friday refuted reports regarding the closure of transport terminals. In a post on the social media platform X, Islamabad Deputy Commissioner Irfaz Nawaz Memon said, "All bus terminals in Islamabad are open as usual. All types of transport are operating as usual at all bus terminals, including Faizabad." Further, the Islamabad Traffic Police also clarified that reports regarding the closure of transport stands in the federal capital were baseless. A traffic police official said that inter-city transport in Islamabad was operating as usual and no shutdown had been ordered. He said any decision regarding closure of bus terminals or inter-city public transport would be communicated to the public in advance through official channels. The official urged citizens to rely only on verified information and avoid spreading unconfirmed reports. The same was also shared by the Islamabad Traffic Police on X. Meanwhile, Rawalpindi Deputy Commissioner Hassan Waqar Cheema also said on X, "All private, public, and goods transport are fully operational and permitted in Rawalpindi district. The district administration will promptly update in case of any development in this regard."

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BOXING

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Why Iran cannot win by closing the Strait of Hormuz

HANI HAZAIMEH

In the escalating rhetoric surrounding the Strait of Hormuz, one narrative continues to surface with alarming persistence: that Iran holds a decisive card via its ability to take the region – and, by extension, the world – hostage by closing this critical waterway. It is a narrative built on geography, amplified by politics and sustained by fear. But it is also fundamentally flawed. The Strait of Hormuz is indeed one of the most strategic chokepoints in the global system. Nearly a quarter of the world's seaborne oil trade flows through this narrow passage, making it indispensable to global energy markets. Yet the assumption that its closure translates into an Iranian strategic victory misunderstands a far more important reality: in any sustained disruption, Iran itself would be the first and most consequential loser. Iran's economy is deeply dependent on the very waterway it threatens to disrupt. Between 70 percent and 80 percent of its exports – and as much as 95 percent of its oil shipments – pass through the strait. In other words, closing it is not an act of leverage, it is an act of self-strangulation. Unlike global markets, which can adapt, reroute and absorb shocks over time, Iran's economic system lacks the flexibility and reserves to withstand prolonged isolation. Estimates suggest that a sustained closure could wipe out tens of billions of dollars in Iranian revenue within months, triggering severe contraction, inflation and internal instability. Even recent developments reinforce this imbalance. As tensions have escalated, efforts to restrict maritime flows have already translated into direct economic losses for Iran, with analysts estimating hundreds of millions of dollars in daily export disruptions. The message is clear: the weaponization of the Strait of Hormuz does not create asymmetry in Iran's favor – it exposes its vulnerabilities. This is where the Iranian strategic calculus appears dangerously misguided. The assumption that the Gulf can be held hostage ignores two critical dynamics: Arab adaptability and global redundancy. First, the Arab Gulf is not without options. While the Strait of Hormuz remains central, it is not the sole gateway. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have already developed alternative export routes that bypass the strait, including pipelines to the Red Sea and the port of Fujairah. These routes are not sufficient to replace the strait entirely, but they are strategically significant. They represent a foundational shift: the recognition that dependence must be mitigated, not managed. The weaponization of the Strait of Hormuz does not create asymmetry in Iran's favor – it exposes its vulnerabilities. More impor-



tantly, these alternatives are not static. In times of crisis, they can be expanded, reinforced and supplemented through regional coordination. This is where the concept of a "northern gateway" becomes strategically relevant. Through integrated infrastructure linking the Gulf to Jordan and onward to Mediterranean ports, Arab states possess the geographic and logistical potential to reorient part of their energy exports toward Europe and beyond. Such a shift would not be immediate but it is entirely feasible – and increasingly necessary. Second, the global system itself is not as fragile as it appears in moments of crisis. Yes, disruption in the Strait of Hormuz can trigger price shocks, supply chain stress and economic turbulence. But global markets are adaptive systems. Strategic reserves can be released. Alternative suppliers can increase output. Shipping routes can be recalibrated. The initial shock may be severe but it would not be permanent. Iran, by contrast, does not operate within such a flexible framework. Its economy is constrained by sanctions, has limited access to foreign reserves and contains structural inefficiencies. It cannot simply wait out a crisis of its own making. Every day of disruption compounds internal pressure, erodes state capacity and narrows strategic options. There is also a deeper geopolitical miscalculation at play. Closing the Strait of Hormuz does not occur in a vacuum. It invites a response – not just from the US but from a coalition of global and regional powers whose interests are directly threatened. The notion that Iran could control the escalation ladder is, at best, optimistic and, at worst, dangerously naive. Recent events underscore this reality. Moves to disrupt the strait have already triggered direct countermeasures aimed specifically at Iranian exports and maritime activity. The objective is not merely to reopen the waterway but to ensure that Iran pays a disproportionate price for its disruption. In such a scenario, escalation does not enhance Iran's leverage – it accelerates its isolation. Moves to disrupt the strait have already triggered direct countermeasures aimed specifically at Iranian exports. But perhaps the most overlooked factor in this equation is the Arab dimension. For too long, the region has been framed as a passive space – reacting to external pressures rather than shaping its own strategic environment. The Strait of Hormuz crisis challenges this perception. If there is a lesson to be drawn, it is this: fragmentation is vulnerability, while coordination is power. An Arab strategy built on integration – economic, logistical and defensive – would fundamentally alter the equation. By linking Gulf energy infrastructure to broader regional networks, by investing in alternative export corridors and by coordinating maritime security, Arab states can transform the Strait of Hormuz from a point of weakness into one element within a diversified system. Such a strategy would not eliminate risk. But it would ensure that no single actor – regional or otherwise – can hold the entire system hostage. This is precisely why the idea of Iranian dominance through the strait is ultimately an illusion. Power in today's world is not derived from the ability to disrupt but from the ability to sustain. Disruption is temporary. Sustainability is strategic. Iran can threaten to close the strait. It can disrupt, harass and escalate. But it cannot endure the consequences of its own actions in a prolonged scenario. The economic, political and strategic costs would accumulate far faster in Tehran than in any Gulf capital or global market.

Trump to Visit Islamabad to Seal Iran Peace Deal

Qamar Bashir



China and Russia both have major stakes in de-escalation, though in different ways. China, as a giant energy importer and a leading Belt and Road power, gains from open sea lanes, cheaper hydrocarbons, and secure corridor expansion westward. Russia, though an energy exporter, still benefits from lower geopolitical volatility in trade and finance and from more stable Eurasian connectivity. It is reasonable to estimate that China's direct and indirect peace dividend could run to \$80–120 billion annually, while Russia's could be in the \$20–40 billion range through steadier energy planning, logistics...

THE Iran–United States standoff has reached a decisive moment. After weeks of tension, destruction, and global anxiety, President Donald Trump has signaled that a peace agreement with Iran is not only possible but near. Reuters reported on April 16 that Trump said he might go to Islamabad if the deal is signed there, while Pakistan confirmed that diplomacy is still active even though no date has yet been fixed for another round of talks. That makes Islamabad not just a venue, but the emerging diplomatic center of one of the world's most dangerous crises. At the heart of this breakthrough are two long-standing sticking points. First, Iran's willingness to formally commit that it will not pursue nuclear weapons. Second, Trump's claim that Iran is prepared to hand over what he called the buried enriched material or "nuclear dust" after earlier strikes on key nuclear sites. Whether every detail is ultimately verified through a final written accord remains to be seen, but politically these two points give both sides a framework to claim success: Washington can say it stopped nuclear escalation, and Tehran can say it preserved the state while opening the door to sanctions relief and normal engagement. This shift comes at a staggering cost. The conflict has already killed thousands across the region, disrupted trade, and shaken financial markets. The Strait of Hormuz remains the central economic flashpoint. Official and major news reporting continues to note that roughly one-fifth of global oil trade moves through that corridor, so any disruption there instantly becomes a worldwide inflation tax. Reuters has also reported fuel stress inside the United States, while AP has warned that Europe faces severe jet-fuel pressure if normal flows do not resume. In other words, this war has not remained a battlefield event; it has become a global cost-of-living event. Against this backdrop, Trump's possible visit to Islamabad to sign a peace agreement with Iranian leaders is not symbolic theater. It is a strategic turning point. A signing in Pakistan would show that the crisis has moved from bombs to bargaining, from blockades to diplomacy, and from military coercion to structured de-escalation. For Iran, such a meeting would signal the possible beginning of normalized state-to-state relations with the United States after more than four decades of sanctions, hostility, and mutual distrust. For Washington, it would create a face-saving exit from a risky conflict while preserving its declared objective of preventing an Iranian nuclear weapons path. For Iran, the economic upside is enormous. Even partial sanctions relief could unlock tens of billions of dollars a year by restoring oil export capacity, reopening access to financing channels, and reviving deferred investment. A reasonable peace-dividend range for Iran is \$50–100 billion annually, including renewed oil sales and broader economic normalization. For the United States, the gain lies less in direct trade and more in avoided damage: lower energy prices, less inflation pressure, reduced military expenditure, and calmer markets. If a durable accord brings oil down meaningfully from crisis highs, the U.S. and its consumers could benefit from a broader global energy relief effect worth well over \$100 billion, while averted war escalation could spare

Washington and its allies additional costs running into the hundreds of billions. These are not marginal improvements; they are strategic savings. Domestic politics in Washington have helped push events in this direction, but that factor should be understood as a nudge, not the whole story. The War Powers Resolution in the House failed by just 213–214, with one Republican voting present, a narrower margin than the earlier 212–219 vote, showing that resistance to a prolonged Iran war is growing. That tightening gap matters because it warns the White House that escalation is becoming politically more expensive. But the larger story is not congressional arithmetic; it is that the administration now sees more value in a deal than in a drawn-out confrontation. Europe also stands to gain substantially. AP's reporting on jet-fuel risk underscores how quickly Gulf supply disruption can hit European transport, tourism, freight, and manufacturing. If Hormuz normalizes and oil and refined-product flows resume, Europe could avoid tens of billions in emergency energy costs and secondary losses. A prudent estimate is that Europe's peace dividend could reach \$100–200 billion annually through lower fuel costs, restored industrial confidence, and reduced inflationary strain. The Middle East itself could gain even more. Stabilized energy markets, improved investor sentiment, reduced shipping risk, and resumed regional projects could yield \$200–400 billion a year in combined benefits across Gulf producers, transport corridors, and reconstruction-linked sectors. China and Russia both have major stakes in de-escalation, though in different ways. China, as a giant energy importer and a leading Belt and Road power, gains from open sea lanes, cheaper hydrocarbons, and secure corridor expansion westward. Russia, though an energy exporter, still benefits from lower geopolitical volatility in trade and finance and from more stable Eurasian connectivity. It is reasonable to estimate that China's direct and indirect peace dividend could run to \$80–120 billion annually, while Russia's could be in the \$20–40 billion range through steadier energy planning, logistics, and regional commerce. Those figures are necessarily scenario-based, but the direction is beyond dispute: peace pays, and war taxes everyone. However, the country that may gain the most strategically from this accord is Pakistan. Pakistan's role as mediator has already elevated its standing. It hosted the talks, kept channels open after the 21-hour breakdown in Islamabad, and retained the confidence of both Washington and Tehran at a time when very few capitals could do so. That diplomatic success now has a direct economic translation. Pakistan's existing two-way goods trade with the United States was about \$7.23 billion in 2024, with the U.S. remaining Pakistan's largest goods export market at \$5.12 billion. Iran and Pakistan, meanwhile, have publicly targeted \$10 billion in annual bilateral trade. If peace removes sanctions-related friction and unlocks energy and transit cooperation, Pakistan could realistically position itself for an incremental economic gain of \$15–25 billion annually within a few years: roughly \$7–8 billion from scaling Pakistan-Iran trade toward the \$10 billion target, \$3–5 billion in annual energy savings from

a revived Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline, \$1–2 billion from stronger U.S.-Pakistan trade and investment momentum, and several more billions from transit, logistics, warehousing, border markets, services, and Gulf-linked agriculture and infrastructure inflows. Over a decade, if corridor integration through CPEC extends into Iran and toward Central Asia and the Middle East, Pakistan's cumulative strategic economic upside could run into the tens of billions more, potentially crossing \$50 billion in combined direct and indirect value. This is why the Islamabad peace track is not merely diplomatic theater for Pakistan; it is a possible economic turning point. That is also why the peace dividend for Pakistan is larger than simple trade arithmetic. Peace would strengthen Pakistan's reputation with Washington, Tehran, Beijing, Riyadh, Ankara, and the Gulf monarchies all at once. It would improve investor confidence at a moment when Pakistan still needs reserve support and external financing, as shown by the recent additional \$3 billion Saudi support package reported by Reuters. A successful mediation would allow Pakistan to market itself not as a security risk at the edge of crises, but as the state that prevented a wider war and made regional commerce possible. That kind of reputational shift lowers financing risk, improves deal flow, and can turn diplomacy into development. At the geopolitical level, the emerging U.S.-Iran rapprochement may also reorder the regional equation. Israel, long a central force in the confrontation with Iran, appears less central to the actual peace architecture now taking shape. The more Washington and Tehran negotiate directly, the more the region shifts from confrontation through intermediaries to pragmatic statecraft. That does not erase old rivalries, but it does signal that the next chapter may be written less by missile launches and more by summit tables. Yet caution remains necessary. The ceasefire is still fragile. Verification of nuclear commitments, sequencing of sanctions relief, security guarantees, shipping normalization, and the politics of implementation in Tehran and Washington will all matter. A single military incident or political reversal could still spoil the process. But even with that uncertainty, the direction of travel is now clearer than it was days ago: diplomacy has regained momentum because war has exposed its own unbearable cost. Still, the balance sheet is compelling. The war may already have inflicted global economic damage in the high hundreds of billions of dollars. Peace, by contrast, could unlock a multi-year dividend that plausibly reaches \$1–2 trillion across energy, trade, shipping, reconstruction, investment, inflation relief, and avoided military escalation. In that larger picture, Pakistan's role is neither ceremonial nor incidental. It is central. Islamabad has offered the table, the channel, and the trust that others could not. If the accord is signed there, Pakistan will not merely have hosted history. It will have helped redirect 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

The case for a Lebanese referendum on Israel peace

Khaled Abou Zahr

This is not something new. The EU was built with the use of such votes. In France, the referendum on the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 aimed to legitimize deeper European integration, including the creation of the EU and the path toward a single currency, by transferring significant national sovereignty to supranational institutions. The country's 2005 referendum on the European Constitution, which sought to simplify and consolidate EU treaties into a single constitutional...

ISTRONGLY agree with Marco Rubio's opening statement during this week's historic negotiations between Lebanon and Israel: Hezbollah's role in Lebanon and beyond must be brought to an end. The Lebanese people are victims of Hezbollah and Iranian aggression. The Israel-Lebanon negotiations in Washington are still at an early stage and the goal should be to achieve a long-term security arrangement and peace, rather than a short-term ceasefire that brings us back to the same point in a few months or years. This means, for the benefit of the Lebanese before anyone else, disarming Hezbollah. These first direct diplomatic engagements between the two sides in decades remain fragile and highly contested, even in Lebanon. While the Lebanese delegation is understandably looking to halt hostilities immediately and then deal with Hezbollah in order to avoid any more destabilization, the US is clearly looking to achieve a long-term agreement. And this is the right process. While I am still optimistic about the process, I cannot help but think about multiple instances of negotiations, especially between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, where all the points were discussed and agreed upon, only to hear the Palestinian leadership state that this solution would not be accepted by the people and hence it was dropped. This has not worked to the advantage of the Palestinians. The fighting has increased and weakened them even more, reaching the catastrophic levels we witness today. This is why a referendum on these negotiations is a necessity. Despite my strong belief that Hezbollah should surrender its arsenal and that a stable peace should be achieved with Israel, is it fair to ask if most Lebanese feel the same? Do they really want peace and do they trust their government to achieve it? Hence, to avoid the mistakes of the Palestinians, this should be put to the people.

These first direct diplomatic engagements between the two sides in decades remain fragile and highly contested. A clear referendum on peace with Israel should be presented. Despite the war, Lebanon is today in a better situation than the Palestinians and can still conduct this vote. One may ask: why now? Simply because a mandate from the people prior to any agreement would solidify the Lebanese stance. The main risk being that if an agreement were to be reached, we would have an unrepresentative group like Hezbollah and its allies trying to torpedo it. Even if at this stage the process of the negotiations are still exploratory, the objective should be to reach a concrete agreement and to resolve all major political and military disagreements. There cannot be a half-baked solution that only temporarily stops the fighting. I am confident that the Lebanese would overwhelmingly vote for peace and stability, as this is the only way to move toward a better phase for the country. A negative vote would mean that Lebanon was stuck and would probably not be able to disarm Hezbollah anytime soon. In this scenario, the Lebanese should be ready to become a part of the dying Iranian axis. So, this would be, in fact, a choice between life and prosperity versus evil and destruction. Some would argue that this vote was a question of demographics and perhaps they are right, but we can no longer live with this hypocrisy and the people need to take responsibility. This is not something new. The EU was built with the use of such votes. In France, the referendum on the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 aimed to legitimize deeper European integration, including the creation of the EU and the path toward a single currency, by transferring significant national sovereignty to supranational institutions. The country's 2005 referendum on the European Constitution, which sought to simplify and consolidate EU treaties into a single constitutional text to improve

clarity and institutional efficiency, saw a victory for the "no" campaign, slowing the integration process. Why now? Simply because a mandate from the people prior to any agreement would solidify the Lebanese stance. Similarly, the 1992 Swiss referendum on the European Economic Area aimed at deciding whether Switzerland should more closely integrate with the EU single market. It was narrowly rejected, meaning the country ultimately chose a more independent, bilateral approach. Votes can go either way, as we witnessed during the UK's Brexit referendum of 2016, which resulted in a historic decision to leave the EU, fundamentally reshaping the country's political and economic relationship with Europe. The same process has been used for constitutional referendums as well as independence votes. Lebanon probably needs both this referendum on an agreement with Israel and a constitutional one, but the latter is another story. Another reason I would like to see this vote take place is that it would let the Lebanese decide whether they agree with what Rubio said – that the country is a victim of an Iranian occupation, which followed the Syrian one, and that Hezbollah is an integral part of this evil force. If they voted no to peace, it would mean that they disagree and this would be an unfortunate scenario, as there is little doubt it would give Hezbollah and its allies a green light for a full takeover of the country. As the regime in Tehran is disintegrating, this would not only be morally wrong but also the worst possible decision for peace and the stability of future generations. It is high time to take responsibility and give a strong mandate so that the state, not an organization, benefits from unity during what are clearly going to be difficult but imperative negotiations.

– Khaled Abou Zahr is the founder of SpaceQuest Ventures, a space-focused investment platform. He is CEO of Eurabia Media and editor of Al-Watan Al-Arabi.

Briefs

Strait of Hormuz opened

FROM PAGE 01
plans to respect the ceasefire even though attempts to completely disarm Hezbollah in southern Lebanon are "not yet complete". Geographic Reference Israel's hard-line defence Minister Israel Katz warned on Friday that Israel plans to respect the ceasefire even though attempts to completely disarm Hezbollah in southern Lebanon are "not yet complete". Mr Katz said that Israel would continue to hold all the places it is currently stationed, including a buffer zone extending six miles from the border with Israel into southern Lebanon. He said that many homes in the area would be destroyed and Lebanese residents will not return to the area. Earlier, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he agreed to the ceasefire "to advance" peace efforts with Lebanon, but also said Israeli troops would not withdraw. Israeli forces have engaged in fierce battles with Hezbollah in the border area as they pushed into southern Lebanon to create what officials have called a "security zone". "That is where we are, and we are not leaving," he said. Hezbollah has said that Lebanese people have "the right to resist" Israeli occupation of their land and that their actions "will be determined based on how developments unfold".

Trump slams NATO as 'useless...'

FROM PAGE 01
United States has spent trillions of dollars defending Europe while receiving little in return during critical moments. "NATO wasn't there for us, and they won't be there for us in the future," Trump stated. The strong criticism has sparked concern among European allies and renewed debate about the future of transatlantic security. Senior NATO officials have not yet issued an official response to the latest comments.

Sharp cut in global fuel prices...

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severely restricted traffic due to military tensions. Analysts expect pump prices for petrol, diesel, and other fuels to fall in the coming days across Europe, Asia, and the United States as lower crude costs feed through the supply chain. Energy experts described the development as a "major de-escalation" that could help stabilize global energy markets, though prices remain higher than pre-conflict levels. Markets are now watching closely to see how quickly shipping traffic returns to normal through the strait.

Pakistan re-enters global...

FROM PAGE 01
signaling improved market access after a prolonged absence. The government is also accelerating efforts under its Global Medium-Term Note (GMTN) and international Sukuk programmes to diversify funding sources and attract broader investor participation. The development is being seen as a positive indicator for Pakistan's financial stability and its ability to tap global capital markets amid ongoing economic reforms. On April 08, 2026, Pakistan successfully repaid \$1.43 billion in maturing Eurobonds, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) confirmed. According to the SBP, the repayment includes \$1.3 billion in principal and the remainder as interest. Payment was made to the agent bank for distribution to bondholders on the maturity date of April 8, 2026. Adviser to the Finance Minister, Khurram Shehzad, said the timely repayments will reinforce confidence in the country's financial management. He described the repayment as a "non-event", highlighting that such transactions are now handled smoothly due to improved economic fundamentals.

Layla Banaras: Bridging two worlds, building Pakistan's women's football future

"I got introduced to football through, obviously, my brother, my cousins, my family," says Layla

DNA

KARACHI: In the evolving landscape of Pakistan women's football, diaspora talent is playing an increasingly important role, and few embody that shift more clearly than Layla Banaras. Born in Birmingham in 2006 to a Pakistani father and English mother, Banaras has already carved out a professional pathway in English football while simultaneously becoming an A midfielder for FA Women's National League South club Lewes, she represents a growing generation of British South Asian women breaking into elite football environments. Her journey is not just about football development; it is also about identity, belonging, and opportunity across two cultures. "It's like two different worlds coming together, so it has really taught me a lot about myself and about the world, really, and I think I'm so grateful that I was brought up in that sort of household." That dual identity has helped shape her outlook, both as a player and as a person navigating the demands of professional sport. Like many footballers, Banaras' earliest steps came far away from stadium lights. "I got introduced to football through, obviously, my brother, my cousins, my family. We always used to play in the garden, so that's what sort of, you know, pushed me to play football, sort of." That informal beginning eventually turned into a historic rise through English football. In January 2023, she made history as the first South Asian heritage woman to appear for Birmingham City in the professional era, debuting in an FA Cup match against Huddersfield Town. Later, she joined Wolverhampton Wanderers on dual registration before moving to Lewes in 2025. Now firmly established in the English system, Banaras continues to grow as a player in a highly competitive environment while balancing her international commitments with Pakistan. Her decision to represent Pakistan came at a defining stage in her career "I think for me it was the right time in my career and my life to sort of take that next step to play international football and to represent Pakistan means so much, so I thought



when they came, and they offered, I thought, why not, like just do it, and it's been a dream so far." That choice has added a new layer to her football journey, one that connects her to her roots while testing her at the international level. Like many players of her generation, Banaras grew up watching some of football's biggest names "I used to watch clips of Messi, Ronaldo, Neymar, Ronaldinho, just all these legends really, and I think they really helped me develop my game and really inspire me." Since joining the national setup, Banaras has quickly adapted to international football. In Pakistan's AFC Women's Asian Cup qualification campaign in Jakarta, she made an immediate impact from defence, registering assists in key matches against Indonesia and Kyrgyzstan.

Her performances reflect both technical ability and game intelligence, rare qualities for a young footballer adjusting to international demands. Banaras also highlighted the importance of international exposure in shaping team unity and development "I think the experience in West Africa has been amazing," she said about the Pakistan team's tour to the Ivory Coast. "The hosts have been so welcoming, the people are really lovely, and it's a really nice place, and I think we've really been able to bond here." Facing different styles of opposition has also given her a clearer understanding of where the team needs to improve. "Obviously, the physical side is really big, and it's shown us that we need to probably work more in the gym, but I think, to be honest, the playing style is quite similar, but I think it's just the physical aspect of the game, and I think everything else we do really matches in West Africa." Despite challenges, Banaras remains confident in Pakistan's ability to compete on the international stage. "I think we're really excited. We're the underdogs. And I think we're really excited to go and show a world-class team what we can do and compete against them," she said. Beyond her playing career, Banaras has also contributed to athlete welfare and nutrition awareness. As a teenager, she worked with Birmingham City's nutrition staff to create Ramadan-specific performance guidance for fasting athletes. For now, her focus remains split between club football in England and international duty with Pakistan. "At club level, I'm not sure. When I go back, I've still got a week left of the season. So we'll see what happens in pre-season. And with the national team, I just want to continue to help it grow football to grow in Pakistan and for us to keep showing the world what we can do." Layla Banaras represents more than a footballer moving through two systems. She stands at the intersection of English development structures and Pakistan's emerging football ambitions, a bridge between established professionalism and growing potential. For Pakistan women's football, she is not just a member of the squad. She is part of a longer project: building belief, experience, and identity on the international stage.

Hyderabad Kingsmen down Rawalpindiz by five wickets

Irfan remains top-scorer with unbeaten 34 while Perera, Labuschagne add 32 each

KARACHI: Hyderabad Kingsmen beat Rawalpindiz by five wickets to continue their winning run in the Pakistan Super League (PSL) 11 at the National Bank Stadium in Karachi on Thursday. Kingsmen chased down the target in 16.3 overs, losing five wickets, thanks to crucial contribu-

tions from skipper Marnus Labuschagne, Kusal Perera and Irfan Khan Niazi. The team suffered an early setback in the opening over as Asif Afridi struck to remove opener Maaz Sadaqat, who scored four off five deliveries, including a boundary. Marnus Labuschagne and Saim Ayub added some stability with a decent partnership, but it was short-lived as Afridi struck again to dismiss Saim for 15 off 11 balls, including a six, leaving the side at 28-2 in 4.1 overs. Usman Khan became the third batter to fall inside the powerplay as Mohammad Amir removed the

wicketkeeper-batter for a duck off eight balls. Rawalpindiz fought back by picking up another wicket, with Saad Masood dismissing Labuschagne lbw after his crucial 32 off 21 deliveries, which included six boundaries, reducing the side to 68-4 in nine overs. The Kingsmen came under further pressure as they lost their fifth wicket, with Ben Sears removing Glenn Maxwell for a first-ball duck. Perera and Irfan Niazi then steadied the innings with a crucial partnership, taking the team past the 100-run mark. Kingsmen sealed victory

in the 16th over as Perera remained unbeaten on 32 off 24 deliveries with three fours and a six while Irfan played an impressive knock of 34 off 29 balls with three fours and a six as the duo notched up a 50-run partnership to guide the chase. Batting first, Pindiz were restricted to 121-9 in their allotted 20 overs courtesy of an exceptional bowling performance by Kingsmen's attack. The team suffered an early setback when Glenn Maxwell struck in the third over, removing opening batter Usman Khawaja, who managed two off five deliveries. - Agencies

Lebanese return to unlivable areas

FROM PAGE 01

fire came into effect at midnight local time (2100 GMT). Israel destroyed all the bridges over the Litani during the war, blowing up the one at Qasmiyah on Thursday. Lebanon was dragged to war on March 2, when Hezbollah opened fire at Israel in support of Iran, sparking an Israeli offensive that authorities say has killed more than 2,100 people and displaced 1.2 million just 15 months after the last Hezbollah-Israel war. Hezbollah's Shiite Muslim constituents have borne the brunt once again. Hezbollah fired hundreds of rockets and drones at Israel. Two Israeli civilians and 13 Israeli soldiers have been killed in the hostilities with Hezbollah since March 2, Israel says. Israel's Defense Minister Israel Katz said territory south of the Litani River, which meets the Mediterranean 30 km (20 miles) north of the Israeli border, had yet to be cleared of Hezbollah militants and arms. "This will have to be done politically or through the continuation of the IDF's military activity after the ceasefire ends," he said. Katz said Israeli forces would continue to hold seized territory, saying Israel had established a "security zone" extending 10 km (6 miles) into Lebanon.

Pete Hegseth faces...

FROM PAGE 01

The original text of Ezekiel 25:17 in the Bible is a brief declaration of divine vengeance. A longer, more dramatic version appeared in the 1973 Japanese film 'Bodyguard Kiba,' which Tarantino adapted for 'Pulp Fiction.' Hegseth's prayer incorporated much of Tarantino's language, with additional military-themed modifications, demonstrating how the passage evolved through film adaptations before entering a Pentagon ceremony. The prayer quickly went viral, sparking Reddit threads, memes, and social media posts mocking the event's cinematic nature. Critics accused Hegseth of blurring the lines between religion, entertainment, and military ceremony, with some arguing that his actions undermined the solemnity of the occasion. The backlash intensified existing scrutiny of his leadership amid the conflict in Iran. Just hours after the worship service, House Democrats filed articles of impeachment against Hegseth, citing the Iran war, civilian casualties, and the mishandling of sensitive information. While unlikely to succeed in the Republican-controlled House, the timing of the 'Pulp Fiction' episode gave opponents fresh ammunition. The controversy reignited debates about religious neutrality in the military, with previous reports highlighting chaplains' concerns about exclusionary practices.

Canada T20 World Cup game in Chennai under ICC scrutiny after corruption claim

ICC's investigation focuses on fifth over bowled by captain Dilpreet Bajwa during New Zealand's chase

THE International Cricket Council on Friday said it was investigating Cricket Canada over allegations of match corruption, including the team's loss to New Zealand at the recent T20 World Cup hosted by India and Sri Lanka. The game in Chennai - which Canada lost by eight wickets - is under scrutiny following allegations of corruption highlighted in a documentary aired by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) on Thursday. "The ACU (anti-corruption unit) is aware of the programme broadcast by CBC," Andrew Ephgrave, interim general manager of the ICC's Integrity Unit, said in a statement. The documentary by the public broadcaster made wide-ranging accusations of corruption and poor governance against Canada Cricket. In the Chennai game, suspicion is focused on the fifth over bowled by captain Dilpreet Bajwa during New Zealand's chase, according to the ESPN Cricinfo website. He started with a no-ball, bowled a wide, and ended up

conceding 15 runs in the over. Canada scored 173 for four wickets in 20 overs, while New Zealand replied with 176 for two off 15.1 overs. The ICC, the game's world governing body, is also investigating a telephone call involving then Canada coach Khurram Chohan in which he claims that senior Cricket Canada board members put pressure on him to select certain players, it said. "Governance matters in relation to ICC Members are considered by the ICC, where they fall under its jurisdiction, in accordance with the ICC's standard constitutional processes," Ephgrave said. Cricket Canada said it was treating the matter with "utmost importance". "Recent promotional material alludes to allegations related to organised crime and match-fixing - issues that Cricket Canada takes extremely seriously," the organisation said on its website. "Where matters are raised, we are committed to reviewing them responsibly and taking appropriate steps as needed."

PSL 11: Sameer, Conway power Islamabad United to dominant win over Karachi Kings

United comfortably chase down 151 with composed half-centuries from Sameer, Conway

KARACHI: Half-centuries from Sameer Minhas and Devon Conway, backed by a disciplined bowling effort, powered Islamabad United to a convincing eight-wicket victory over Karachi Kings in the 25th match of PSL 11 at Karachi's National Bank Stadium on Thursday. Set to chase a modest 151-run target, the three-time champions comfortably knocked the winning runs for the loss of just two wickets and 24 balls to spare. The United made a flamboyant start to the pursuit as their opening pair of Minhas and Conway yielded 93 runs in 10 overs. Minhas dominated the opening stand with a blistering 58 off 36 deliveries, studied with 10 fours, until getting stumped off Kings' stand-in captain Moeen Ali on the final delivery of the 10th over. The United then suffered another jolt 14 deliveries as their in-form top-order batter Mohammad Faiz could muster five before falling victim to Hasan Ali in the 13th over. Conway was then joined by skipper Shadab Khan in the middle, and the duo ensured retaining United's momentum with an unbeaten 43-run partnership, which eventually steered the visitors to glory in 16 overs. The left-handed opener contributed with an unbeaten 53 off 36 deliveries, laced with six fours and a six, while Shadab struck two sixes and a four on his way to a 16-ball 31 not out. For the Kings, only Moeen and Hasan could pick up a wicket apiece. Minhas claimed the Player of the Match award after guiding United with 58 off 36. United captain Shadab Khan's decision to field first proved beneficial as the home side could accumulate 150/6 in their 20 overs despite Hendricks' gutsy knock. The Kings got off to a dismal start to their innings as



emerging batter Saad Baig, who was promoted to the opening position, could score a five-ball six before falling victim to Richard Gleeson in the second over with just seven runs on the board. Following the early stutter, returning Jason Roy was joined by Reeza Hendricks in the middle, and the duo stabilised the Kings' innings by putting together 62 runs for the second off 39 deliveries until United captain Shadab got rid of the latter in the ninth over. Roy scored a brisk 39 off 27 deliveries with the help of three fours and two sixes on his PSL return after a more than one-year hiatus. Shadab struck again in his next over, dismissing Salman Ali Agha, who could muster four off six, as the Kings slipped further to 77/3. Hendricks was then involved in another crucial partnership for the Kings as he knitted a 54-run stand for the fourth wicket with Azam Khan until the former was dismissed by Gleeson in the 18th over and walked back after scoring a handy 34 off 29 deliveries, comprising three fours and a six. Kings suffered another setback to their batting expedition in the penultimate over as Faheem Ashraf sent Khusdil Shah back for two, but mainstay Hendricks and stand-in captain Moeen Ali (eight) added valuable runs at the back-end to take the home side's total past the 150-run mark. Hendricks carried his bat all the way through and returned after top-scoring with an unbeaten 51 off 44 deliveries, laced with four boundaries. Gleeson and skipper Shadab jointly led United's bowling charge with two wickets each, while Faheem and Mohammad Hasnain chipped in with one scalp apiece. - APP

PM Shehbaz holds high-level meetings..

FROM PAGE 01

Abdurahman Al Thani and former Kosovo President Vjosa Osmani. According to official sources, all meetings took place in a warm and cordial atmosphere. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif remained the center of attention among the participating leaders. The bilateral discussions focused on the current global situation and key regional developments. The leaders exchanged views on enhancing bilateral cooperation, trade, investment, and peace and stability in the region. These high-profile engagements underscore Pakistan's active diplomatic outreach and the growing international stature of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on the global stage. The Antalya Diplomacy Forum has provided a significant platform for Pakistan to strengthen ties with key partners in the Muslim world and beyond.

Pakistan & Austria reaffirm...

FROM PAGE 01

Both sides expressed satisfaction over the positive trajectory of Pakistan-Austria relations and reiterated their commitment to further strengthening bilateral cooperation across multiple sectors. They also agreed to maintain sustained high-level exchanges between the two countries. During the cordial meeting, the two Foreign Ministers exchanged views on regional and international developments. FM Mehl-Reisinger particularly commended Pakistan's constructive diplomatic role in facilitating dialogue between the United States and Iran. Both leaders stressed the importance of continued diplomatic engagement to promote peace, stability, and de-escalation in the region.

Amb. Khalil encourages Chinese businesses to invest in Pakistan

DNA

BEIJING: Pakistan top envoy to China, Ambassador Khalil Hashmi addressed a China-Pakistan Investment Promotion Conference today in Beijing. The conference was organized by IBI Guolian Gufan Group in collaboration with Pakistan Embassy, Beijing Federation of Industry and Commerce, and local district authorities. Over 70 Chinese companies from across various sectors participated. The Conference follows Pakistan-China Industrial Cooperation Summit which was also organized by IBI earlier this week in the coastal city of Ningbo, in Zhejiang province. It marked joint efforts to encourage Chinese efforts "going global", with Pakistan as a priority destination. It also brought together representatives of government institutions, industry bodies, and leading enterprises to explore opportunities in investment, industrial collaboration, and long-term partnerships. In his opening remarks, Ambassador Hashmi highlighted Pakistan's key advantages of location, competitive labour costs, favorable investment policy and strong government support for China's investors. He noted that key sectors including energy, infrastructure, manufacturing, digital economy, and agriculture all offer immediate and scalable opportunities for Chinese enterprises. Highlighting Pakistan's geographic advantage, he stated that companies investing in Pakistan gain access to a market of nearly 3 billion consumers across South Asia, the Gulf, and Central Asia, positioning Pakistan as a regional production and export hub. The Ambassador also welcomed the decision by IBI Guolian Gufan's to establish Pakistan Digital Economy Headquarters in Pakistan, describing it as a flagship initiative that will advance digital trade, industrial connectivity, and supply chain integration between the two countries. Building on the momentum generated from Ningbo.

Briefs

Gold price declines by Rs 3,300 per tola

ISLAMABAD: The prices of gold decreased in the local market on Friday, with 24 karat gold per tola falling by Rs 3,300 to settle at Rs 501,562 compared to Rs 504,862 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 decreased by Rs 2,829 to Rs 430,008 from Rs 432,837, whereas 10 grams of 22 karat gold went down by Rs 2,593 to Rs 394,188 against Rs 396,781. In the international market, the price of gold decreased by \$33 to \$4,792 per ounce from \$4,825.

Meanwhile, the price of silver per tola decreased by Rs 70 to Rs 8,444 from Rs 8,514, while the price of 10 grams of silver also decreased by Rs 60 to Rs 7,239 from Rs 7,299. The price of silver in the international market decreased by \$0.70 to \$79.60 per ounce from \$80.30. — APP

PHEVs gain traction in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs) are emerging as the preferred entry point for electrified mobility in Pakistan and other emerging markets, as infrastructure limitations and cost constraints slow the adoption of fully electric vehicles (EVs), according to industry data and recent market activity.

The trend aligns with a broader global shift led by China, which has overtaken Japan and Germany to become the world's largest car exporter, driven largely by new energy vehicles, including EVs and hybrid variants. In Pakistan, early indicators suggest that consumer demand is tilting toward PHEVs, with Chery Master Pakistan reporting over 2,000 bookings for its plug-in hybrid SUV lineup within a short period of market entry, a company official said.

The bookings span the company's Tiggo PHEV range—including the Tiggo 7, Tiggo 8, and Tiggo 9—reflecting strong initial traction across multiple segments, from urban commuters to family and premium SUV buyers, he added. Auto industry analysts say the shift is being driven by fuel economics and usability considerations rather than upfront vehicle pricing alone. With petrol prices remaining elevated, a conventional vehicle averaging around 10 kilometres per litre results in significantly higher per-kilometre costs compared to hybrid and plug-in hybrid alternatives, particularly in urban driving conditions. — APP

Syria may consider 'long-term' talks with Israel on Golan

ANTALYA: Syrian President Ahmed Al-Sharaa on Friday said he could consider "long-term negotiations" with Israel on the disputed Golan Heights if Israel agreed to withdraw from recently occupied Syrian territories. Since the fall in December 2024 of Syrian president Bashar Assad, Israel has sent troops into a buffer zone patrolled by the UN that had separated Israeli and Syrian forces on the Golan Heights.

Sharaa said Syria wanted "either to establish new rules that would reactivate the disengagement agreement or conclude a new agreement that would guarantee the security of both parties." "If we reach an agreement, we could enter into long-term negotiations to resolve the issue of the occupied Golan," the Syrian president told a diplomatic forum in the Turkish city of Antalya. Israel had seized most of this plateau from Syria during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, then annexed the areas under its control — a move not recognized by most of the international community. "Israel is violating the 1974 disengagement agreement, and today we are working to reach a security agreement that will guarantee its withdrawal from the territories it occupied after the fall of the (Assad) regime and its return to the 1974 lines," Sharaa said. — APP

Pakistan, Ethiopia call for enhancing trade ties

During the meeting, both sides discussed areas of mutual interest including trade, investment, and economic cooperation. The Ambassador highlighted Ethiopia's vast potential, noting its population of approximately 130 million and its growing economic sectors. He underscored Ethiopia's strengths in agriculture, livestock exports to the Middle East, and hydropower generation, which provides cost-effective electricity

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Ambassador of Ethiopia to Pakistan, Dr. Oumer Hussein Oba, called on the Federal Minister for Board of Investment, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh. The federal minister warmly welcomed the Ambassador and appreciated the longstanding friendly relations between Pakistan and Ethiopia, said a release issued here Friday.

The Ambassador commended the rich culture and hospitality of the Pakistani people and congratulated the Federal Minister on Pakistan's constructive and positive role in promoting global peace. The federal minister appreciated the visionary leadership and diplomatic efforts of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir in enhancing Pakistan's global standing and promoting peace. During the meeting, both sides discussed areas of mutual interest including trade, investment, and economic cooperation. The Ambassador highlighted Ethiopia's vast potential, noting its population of approximately 130 million and its growing economic sectors. He underscored Ethiopia's strengths in agriculture, livestock exports to the Middle East, and hydropower generation, which provides cost-effective electricity.

The Ambassador also highlighted the success of Ethiopian Airlines, one of the leading airlines globally, which is currently operating from Karachi and is exploring further expansion, particularly in cargo services. He emphasized the cultural diversity of Ethiopia and noted strong similarities between Ethiopian and Pakistani cultures. He further mentioned that coffee remains one of Ethiopia's major exports and invited Pakistan to explore investment opportunities under Ethiopia's pro-business policies. The federal minister highlighted Pakistan's investment potential in key sectors including agriculture, minerals, and information technology. He provided an overview of the Board of Investment's role in facilitating investors, briefed on Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and the tax

incentives. He also emphasized ongoing regulatory reforms aimed at improving ease of doing business in Pakistan. Both sides acknowledged the improving global perception of Pakistan and agreed that there exists immense potential for enhanced bilateral cooperation. The Ambassador extended an invitation to the Federal Minister to visit Ethiopia, which was warmly reciprocated. The minister also invited the Ambassador to visit his constituency, Chinot

to experience firsthand the rich Punjabi culture, historical heritage, and renowned wooden craftsmanship of the region. Senior officials of the Board of Investment, including Director General BOI Mehmood Tufail, were also present during the meeting. The Board of Investment under the leadership of Federal Minister Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh remains committed to facilitating foreign investment and strengthening international partnerships.



OGRA clears Rs 38b OMCs price differential claims

DNA

ISLAMABAD: While implementing the Federal Government decision to maintain the fuel prices at affordable level, the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) has processed the disbursement of approximately PKR 38 billion in Price Differential Claims (PDC) to 34 Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs). OGRA has implemented the Federal Government decision through a mechanism, duly concurred by Federal Government, aimed at improving transparency, efficiency, and timeliness in the verification and release of PDCs. The framework ensures a structured evaluation process, enabling expeditious settlement of legitimate eligible claims so as to ensure robust financial discipline. The Authority reaffirmed its commitment to supporting government efforts to stabilize petroleum prices while safeguarding the interests of all stakeholders across the oil supply chain.

“OGRA has implemented the Federal Government decision through a mechanism, duly concurred by Federal Government, aimed at improving transparency, efficiency, and timeliness in the verification and release of PDCs”

Man accused of killing Charlie Kirk pushes to ban cameras from court

SALT LAKE CITY: The man accused of killing Charlie Kirk wants a judge to ban cameras from the courtroom and says live broadcasts of the prosecution are violating his right to a fair trial. Tyler Robinson is due in court Friday as his attorneys press their claims that biased coverage is tainting potential jurors in his aggravated murder case. Among numerous examples cited was a New York Post story they say sug-

gested Robinson confessed to Kirk's killing during a courtroom conversation on Dec. 11, in his first appearance after being charged. The conversation with his attorneys was inaudible, but the story cited a "lip reading analysis" to support its claim that Robinson said, "I think about the shooting daily." "The predominant purpose being served by the live stream coverage has not been the educational report-

ing of the court proceedings, but rather advertising profit, sensationalism, political agendas, and, most prominently, the vilification of Mr. Robinson," his attorneys wrote in their request to bar cameras. Prosecutors intend to seek the death penalty for Robinson should he be convicted in the Sept. 10 shooting of the conservative activist, who was addressing a crowd of thousands on the Utah Valley University campus in Orem. Robinson, who turned 23 on Thursday, has not yet entered a plea. Media sensationalism around the case has cut both ways. In a March 30 headline, the UK-based Daily Mail reported the bullet that killed Kirk "did NOT match" a rifle allegedly used by Robinson. The story was based on an inconclusive, preliminary finding by ballistics experts and led to speculation about Robinson's possible exoneration. — APP

possible exoneration. — APP

Bangladesh warns of new wave of Rohingya refugees making perilous sea crossings

DHAKA: Bangladeshi authorities are warning of a new wave of Rohingya taking life-threatening sea journeys to escape refugee camps, as conditions deteriorate due to a sharp decline in international aid, affecting even access to food. At least 250 people are feared dead or missing after a boat capsized in the Andaman Sea on the way to Malaysia, the International Organization of Migration said this week, marking the latest incident involving Rohingya refugees undertaking risky journeys by sea in hopes of finding a better life. Most of them depart from Bangladesh's coastal Cox's Bazar district, where nearly 1.3 million Rohingya are trapped inside squalid camps with limited access to job opportunities and education. As international aid for the refugee community has been dropping since 2021, aid agencies and the Bangladeshi government have been facing difficulties in covering the costs of education, healthcare and food, thus furthering the Rohingya's struggle to survive. "The lives of the Rohingya are very miserable here at the Rohingya camps. They are very hopeless with the current situation," Mizanur Rahman, refugee relief and repatriation commissioner in Cox's Bazar, told Arab News on Thursday evening. "The reality is that they see a bleak future in front of them. If they consider that a better life is there on the other side of the sea, they must want to go there. I fear that this trend will further increase in the coming days." In 2025, IOM reported at least 890 Rohingya refugees — out of more than 6,500 people — had died or gone missing trying to relocate to another country through deadly sea crossings, the highest figure since 2014. For years, many Rohingya have risked their lives by crossing on fragile wooden boats to reach countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, fleeing persecution in Myanmar and harsh conditions in Bangladesh's overcrowded refugee camps. "This sort of boat journey is very risky and inhumane. The passengers are forced to lie down beneath the deck of the wooden boat, packed tightly against one another. There is no scope to make even a little movement," Sayed Ullah, a Rohingya community leader and acting president of the United Council of Rohingya, told Arab News, citing past testimonies from survivors. — DNA

Japan welcomes Lebanon, Israel ceasefire

TOKYO: Japan's Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi on Friday welcomed the 10-day ceasefire agreed on April 17 between Israel and Lebanon. In a statement, Motegi said Japan would "closely monitor" the impact of the pact on the situation in the region — including on the negotiations between the US and Iran — and "strongly expects that all parties fully implement this agreement toward realizing peace and stability in the region." He added that Japan has called on all parties to halt hostilities, abide by international law, and seek a diplomatic settlement. — APP

Philippines forces kill 10 Islamist militants in arrest gunfight

MANILA: Philippine security forces killed 10 alleged armed Islamist militants Friday who resisted an attempt to arrest them, police said. The firefight with police and soldiers happened in the Muslim-populated south of the mainly Catholic Asian nation, where remnants of Daesh-inspired groups operate. Among the dead was Amerol Mangoranca, leader of an armed group called the Maute-Dawlah Islamiya, a regional police report said.

The government force arrived near the town of Marantao before dawn to serve arrest warrants for murder, homicide, and kidnapping against Mangoranca and his group, it said. This triggered an hour-long firefight with the group, who included the rebel leader's wife and three other women.

A separate military report said an unarmored infant was recovered after the gunfight. Government forces sustained no casualties and recovered guns and explosives, the military added. The group is suspected of being behind a January ambush that killed four soldiers and wounded another, said the Philippine Army's First Infantry Division report. The slain gunmen were from the "same network responsible for the Marawi siege and years of violence," the military unit's commander Maj. Gen. Yegor Barroquillo said in the statement.

In May 2017, hundreds of Filipino Muslim fighters as well as foreign militants joined forces to take over the Mindanao city of Marawi, intending to make it the capital of a Southeast Asian caliphate to be ruled by their radical interpretation of Islam. A bloody siege by government forces ended five months later with the loss of more than a thousand lives and with many of the militant groups' most senior leaders being killed. — APP

World Heritage Day – 18 April: safeguarding Pakistan's cultural legacy

ZAHRA SOHAIL

EVERY year on 18 April, the international community observes World Heritage Day (International Day for Monuments and Sites) to celebrate the richness and diversity of cultural heritage and to reaffirm our shared responsibility to safeguard it for future generations. The theme for 2026, "Emergency Response for Living Heritage in Contexts of Conflicts and Disasters," highlights the urgent need to protect not only physical sites but also the living heritage, traditions, practices, and knowledge systems, that are particularly vulnerable in times of crisis. It underscores the importance of preparedness, community-based approaches, and rapid response mechanisms to ensure the continuity of cultural practices, while calling for stronger integration of heritage safeguarding into disaster risk reduction and development planning frameworks. Pakistan is endowed with an exceptionally rich and diverse cultural heritage that spans from the ancient Indus Valley Civilization to Gandhara art, Islamic architecture, and vibrant living traditions. This legacy is reflected in its six UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the archaeological ruins of Mohenjo-daro, the Buddhist Ruins of Takht-i-Bahi and Neighbouring City Remains at Sahri-Bahlol, the Taxila, the Historical Monuments at Makli, the Lahore Fort and Shalimar Gardens, and the Rohtas Fort. These sites are not only symbols of national pride but also key anchors for tourism and local economies. However, six World Heritage Sites do not fully reflect the immense cultural wealth of Pakistan. Despite having a strong Tentative List, no new site has been inscribed on the World Heritage List since 1997. This is not due to a lack of potential but rather reflects challenges in meeting the evolving requirements for World Heritage protection, which have become more demanding in response to increasing threats from climate change and urban pressures. In particular, there

are gaps in ensuring robust protection systems, effective management frameworks, and long-term conservation planning. Strengthening institutional capacity and integrating heritage management into broader governance systems are therefore essential—not only to advance future nominations, but also to ensure that existing World Heritage properties are adequately safeguarded and do not face the risk of being placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger. A critical issue highlighted by World Heritage Day is the need to mainstream heritage protection within national and urban development frameworks as well as ensure compliance to the international standards of conservation. Cultural heritage sites across Pakistan are increasingly exposed to pressures from urban expansion, infrastructure development, encroachments, environmental degradation, and, in some cases, interventions that do not fully align with international standards of conservation and restoration. The World Heritage Convention, along with its Operational Guidelines, provides clear guidance to States Parties on safeguarding these properties. In particular, Paragraph 172 encourages States to inform and

seek guidance from UNESCO on any major restoration, development, or infrastructure projects that may impact the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of a site. Adherence to these provisions, along with internationally recognized conservation charters and standards, is essential to ensure that development and heritage protection go hand in hand. UNESCO continues to advocate for a balanced approach, one that supports development while safeguarding the authenticity, integrity, and long-term sustainability of heritage assets. At the same time, heritage protection offers immense opportunities for sustainable development. Well-managed heritage sites can generate employment, promote cultural tourism, support local crafts and creative industries, and contribute to inclusive economic growth. Moreover, heritage conservation is closely linked with environmental sustainability, as traditional knowledge systems and historic landscapes often embody practices that promote resilience and harmony with nature. UNESCO has been actively supporting the Government of Pakistan in addressing these challenges and strengthening heritage management systems. Efforts

include raising awareness on the importance of safeguarding heritage in line with international standards, as well as providing technical support for the development of integrated management plans for World Heritage Sites. UNESCO organized a training workshop on World Heritage management from 26–29 January 2026 in Peshawar engaging site managers and Director Generals, focusing on the preparation of management plans and the revision of Pakistan's Tentative List. In addition, UNESCO has been supporting disaster risk reduction and conservation efforts at key sites such as Mohenjo-daro, Makli, and Takht-i-Bahi, alongside capacity-building of technical staff in restoration techniques aligned with international best practices. On this World Heritage Day, the message is clear, that safeguarding Pakistan's cultural heritage is not only a responsibility but an opportunity. By integrating heritage protection into national development policies, strengthening institutional capacities, and compliance to international standards of conservation, Pakistan can unlock the full potential of its cultural assets, for economic growth, environmental sustainability, and the well-being of future generations.



Briefs

Pakistan-EU business forum to strengthen trade, GSP+

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan held a detailed meeting on Friday with Raimundas Karoblis to discuss strengthening Pakistan-European Union economic relations, with a particular focus on the upcoming Pakistan-EU Business Forum scheduled to be held on April 28-29, 2026, in Islamabad and the continued importance of the GSP Plus scheme. The meeting underscored that the Pakistan-EU Business Forum will serve as a major platform to deepen trade and investment cooperation. Both sides highlighted that the forum is expected to bring together a large number of participants, including government representatives, business leaders, and institutional stakeholders from Pakistan and across the European Union, said a release issued here on Friday. It was noted that the event will feature extensive business-to-business (B2B) engagements, with hundreds of meetings planned between Pakistani and European companies. These interactions are aimed at fostering direct partnerships, facilitating investment flows, and identifying new avenues for collaboration across key sectors. The Minister emphasized that the forum comes at a critical time and presents an opportunity for Pakistan to project a strong, business-friendly image globally.

UK PM faces calls to resign

DNA

LONDON: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Friday faced renewed calls from his political opponents to resign after it was revealed that his former ambassador to the United States failed security vetting and was still allowed to take up the job. The government on Thursday confirmed Mandelson - who was subsequently fired after Starmer said he had lied about the strength of his relationship with sex offender Jeffrey Epstein - had failed his security vetting before taking up the role. The government said Starmer was unaware officials in the Foreign Office had overruled the vetting recommendation, and a source said the most senior official at the Foreign Office, Olly Robbins, would leave his role after losing Starmer's confidence. "I don't think the prime minister can get out of his responsibility by sacking Olly Robbins. I think the buck has to stop with Mr Starmer," Liberal Democrat Leader Ed Davey told BBC Radio. "I think the evidence suggests that he misled the Commons (parliament) and misled the public.

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia ink deal to extend \$3bn deposit

Extension of deposit reflects longstanding economic partnership between Islamabad and Riyadh, says finance ministry

DNA

RIYADH: Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have signed an agreement to extend the maturity of Riyadh's \$3 billion deposit placed with the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), according to a statement issued by the finance ministry on Friday. Saudi Fund for Development Chief Executive Officer Sultan bin Abdul Rahman Al-Marshad and SBP Governor Jameel Ahmad signed the agreement on the sidelines of the World Bank-IMF Spring Meetings 2026 in Washington, read the statement. The agreement provides for the extension in the maturity of a \$3 billion deposit placed by SFD with the SBP, it said. Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb and Pakistan's ambassador to the United States witnessed the signing of the agreement. The extension of the deposit reflects the strong and longstanding economic partnership between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, and will further support Pakistan's external sector stability, the statement said. The development comes just a day after Saudi Arabia announced an additional \$3 billion deposit to the SBP. The Saudi state news agency SPA said that the financial support was provided to Is-



Islamabad at the directives of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Earlier that day, the central bank said it had received \$2 billion from Saudi Arabia "in the value date of April 15, 2026". FinMin Aurangzeb had

previously said that Riyadh committed \$3 billion in additional financial support for Pakistan, while also extending the maturity of its existing deposit for a longer period. Saudi Arabia has consistently provided support to Pakistan during periods of economic strain. In 2018, Riyadh unveiled a \$6 billion package that included a \$3 billion deposit at Pakistan's central bank and \$3 billion in oil supplies on deferred payment. Meanwhile, Pakistan faces a \$3.5 billion repayment to the United Arab Emirates this month that has put a strain on its foreign exchange reserves, which stood at about \$16.4 billion as of March 27. Under Pakistan's \$7 billion International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme, the country is targeting foreign exchange reserves of more than \$18 billion by June. Pakistan has recently repaid \$1.43 billion in external debt, including the \$1.3 billion Eurobond. Khurram Schehzad, adviser to the finance minister, made the announcement in a post on X on April 7, saying debt servicing continued to be executed, "... reflecting consistency, discipline, and strengthened capacity." The \$1.43 billion repayment also included \$126.125 million in coupon obligations on other Eurobond issuances, he added.

Pakistan jets escorted Iranian team back home

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Air Force (PAF) escorted Iranian negotiators home from inconclusive peace talks with the US last weekend, launching a major operation after the Iranians said Israel might seek to kill them, three sources told media. Pakistan deployed some two dozen jets in the escort, as well as the force's Airborne Warning and Control System for aerial surveillance to ensure the safety of the delegation back from Islamabad, said two Pakistani sources with knowledge of the operation. One said similar security protection would be provided for subsequent talks if the Iranians ask for it, "otherwise Pakistani aircraft would receive them in Pakistani airspace". A third source involved in the talks said measures were already in the works ahead of an expected further round of talks as soon as this weekend. A regional diplomat briefed by Tehran, however, said Pakistan insisted on the escort after Iranian delegates raised the "hypothetical" possibility of a threat. The discussions with the Iranian delegation about a potential threat while travelling and the presence of a Pakistani air escort into Iran have not previously been reported. The Israeli prime minister's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Iran's permanent mission in Geneva did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Pakistan's air force and military did not respond to questions about the operation. The US embassy in Islamabad did not respond to a request for comment.

UN chief welcomes Israel-Lebanon ceasefire

UNITED NATIONS: The United Nations welcomed the announcement of a 10-day ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel, with Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressing support for efforts to end the prolonged conflict. "The Secretary-General welcomes the announcement of a 10-day ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon and commends the role of the United States in facilitating the ceasefire," his spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a statement Thursday. In earlier remarks, Dujarric told his news briefing that "obviously, we welcome steps that would end hostilities and suffering on both sides of the Blue Line." Noting that the UN "remains ready to support these efforts," he also said that it continues to call for "the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1701," describing it as the pathway toward "a permanent ceasefire and long-term solution to the conflict." He stressed that "there is no military solution to this conflict," as UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert continues diplomatic outreach with the parties. Dujarric said that Guterres "further hopes that this agreement will contribute to ongoing efforts toward a lasting and comprehensive peace in the region." He also highlighted the worsening humanitarian situation in Lebanon, warning that "the needs are continuing to deepen" across the country, with "civilians continuing to bear the brunt of the violence." Earlier on Thursday, US President Donald Trump announced that Israel and Lebanon agreed to begin a 10-day ceasefire starting at midnight local time in Tel Aviv and Beirut following recent talks in Washington, DC. - APP

Indonesia helicopter crash kills 8

AKARTA: Two crew members and six passengers were killed when a private helicopter crashed in dense forest on Indonesia's Borneo island, the transport ministry said Friday. The Airbus helicopter, owned by local firm Mathe Air Nusantara, lost contact with air traffic control about five minutes after takeoff in the West Kalimantan province on Thursday morning. All eight on board were men and one was a Malaysian national, civil aviation director general Lukman F Laisa said in a statement. "The joint search and rescue team had successfully located the crash site of the aircraft and, based on information from the field, all passengers and crew members have been confirmed dead," he said. Rescuers found the crash victims Thursday evening in a dense forest area with steep slopes, search and rescue agency head I Made Junetra told AFP Friday. The bodies were being flown to the provincial capital of Pontianak, Made added. - Agencies

Pakistan's DPM/FM meets TRNC Foreign Minister

Senator Dar, who is leading Pakistan's delegation at the Forum, highlighted the importance of such interactions in furthering Pakistan's principled foreign policy and deepening ties with friendly nations

NEWS DESK

ANKARA: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar held a bilateral meeting with Tahsin Ertugroglu, Foreign Minister of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), on the sidelines of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum. During the cordial meeting, both sides reaffirmed their strong commitment to strengthening bilateral cooperation in multiple sectors. Particular emphasis was placed on advancing collaboration in education and supporting the welfare of the Pakistani diaspora in the TRNC. The two Foreign Ministers agreed to maintain close engagement and continue joint efforts aimed at promoting the mutual interests and well-being of both peoples. Senator Dar, who is leading Pakistan's delegation at the Forum, highlighted the importance of such interactions in furthering Pakistan's principled foreign policy and deepening ties with friendly nations. This meeting underscores the growing diplomatic en-

Ishaq Dar, Korean Minister discuss recent regional developments

ANTALYA: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar met Thursday evening with Vice Minister for Strategy and Intelligence at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea Jeong Yeondoo, on the sidelines of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum. During the meeting, they exchanged views on matters of mutual interest and recent regional developments. Vice Minister Yeondoo appreciated Pakistan's role in the sustained diplomatic efforts in pursuit of peace and stability in the region and beyond. - APP

Imran Khan's wife Bushra Bibi discharged from hospital after eye surgery: sources

FORMER first lady underwent eye procedure after being diagnosed with retinal detachment in right eye, say insiders Bushra Bibi, wife of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan, has been shifted back to Adiala jail in Rawalpindi after undergoing eye surgery for retinal detachment, sources said on Friday. The sources affiliated with the prison said Bushra, the former first lady, had complained of impaired vision in her right eye, prompting the jail administration to arrange an immediate examination by ophthalmology specialists. Following the assessment, doctors confirmed retinal detachment and advised urgent surgery. The insiders said she was moved to a private hospital in Rawalpindi on the evening of April 16, where necessary pre-operative tests and medical evaluations were completed. After having her consent, the procedure was carried out by Dr Nadeem Qureshi along with a medical panel. Following the surgery and an overnight stay at the hospital, Bushra was discharged and transferred back to the

Adiala jail. The sources further said her condition is now stable, adding that post-operative check-ups and follow-up care would be conducted in line with doctors' recommendations. Later, the former first lady's family members, including her daughter, son-in-law and sister-in-law, were allowed to meet her at the Rawalpindi prison. Her sister, Mariam Riaz Watto, had earlier said in a post on X that the family had been called to the hospital, where her daughters were present. She also revealed that Bushra was to undergo surgery as part of her treatment. Earlier today, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan confirmed Bushra's hospitalisation, saying the party had received information about the transfer of the incarcerated former first lady to a medical facility on Thursday night. In a statement released on X, Barrister Gohar called for immediate access for the families of both Imran Khan and his wife, while reiterating demands for the former premier to also be shifted to a hospital for urgent medical treatment.

No more free electricity for employees

DNA

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court has dismissed a petition against the withdrawal of free electricity units for officers of the Water and Power Development Authority (Wapda) and other power distribution companies, terming the government's move as "reasonable and rational", it emerged on Friday. LHC's Justice Malik Javid Iqbal Wains rejected the petition challenging a notification issued by the Ministry of Energy (Power Division) on December 5, 2023. In a 14-page verdict, the court upheld the government's decision, saying that the "measure has been adopted pursuant to a lawful policy decision and does not deprive the petitioners from any statutory entitlement." The monetisation of free electricity units neither reduces basic pay nor alters any vested service rights, the court stated, adding that it merely modifies the manner in which a discretionary facility is extended by the department.

Pak highlights mediation in Iran war as UNGA debates

UNITED NATIONS: Pakistan highlighted its role aimed at ending the US-Israeli war on Iran and mediating a durable peace as the UN General Assembly Thursday heard explanations from China and Russia regarding their use of the veto on April 7, rejecting a Gulf States-led resolution in the Security Council that called for re-opening the Strait of Hormuz. Pakistan had abstained on the draft in the 15-member Council, along with Columbia, on the Bahrain-drafted resolution, which received 11 votes in favour, with Russia and China voting against. "The Strait of Hormuz is an important international shipping route for goods and energy," Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, permanent representative of Pakistan to the UN, told the 193-member Assembly, underscoring the need for safe passage of civilian ship as the situation in the Strait was adversely impacting countries around the world. It may be pointed out that the General Assembly cannot overturn or nullify a Council veto, which may be exercised by China, France, Russia, United Kingdom or the United States as the five permanent Council members. But, it may discuss, scrutinize and

politically respond to veto use through debate and resolutions under the UN Charter and established practice. This role was significantly strengthened in April 2022, when the Assembly adopted a procedure requiring every Council veto to trigger an Assembly debate within 10 working days. Today's debate was held under this initiative, which requires vetoing States to explain their rationale and allows all UN members to comment on and assess the veto's consequences, thereby enhancing transparency and accountability. In his remarks, Ambassador Asim Ahmad said Pakistan supports the sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and security of "all brotherly countries" in the region, while any discussion or arrangement related to the Strait must consider the legitimate interests of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. In Pakistan, Ambassador Asim Ahmad said the impact of the conflict is felt not only in terms of energy supplies, but also in fertilizers and other essential commodities, "squeezing the livelihood of the most vulnerable". If disruptions persist, suffering will become widespread, the Pakistani envoy said. - DNA



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