



A Leading National Daily



فرمان رسول ﷺ رسول اللہ صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم نے فرمایا کہ اگر میرے پاس احد پھاڑے برابر بھی سونا ہو تو مجھے اس میں خوشی ہوگی کہ تین دن بھی مجھ پر اس حال میں نہ گزرنے پائیں کہ اس میں سے میرے پاس کچھ بھی باقی نہ بچے۔ البتہ اگر کسی کا قرض دور کرنے کے لیے پھر رکھ چھوڑوں تو یہ اور بات ہے۔ (صحیح بخاری، حدیث نمبر 6445)

Barkat Rice Mills (Pvt) Limited

Daily The Spokesman



Trump accuses Iran of using AI to spread disinformation

"AI can be very dangerous, we have to be very careful with it," Trump said to reporters on Air Force One shortly after he made a post on his Truth Social platform where he accused Western media outlets without evidence of "close coordination" with Iran to spread AI-generated "fake news."



Middle East war has affected world economy, says minister

Federal Minister for Food Security and Research Rana Tanveer Hussain has said action against Iran will affect the world economy. Speaking to the media in his native constituency, Rana Tanveer Hussain said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir were striving for peace in the region, but the economy of the entire region is affected in the war environment.

Simultaneously published from Islamabad, Lahore and Multan

Ramazanul Mubarak 27, Tuesday, March 17, 2026

www.dailyspokesman.net

@daily_spokesman

Daily Spokesman Vol: 19, Issue: 331 Price Rs. 25.00 Pages 8

Meeting

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting regarding enforcement of austerity and relief measures and conservation and management of petroleum reserves in the wake of emerging situation in the region on Monday.



Photo: PID

Israeli authorities continue closure of Al-Aqsa Mosque for 17th consecutive day



Wafa

JERUSALEM: Israeli occupation authorities have continued the closure of Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in occupied Jerusalem to Muslims worshippers for the 17th consecutive day, citing security pretexts. For the first time since 1967, Israeli authorities have prevented worshippers from performing prayers and religious rituals at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, as worshippers were absent from the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan.

The Jerusalem Governorate had warned of the dangerous escalation in incitement led by extremist so-called "Temple Mount" organizations against the Al-Aqsa Mosque, amidst the ongoing closure measures. It emphasized that what is taking place cannot be considered temporary security measures, as Israeli authorities claim, but rather part of a political and ideological approach aimed at altering the existing religious, historical, and legal status quo at the mosque compound.

Economic stability, public relief, govt's top priorities: PM

City Desk
ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, Monday, said that economic stability and provision of relief to the public remained government's top priorities and all measures were being taken to not only provide immediate relief but also ensure long-term economic stability. He said that the Government of Pakistan was prepared to face any situation arising from the ongoing global tensions.

The prime minister chaired a review meeting regarding enforcement of austerity and relief measures and conservation and management of petroleum reserves in the wake of emerging situation in the region. The prime minister directed petroleum distribution companies to ensure sale of petroleum products at the government-determined prices and to maintain transparency in this matter, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release. The meeting was attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign

Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, Minister for Economic Affairs Ahad Khan Cheema, Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik, Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar, Minister for IT Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Minister of State for Finance Bilal Azhar Kayani and relevant senior officials. The meeting was apprised that the government was continuously monitoring the sale of petroleum products at the fixed prices while to ensure the uninterrupted supply of

oil and its sale at the prescribed price, a feature had been added to the Pak App enabling consumers to report certain issues. Through the Pak App, consumers could now inform the relevant authorities about the unavailability of fuel or its sale at higher prices anywhere in the country, upon which the immediate action would be taken, it was added. The participants of the meeting appreciated prime minister's decision last Friday not to further increase petroleum prices.

PM, Amir Muqam discuss projects in AJ&K, GB, KPK

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan and President of Pakistan Muslim League (N) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Engineer Amir Muqam Monday held meeting with Prime Minister Muhammad Sheh-

baz Sharif. The minister briefed the Prime Minister about the progress of public welfare projects in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The meeting also discussed the affairs of PML-N in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

PM directs salary disbursement for federal employees ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr

City Desk
ISLAMABAD: On the special instructions of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, it has been decided to pay salaries to federal government employees before Eid-ul-Fitr holidays. Federal government departments have received the Prime Minister's instructions and action has been taken to pay salaries before Eid.

DPM, Acting U.S. Chargé d'Affaires discuss ties

City Desk
ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar on Monday held meeting with Acting U.S. Chargé d'Affaires Zachary Harkenrider. Discussions focused on Pakistan-U.S. bilateral relations and ongoing regional developments. DPM/FM emphasized the importance of diplomatic engagement and underscored the urgent need to promote peace and stability in the region.

Federal, Balochistan govts pledge joint strategy to ensure lasting peace and strengthen rule of law

Bureau Report
QUETTA: Federal and Balochistan governments have reaffirmed their commitment to establishing sustainable peace in the province through coordinated efforts, stronger law enforcement, and enhanced institutional cooperation. The assurance came during a law and order meeting at the Chief Minister's Secretariat in Quetta, jointly chaired by Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti. Senior officials from both federal and provincial institutions attended, a CM's Secretariat press release said. Senior officials, Chairman National Database and Registration Authority, DG Federal Investigation Agency, DG National Cyber

Crime Investigation Agency, and IG Federal Constabulary, provided detailed briefings on their respective departments. They highlighted ongoing initiatives aimed at tackling illegal activities, improving institutional capacity, and promoting long-term stability in the province. Participants reviewed the overall security situation and discussed key issues, including repatriation of Afghan refugees, elimination of hawala and hundi networks, efforts to curb extortion and smuggling and strategies to strengthen the rule of law. A major decision was to deploy the Federal Constabulary in Balochistan. Initially, two wings will be stationed in the province, with around 3,000 personnel eventually deployed in sensitive areas to rein-

force security. Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti said the provincial government is taking firm steps to eliminate terrorism and restore order. He stressed that ensuring the writ of the state is non-negotiable. "Today, no highways are being blocked in the name of protests in Balochistan," Bugti noted, highlighting improved public order due to effective strategies and institutional coordination. The meeting was attended by Assembly member Mir Zia Langove, Chief Secretary Shakeel Qadir Khan, Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Hanza Shafqaat, Inspector General of Police Muhammad Tahir Khan, and Principal Secretary to the CM Imran Zarkoon, along with other senior officials.

Atta Tarar reiterates commitment to journalists' welfare

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar on Monday reiterated the government's resolute commitment to the welfare and development of journalist community. The minister expressed the resolve

during a meeting with a delegation of the National Press Club which was led by senior journalist Haji Nawaz Raza, and included the newly elected President Abdul Razaq Sial and Secretary Dr. Furqan Rao. The minister extended his heart-

felt congratulations for the officials of both the Democrats and Journalist panels for their success in the recent elections and expressed his best wishes for the members of the executive body. *Continued on Page 7*

PM Rathore chairs meeting, approves honorarium hike for Quran reciters

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: A high-level meeting of the Tajweed-ul-Quran Trust was held here today, under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Faisal Mumtaz Rathore.

The meeting was attended by the minister for information, religious affairs, and Auqaf, Chaudhry Muhammad Rafiq Nanyar, while Chief Secretary Khushal Khan joined the meeting through a video link.

The meeting approved the increase in the monthly honorarium of the Qurra (Quran reciters).

Speaking on the occasion, Prime Minister Faisal Mumtaz Rathore said that promoting the education and recitation of the Holy Quran was one of his government's key priorities.

Highlighting the significant role of Quran reciters in society, the Prime Minister said they play a vital role in serving Islam.

"The government will continue to take practical steps for their encour-



agement and welfare," he added.

The Prime Minister said that more effective steps will be taken for the proper education of the Holy Quran and the promotion of Tajweed through the Tajweed Trust.

The Prime Minister directed the concerned authorities to ensure early implementation of the decision

to increase the honorarium of the reciters and to formulate a comprehensive strategy to further improve the performance of the trust.

On this occasion, Principal Secretary Zafar Mahmood Khan; Secretary Finance Hassan Masood; Secretary Religious Affairs and Auqaf Rafaqat Khan; Controller General of

Accounts Fateh Muhammad Qureshi; Chairman Ulama and Mashaikh Sahibzada Zulfiqar Ali; Controller Religious Affairs/Secretary Tajweed-ul-Quran Trust Syed Wajahat Hussain Gardezi; and Supervisor Tajweed-ul-Quran Trust Raja Muhammad Siddique Khan were present in the meeting.

Azad Kashmir Minister Honors Legendary Spiritual Leaders in Mirpur Visit



Bureau Report

MIRPUR: Azad Kashmir Minister for Information, Religious Affairs and Auqaf Chaudhry Muhammad Rafiq Nanyar visited the shrines of the great spiritual leader of the subcontinent, Hazrat Baba Peera Shah Ghazi, also known as Damri Wali Sarkar, and Hazrat Mian Muhammad Bakhsh, the great Kashmiri, offered prayers and flowers and prayed for the eternal peace of the religious leaders. On this occasion, he also visited the office of the Auqaf Department and instructed the Auqaf employees to utilize all resources to facilitate the pilgrims visiting the shrines so that they do not face any kind of trouble.

AJK Election Commission Reviews Poll Preparations, Confirms Vote Before July



Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: An important high-level meeting was held at Jammu and Kashmir House, Islamabad, under the chairmanship of Syed Nazir-ul-Hassan Gilani, Member, Election Commission of Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The meeting was attended by Secretary Election Commission Raja Shakeel Khan, NADRA's Alamdar Hussain, Head of E-Governance Department, Deputy Director Omar Tariq, Zahid Abbas Project Manager, Zeeshan Mughal Software Specialist, Faisal Imran Assistant Director, while Election Commission of Pakistan's Director IS Imran Ahmed Khan, Director HR Asif Ali Shaheen, Assistant Director Khawaja Imran-ul-Haq, Secretariat Officer Raja Waseem. During the meeting, a detailed review of the ongoing preparations for the upcoming general elections in Azad Jammu and Kashmir was taken. Officials from NADRA and the Election Commission of Pakistan briefed the meeting on the verification of voter data and updating of data. Addressing the meeting, Member Election Commission Syed Nazir-ul-Hassan Gilani said that ensuring the holding of transparent, free and fair elections in Azad Jammu and Kashmir is the top priority of the Election Commission. He said that the elections will be held before July. The Election Commission of Pakistan has shown its willingness to make arrangements for the constituencies of the refugees, for which the Election Commission thanks the Election Commission of Pakistan.

Sardar Attique Receives Grand Welcome on Arrival in Rawalpindi Post Pilgrimage

Spokesman Report

RAWALPINDI / MUZAFFARABAD: President of All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference and former Prime Minister of Azad Kashmir Sardar Attique Ahmed Khan has returned to his home Rawalpindi Mujahid Manzil after performing Umrah, where the series of congratulations has begun. Yesterday, when Sardar Attique Ahmed Khan arrived at Islamabad Airport from Saudi Arabia, the leader of the 5th Muslim Conference was given a grand welcome by the workers, who showered him with flower petals, presented him with bouquets and garlands and congratulated him. Sardar Attique Ahmed Khan thanked all the workers who came to the airport.

Diplomacy is the path to end Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions: Sardar Masood Khan

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: Sardar Masood Khan, former President of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and former Ambassador of Pakistan to the United States and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, has stated that Pakistan initially pursued diplomacy and engagement with the Afghan Taliban but was compelled to undertake targeted counter-terrorism operations after repeated terrorist attacks originating from Afghan territory.

Speaking during a television interview on the evolving security situation in the region, Ambassador Masood Khan said that since 2021 Pakistan had consistently tried to resolve the issue through diplomatic channels after the revival of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which began using Afghan soil to carry out attacks against Pakistan.



Assistance

ISLAMABAD: A large number of poverty-ridden women beneficiaries of Benazir Bhutto Income Support Program (BISP) gather in a queue for their turn to get cash, in the Federal Capital.



Photo: Online by Sultan Bashir

Kashmir Leader urges New NPC Islamabad Body to Champion Freedom Struggle

City Desk

RAWALPINDI: President of All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference and former Prime Minister Sardar Attique Ahmed Khan congratulated the newly elected office bearers of the National Press Club Islamabad.

Sardar Attique Ahmed Khan congratulated the newly elected President Abdul Razaq Sial, Secretary Furqan Rao, Finance Secretary Abid Abbasi, Senior Vice President Ehteshamul Haq, Shiraz Gardezi,



Bashir Chaudhry, Usman Khan, Sehrish Qureshi, Shakeela Jalil, Aun Shirazi, Javed Bhagat and said that while these media representatives highlight the problems of all over Pakistan, they will also play a full role in solving the Kashmir issue and highlighting the freedom movement through their pen.

The election of the newly elected office bearers of the Press Club is an expression of the journalist community's full confidence in them.

He appreciated the role of the journalist community for freedom

of expression and said that expression of opinion is a fundamental right of a citizen and the journalist community has made countless sacrifices in this regard.

He expressed the hope that the newly elected office bearers of all the press clubs will use all their abilities to solve the problems faced by the journalist community and highlight the Kashmir issue, besides fulfilling the hopes of the journalist community. The journalism sector is the fourth pillar of the state.

A Unified Digital Degree Verification Policy: A National Necessity in the Digital Era

In today's rapidly evolving digital world, transparency, efficiency, and accessibility are no longer luxuries; they are necessities. Pakistan has made significant strides in digital governance, education technology, and online services, yet one critical area remains fragmented, costly, and outdated: degree verification.

Across Pakistan, universities, Boards, the Higher Education Commission (HEC), the Inter Board Committee of Chairmen (IBCC), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) operate separate verification systems, each with its own procedures, timelines, and fees. This fragmented approach places an unnecessary financial and administrative burden on students, professionals, institutions, and employers.

uniform, free, and fully digital national degree verification policy.

Pakistan is already moving toward digital governance, e-services, and smart education systems. Degree verification should be integrated into this transformation. Every university, Boards, HEC, IBCC, and MOFA should maintain a secure, centralized digital verification system accessible online, eliminating paperwork and delays.

Students and professionals often pay multiple fees to verify the same academic record at different levels of school, college, university, HEC, IBCC, and MOFA. These fees can be substantial, especially for students from low-income backgrounds. Education is a fundamental right; verifying academic credentials should not be a revenue-generating service.

Removing verification fees will Promote equal opportunities, Reduce financial barriers for students and job seekers, Encourage academic mobility and international recognition and Prevent exploitation and middleman practices

A unified digital verification system will enhance, Trust in Pakistani academic credentials worldwide, Transparency in academic records, Speed and efficiency for employers, universities, and foreign institutions and Fraud prevention through real-time verification and blockchain or secure databases.

Countries around the world are adopting digital credential platforms, and Pakistan must not fall behind. A centralized system will reduce Manual processing costs, Paperwork and storage expenses, Staff workload and Processing delays and corruption risks.

In the long run, digital verification is more cost-effective than manual systems, making verification fees unnecessary. To modernize Pakistan's education verification framework, the following steps are essential:

The Government of Pakistan should formulate a National Digital Degree



Analysis

Dr. Mushtaq Ahmed Rahu

Verification Policy requiring: All universities, Boards, HEC, IBCC, and MOFA to adopt standardized digital verification platforms and Interoperability among all institutions.

Degree and certificate verification should be Free for students and institutions, Accessible online through secure portals and Available 24/7 for domestic and international users.

A national academic credential repository should be developed under HEC or a federal digital authority, ensuring secure storage of academic records, Integration with NADRA and education databases and Real-time authentication

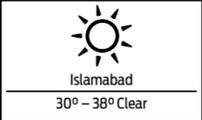
Strict cybersecurity protocols must be implemented to protect student data and prevent misuse.

Education is the backbone of

national development, and digital verification is a cornerstone of modern education systems. Charging students for verifying their own academic records is an outdated practice that contradicts the principles of digital governance and educational equity.

Pakistan has the technical capacity, institutional infrastructure, and digital ambition to implement a free, unified, and fully digital degree verification system. What is needed now is policy commitment and coordinated action.

A national uniform policy for digital degree verification will not only empower students and professionals but also strengthen Pakistan's global academic reputation and digital governance framework. The future is digital. Verification should be digital, unified, and free.



SERVICES

Namaz Timings

Fajr 4:55 am
Zohr 12:17 pm
Asr 4:33 pm
Maghrib 6:16 pm
Isha 7:39 pm

EMERGENCY

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

Women Police Stations

Islamabad 9222596
Rawalpindi 9270601-20

ENQUIRY

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

HOSPITALS

CMH 561111
MH 561116
MH 561116
Cantt Hospital 9270907-11
DHQ 5556311-4
RGH 9290301-7
Holy Family 9290322-7
PIMS 9261170-79
Polyclinic 9218300-09
Shifa International 4603666

DEPARTMENTS

CDA 9221334-43
CDA 9208301-04
Met Office 9250360-6
RDA 5555864
TMA 5770886
Cantonment Board 9270151-3
Islamabad Metropolitan
Corporation 9209224
Potohar Town 9209224
Rawal Town 5773343

COMPLAINTS

Water Tanker Service
E-7, F-10 & F-11 9204654
G-5, G-6, G-7, G-8, 9203883
G-9, G-10, G-11, G-12, H-8 9266316
Wapda Islamabad 9217579-80
Sui Gas Complaint 119, 9272249
Wasa Water Tank
Rawalpindi 0331-5022125

DC Mela visits Kamalia and reviewed various ongoing development schemes

Zafar Chishti

TOBA TEK SINGH: In line with the vision of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, efforts are underway in district Toba Tek Singh to improve civic facilities and ensure the timely completion of development projects. In this regard, Deputy Commissioner Toba Tek Singh Umar Abbas Mela paid a detailed visit to Tehsil Kamalia and reviewed various ongoing development schemes and public service initiatives.

During the visit, the deputy commissioner inspected the beautification and rehabilitation work at Iqbal Bazaar Kamalia and directed the concerned officials to ensure the early and quality completion of the project so that citizens could benefit from an improved commercial environment.

He also visited the site of the under-construction cricket arena in Zeeshan Colony Kamalia and instructed officials to expedite the work. Speaking on the occasion, he said providing quality sports facilities to the youth was among the district administration's key priorities in order to promote healthy and positive activities.

During the visit, he also inspected Government High School 736 GB Kamalia and appreciated the school administration for maintaining cleanliness and carrying out renovation work.

He directed the relevant departments to further improve sanitation arrangements and ensure the timely and quality completion of all development projects for the facilitation of the public.

Punjab Cabinet approves wide-ranging development, welfare and governance measures

Bureau Report

LAHORE: The Punjab Cabinet met under the chairmanship of CM Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif through a full video-link session for the first time, with ministers and officials participating online as part of the government's austerity drive.

The cabinet approved a series of development initiatives across the province. These included provision of land for the establishment of the Mian Nawaz Sharif University of Engineering and Technology in Kasur, approval of the charter for the Quaid-e-Azam Institute of Sciences in Sargodha, and approval of a sports complex in Kundian. A state-of-the-art special education middle school building for children with special needs was also approved in Murree.

The cabinet approved water distribution improvements and construction

of the Chahan Dam project for Rawalpindi, along with a cyber security project scheme. Approval was also granted for recruitment in the Punjab Mass Transit Authority and for appointments of the chief executive officer and company secretary of the Punjab Energy Holding Company Limited.

Funds were approved for construction of bus stop shelters for electric buses across Punjab. Recruitment of watch and guard staff and other personnel for women's prisons in Lahore, Rawalpindi and Faisalabad was also authorised. The cabinet also approved the establishment of an AI hub within the Provincial Intelligence and Financial Threat Assessment Centre (PIFTAC) along with recruitment for 137 posts.

The cabinet also approved multiple policy reforms, development schemes and institutional measures covering sectors including health, education,



water supply, social protection, local government, infrastructure, environmental management, energy, policing and administrative governance aimed at strengthening service delivery and development across Punjab.

Illuminated

ISLAMABAD: A beautiful view of illuminated Grand Faisal Mosque on the Lailat al-Qader, also known as the Night of Power, the 27th night of the holy fasting month of Ramadan, in the Federal Capital.



Photo: Online by Sultan Bashir

CM Punjab expresses grief over death of eight women in roof collapse incident



Bureau Report

LAHORE: Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif has expressed deep sorrow and grief over the tragic incident in which eight women lost their lives after a roof collapsed in Rahim Yar Khan.

The chief minister extended heartfelt condolences and sympathy to the bereaved families. Directions have also been issued to ensure the best possible medical treatment for the injured women.

An immediate report has been sought from the Deputy Commissioner of Rahim Yar Khan regarding the incident.

PESSI Unveils Mobile Number Correction Process for Maryam Nawaz Roshan Card Beneficiaries

Raza Naqvi

ATTOCK: Maryam Nawaz Roshan Card: Procedure Issued for Correction of Mobile Numbers of Workers Registered with Punjab Social Security



Workers with incorrect mobile numbers can get verification done through nearby bank agents or Bank of Punjab branches.

After correction of the mobile number, workers can easily receive Rs. 10,000 in cash through an OTP

The Punjab Employees Social Security Institution (PESSI) has issued a procedure for correcting mobile numbers to facilitate registered workers under the Maryam Nawaz Roshan Card program.

Workers who already have a Maryam Nawaz Roshan Card but whose mobile numbers are incorrectly registered can visit nearby Bank of Punjab branchless banking agents, including UBL Omni, HBL Konnect, or Alfa Pay, to complete their identity verification (POL / Proof of Life). After verification, they can register their correct mobile number and easily receive their cash payment.

The Punjab Employees Social Security Institution has advised all registered workers to follow the above procedure and ensure timely correction of their mobile numbers so that they can receive the Rs. 10,000 cash assistance without any difficulty.

Kamalia Police Operations Continue Against Criminal Elements. DSP Javed

Zafar Chishti

TOBA TEK SINGH: Kamalia Police Operations Continue Against Criminal Elements. According to the Details, DSP Kamalia Chaudhry Javed Akhtar Gujjar talking to our correspondent in his office, said that police operations are continuing without discrimination to maintain law and order in the area and to eliminate criminal elements. He stated that no criminal or lawbreaker will be given any leniency and these operations will continue until crime is completely eradicated. He further said that Kamalia Police remain active day and night to ensure the protection of the lives and property of citizens. Police personnel conduct regular patrols in streets, neighborhoods, markets and major roads of the city on a daily basis to keep a close watch on any suspicious activity and to bring criminals to justice. DSP Chaudhry Javed Akhtar Gujjar added that the police are committed to maintaining an atmosphere of peace and security in the area so that citizens feel safe. He emphasized that effective action against crime is not possible without public cooperation, therefore citizens should immediately inform the police about any suspicious persons or activities.



Commissioner Multan Briefed on the Proposed Parking Plaza Project

Kiran Asim

MULTAN: A meeting was held under the chairmanship of Commissioner Multan Division Aamir Karim Khan to resolve the parking problems faced by patients and attendants at Children's Hospital, in which a detailed review of the proposed parking plaza project was taken. The meeting was also attended by the administration of XEN Building, Children's Hospital and other concerned officers.



Khan was briefed on the proposed parking plaza

project to improve parking facilities at Children's Hospital. It was informed that a large number of patients and attendants visit the hospital daily, due to which parking and traffic problems are arising.

Commissioner Aamir Karim Khan directed that the entry and exit points of the parking plaza be reviewed on-site according to the traffic flow, while considering the narrow road and possible traffic pressure, alternative entry and exit points should also be considered.

Restaurants, Caterers, Sweets and Bakers Association Pakistan Delegation Meets ADCG Maliha Sehar

City Desk

RAWALPINDI: A delegation of the Restaurants, Caterers, Sweets and Bakers Association Pakistan called on Additional Deputy Commissioner General Maliha Sehar at her office in Rawalpindi to congratulate her on assuming charge of her new position and to extend their best wishes.



On the occasion, President of the Association Muhammad Farooq Chaudhry presented a bouquet to Maliha Sehar. The delegation was led by Patron-in-Chief Chaudhry Muhammad Naeem. Other members of the delegation included Chairman Mumtaz Ahmad, Senior Vice President Chaudhry Zahid Mahmood, General Secretary Raja Adnan Mahmood, Senior Vice Pres-

ident Bakers Huzaifa Ansar, Senior Vice President Saleem Sher Zaman, Information Secretary Tariq Khan, along with other respected members of the Association's core committee. On this occasion, President Muhammad Farooq Chaudhry briefed the Addi-

tional Deputy Commissioner about the issues and challenges faced by the business community. He reaffirmed the Association's commitment to fully cooperate with the administration to promote a better business environment in the city, ensure cleanliness, and uphold legal regulations. Additional Deputy Commissioner General Maliha Sehar thanked the delegation for their visit and assured them of maintaining close coordination with the business community to address their concerns through mutual cooperation.

Group Chairman/Chief Editor: **Almass Ayoub Sabir**
 Vice Chairman: **Asim Nazir Ahmad**
 Editor: **Naveed Ahmad Khan**
 Head Editorial Advisory Board: **Amjad Mehmood**
 Bureau Chief Karachi: **Khurram Jaffrani**
 (jaffrani@adpluse.pk)
 Bureau Chief Lahore: **Syed Afraz Ali Nazish**
 (afrazalishah@gmail.com)
 Head Office: AIMS Building, Street No. 4, H-8/1, Islamabad.
 spokesmanislamabad@gmail.com
 Phone: +92 51 2227123,
 WhatsApp +92 346 5008408
 Karachi office: A111, Block C, Gulsha-e-Jamal, PRECHS,
 Karachi Phone: 021-33399390
 Email: spokesmankarachi@gmail.com
 Lahore Office: 7-E, Samanberg, Johar Town.
 spokesmanlahore@gmail.com
 Daily The Spokesman available only on annual subscription

Trump Begg Global Help Against Iran

Wars between unequal adversaries often begin with certainty. The stronger power assumes that victory is inevitable, while the weaker opponent is expected to collapse under overwhelming force. Military superiority, economic dominance, and technological advantage create a powerful belief that resistance will be short-lived. Yet history repeatedly shows that when confidence turns into overconfidence, wars rarely unfold according to the plans of the stronger side. The ongoing confrontation between the United States, Israel, and Iran appears to be unfolding along exactly this trajectory.

At the outset of the conflict, the United States projected absolute confidence in its military strength. With a defense budget approaching nine hundred billion dollars, eleven aircraft carriers, hundreds of advanced fighter aircraft, and the most sophisticated intelligence network ever assembled, Washington believed that it possessed the ability to overwhelm any adversary. Iran, by contrast, was portrayed as economically exhausted and strategically isolated. Decades of sanctions had strained its economy, and it lacked the type of conventional naval and air power that defines Western military dominance.

This imbalance shaped the early expectations of the war. The assumption in Washington and Tel Aviv was that Iran would not be able to sustain a prolonged confrontation against the combined military capabilities of the United States and Israel. The expectation was not merely victory but rapid victory. In the early hours and days of the conflict, official statements emphasized that Iranian defenses had been destroyed and that Western forces had achieved decisive superiority in the air.

This early confidence was reflected in repeated public statements made by President Donald J. Trump and senior

U.S. defense officials during the opening phase of the war. Within the first hours and days of the conflict, Washington announced that Iranian military infrastructure had been severely damaged. Statements claimed that Iran's air force capability had been neutralized, its missile and defensive systems crippled, and key commanders eliminated in precision strikes. The impression presented to the world was that Iran's ability to conduct either defensive or offensive operations had been largely destroyed. Only much later in the conflict—nearly two weeks into the fighting—did Trump issue another dramatic statement following new airstrikes on Iran's Kharg Island oil export facilities, declaring that Iran had "no ability to defend anything that we want to attack."

Yet the battlefield soon began to contradict these declarations. Instead of collapsing, Iran responded with a strategy that avoided direct conventional confrontation and instead relied on asymmetric warfare. Ballistic missiles, long-range drones, and coordinated regional pressure became the core elements of Iran's response. Missile barrages began reaching targets across the region, forcing Israeli defense systems such as Iron Dome, David's Sling, and Arrow interceptors to operate under sustained pressure.

As the conflict continued, the geographic scope of the war began to expand beyond Israel itself. Strategic infrastructure across the Middle East suddenly became vulnerable. Oil facilities, refineries, and shipping routes across the Gulf faced rising threats. The war was no longer limited to direct military engagement between two adversaries; it had begun to affect the economic lifelines of

the entire region.

The most critical pressure point quickly emerged in the Strait of Hormuz, one of the most strategically important maritime corridors in the world. Nearly twenty percent of the world's oil supply and massive volumes of liquefied natural gas pass through this narrow channel each day. Any disruption in this corridor immediately sends shockwaves through the global economy.

As tensions escalated, shipping companies began rerouting vessels away from the region to avoid potential attacks. Insurance premiums for oil tankers increased dramatically, and global oil prices climbed sharply. These developments triggered a chain reaction across global supply chains, affecting industries ranging from transportation and petrochemicals to agriculture and food production.

Countries heavily dependent on imported energy began facing serious economic pressure. Rising fuel costs pushed inflation higher, and governments introduced emergency measures to conserve energy. In some countries, businesses reduced operations and institutions shifted to remote work in order to limit energy consumption. The consequences of the war were no longer confined to the battlefield; they were spreading through the global economy.

Europe also found itself increasingly vulnerable to the unfolding crisis. After reducing its dependence on Russian natural gas following the Ukraine conflict, many European nations had turned to liquefied natural gas imports from Qatar. Those shipments, however, must pass through the Strait of Hormuz. Any prolonged disruption in that waterway therefore threatens European energy

security as well.

As the crisis deepened, a development occurred that many observers considered extraordinary. Despite earlier declarations that Iran had been "decimated," the United States began asking other countries to help secure the Strait of Hormuz and escort commercial shipping through the region. Washington appealed to several nations—including the United Kingdom, France, Australia, Japan, the Philippines, South Africa, and even China—to help ensure safe maritime navigation.

This appeal created an obvious contradiction. If Iran had truly been defeated, why would the world's most powerful military require international assistance to secure the region's most important shipping route? The request itself suggested that the conflict had become far more complicated than initially anticipated.

The shifting narrative of the war added further confusion. The conflict did not begin with a single clearly defined objective. Instead, the justification evolved repeatedly as the war progressed. Initially, the war was presented as a mission to liberate the Iranian people from their leadership. Shortly afterward, the stated objective shifted toward eliminating Iran's nuclear program and forcing Tehran to surrender enriched uranium and nuclear infrastructure.

As the conflict continued, the goals expanded further. The mission was no longer limited to nuclear facilities; it now included dismantling Iran's ballistic missile and drone capabilities. Factories, research laboratories, and technological facilities connected to military development became targets. Later still, the narrative shifted once again, framing the war as necessary to protect global trade and ensure safe shipping through the Strait of Hormuz.

Continued on Page 7



Analysis

Qamar Bashir

Government Expands Roshan Digital Account Scheme to Foreign Nationals

On the instruction of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, the Government of Pakistan has decided to expand the Roshan Digital Account (RDA) framework to allow foreign nationals, as well as foreign companies and institutional investors, to open Roshan Digital Accounts and invest in Government securities as well as Naya Pakistan Certificates that offer a very attractive rate of return.

The announcement was made by Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb who said that this important step reflects the government's commitment to further integrate Pakistan with global financial markets and attract foreign investment through a secure and transparent digital banking platform.

The Finance Minister noted that Pakistan's diaspora of around 11 million people represents one of the largest and most vibrant expatriate communities in the world. In every part of the globe, from the Middle East to Europe, from North America to the Far East, Pakistani professionals, entrepreneurs, workers and students are contributing to their host economies while continuing to support their families and communities back home. He said that overseas Pakistanis are not only a source of economic strength for the country but also serve as ambassadors of Pakistan's culture, enterprise and values around the world.

Highlighting the role of overseas Pakistanis in strengthening the national economy, Senator Aurangzeb said that according to the State Bank of Pakistan, the country achieved a historic milestone in fiscal year 2025 with record-breaking remittances exceeding \$38.3 billion, marking an impressive 26.6 percent increase compared to the previous year. He added that as Pakistan progresses through fiscal year 2026, remittances are projected to reach an unprecedented \$42 billion. This strong performance reflects the continued trust and confidence of the diaspora in Pakistan's economic prospects and their unwavering support in strengthening the country's foreign exchange reserves and overall economic growth. With this consistent performance, Pakistan now ranks fifth among the top remittance-receiving countries globally and second in South Asia.

The Finance Minister emphasized that remittance inflows remain the single most critical factor in stabilizing Pakistan's external account, enabling the country to maintain a sustainable balance of payments and build its foreign exchange reserves. He noted that the State Bank of Pakistan's reserves currently stand at around \$16.3 billion, while the country's total foreign exchange reserves amount to approximately \$21.6 billion.

Recalling the launch of the Roshan Digital Account initiative, Senator Aurangzeb stated that in order to further connect non-resident Pakistanis (NRPs) with Pakistan's financial and banking system, the State Bank of Pakistan, in collaboration with commercial banks, introduced the Roshan Digital Account initiative on September 10, 2020. With the slogan "Door Reh Kar bhi Paas," the initiative was designed with the clear objective of associating millions of overseas Pakistanis with Pakistan's banking and investment ecosystem through a fully digital and seamless experience.



Cartoon by Amjad Rasmi. (Courtesy of Asharq Al-Awsat)

From Intellectuals to Artisanals

A recent announcement by the responsible watchdog of higher education in Pakistan advised universities to integrate artificial intelligence modules into their undergraduate degree programs. This may be regarded as a healthy and positive move; however, concerns remain that overdependence on artificial intelligence is already eroding the foundations of intellectualism, critical thinking, deep understanding, and higher-order learning skills. It must be debated whether such widespread reliance on artificial intelligence will strengthen the intellectual dimension of education or gradually erode it altogether. When the Gutenberg press was invented, it was feared that human memory would deteriorate. Later, when the calculator was introduced, many argued that mathematical ability and arithmetic skills would be lost. Although certain changes did occur, nothing was completely eroded, dismantled, or lost. In the case of AI, it is important to recognize that it is not designed to replace humans but to support them, saving time and energy. In this sense, it becomes a tool in the hands of humanity, much like cell phones, laptops, and other digital devices.

What, then, remains for the contemporary intellectual, especially when universities themselves are moving toward integrating AI-generated content? Perhaps the intellectual must become akin to an artisan. When industrial production began, handmade crafts did not disappear; rather, they acquired a niche value among those who appreciated handcrafted goods. Similarly, a small number of intellectuals may survive as artisan scholars, producing knowledge through their own minds and efforts. Their work would undoubtedly hold value, but their number would be limited. This small fraction

may not significantly influence the broader system, as employers often prioritize speed, efficiency, and access to global knowledge networks. The traditional model of producing knowledge over many years may struggle to compete with the speed and dexterity that machines provide. Therefore, intellectuals must transform themselves and redefine their roles within the emerging academic landscape.

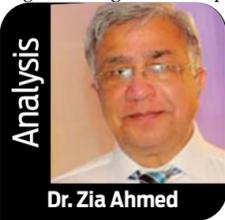
One possible path forward is for academics to function as co-pilots in knowledge generation. Rather than resisting or rejecting machine-generated materials, they should integrate their expertise with AI systems, collaborating in the production of study materials, examinations, evaluations, and new research. Another vital role is to become skilled question designers. The more intelligent and precise the question, the more meaningful and powerful the answer generated by AI. Academics can develop sophisticated questioning frameworks across disciplines and then critically evaluate AI-generated responses to determine whether they genuinely serve humanity and contribute to safer, more ethical foundations for human life.

Professors can also serve as ethical watchdogs in the use of AI technologies. Their intuition and experiential insight can guide students in using artificial intelligence responsibly and critically. Such intuitive and institutional wisdom enables educators to help learners approach AI from multiple angles and levels, extracting maximum benefit while maintaining ethical boundaries. There is no realistic possibility of escaping AI; therefore, the most viable option for academia is to adopt and shape this technology for

constructive purposes. In addition, universities must reform their examination systems. Excessive dependence on written assignments and prepared submissions should be reduced. Greater emphasis should be placed on oral examinations and dialogic assessment. Instead of providing students with pre-announced topics, professors could present spontaneous questions and problems during evaluation. Assessment would then be based on the student's immediate analytical response, conceptual understanding, and intellectual agility. Such a shift from written to oral evaluation would require substantial training and structural transformation, but it may prove to be a more authentic way of assessing knowledge and skill.

It is likely that learning will increasingly resemble an assembly line in a manufacturing industry, where many processes occur automatically. In such a context, the professor's role may shift toward supervision. However, this supervisory role should not be passive. With thoughtful engagement, it can become more meaningful and impactful. Ultimately, the professor remains indispensable in the university for creativity, originality, critical thinking, and ethical guidance. The challenge, therefore, is not whether AI will enter higher education, but how intellectuals will redefine themselves in its presence. Although meeting this new and powerful challenge will not be an easy task but if the higher education controlling, supervisory bodies, management, social scientists, renowned educators and the job market join hands to develop a model for not only integrating artificial intelligence for our benefit but also saving existential crises of the intellectual at the universities, the future would be for our benefit otherwise, a let loose approach will cause a situation beyond our control.

The writer is currently working as Professor of English at University of Southern Punjab, Multan, and has recently been working as principal of GGCL Multan.



Analysis

Dr. Zia Ahmed

Islamophobia Beyond Borders: Politics, Media Narratives and the Human Cost

Islamophobia rarely announces itself openly. It hides behind political slogans, security debates and sensational headlines. Sometimes it appears as a political speech warning about "demographic threats." Sometimes it emerges through media headlines that repeatedly link Islam with conflict. Increasingly, it spreads through digital platforms where misinformation travels faster than facts. A policy framed as national protection, a news story associating Muslims with violence, or a viral narrative suggesting that faith itself is a threat, these elements gradually shape public perception. Piece by piece, they construct a climate in which suspicion toward Muslims begins to feel normal. The International Day to Combat Islamophobia therefore arrives not simply as a symbolic observance but as a warning: anti-Muslim bias has evolved into a global political and social challenge.

International human rights frameworks clearly define discrimination and its consequences. Under the Equality Act 2010, discrimination may be direct or indirect. Direct discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favorably because of a protected characteristic such as religion. Indirect discrimination arises when policies that appear neutral disproportionately disadvantage a particular group. Both forms are increasingly evident in the experiences of Muslim communities worldwide. Even when framed as neutral security measures or administrative rules, certain policies often affect Muslims in ways that undermine equality and social inclusion.

The perception of Muslim identity is itself shaped by assumptions linked to ethnicity, race, or appearance. Researchers and policy groups have repeatedly noted that people are frequently labeled as Muslim based on physical features, cultural markers, or

names, rather than their actual beliefs. This dynamic means Islamophobia does not affect only practicing Muslims; it also targets individuals perceived to belong to the Muslim community. The result is a broad climate of suspicion where identity alone becomes grounds for discrimination.

Political rhetoric has played a central role in reinforcing these perceptions. In recent years, electoral politics in several countries have increasingly relied on narratives that portray Muslim communities as demographic or cultural threats. Anti-immigration campaigns often frame Muslim migrants as incompatible with national values. These narratives are rarely expressed as overt hostility toward a religion. Instead, they appear as debates about security, integration, or cultural preservation. Yet the underlying message remains clear: Muslim identity is treated as a problem to be managed rather than a community to be respected.

Global leaders have begun to acknowledge this troubling trend. António Guterres, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, recently warned that Muslims worldwide face institutional discrimination, socio-economic exclusion and biased immigration policies. He also highlighted the widespread use of surveillance and profiling targeting Muslim communities. Speaking on the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, he urged governments to recommit to equality, dignity and human rights regardless of faith.

Evidence supporting these concerns continues to emerge from international reports. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom has warned that certain anti-conversion laws are being used to intimidate religious

Continued on Page 7



Analysis

Mehr un Nisa Rehman

Pakistan congratulates Kazakhstan on successful constitutional referendum

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has extended warm congratulations to the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Mr Qasym-Jomart Tokayev, and the people of Kazakhstan on the successful holding of the constitutional referendum.

The President noted that the strong participation of the people and the broad support expressed for the referendum reflect the confidence of the citizens of Kazakhstan in the continued progress and development of their country.

President Zardari reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to further strengthening bilateral relations and expanding cooperation in areas of mutual interest for the benefit of both countries.

He also emphasised that Pakistan greatly values its close and brotherly relations with Kazakhstan, which are rooted in mutual respect, shared aspirations for peace and development, and a tradition of constructive cooperation.



President Abbas discusses latest developments in Palestinian Territory and region with Pope Leo XIV-In Phone Call

Wafa

RAMALLAH: President Mahmoud Abbas of the State of Palestine held a telephone call on Monday with Pope Leo XIV of the Vatican, during which they discussed the latest developments in the Palestinian Territory and the broader region.

President Abbas expressed his gratitude to the Pope for his principled humanitarian stance, including calls to end the war in the Gaza Strip and the pursuit of peace based on the two-state solution, as well as his rejection of unilateral actions that undermine the prospects for peace.

The President briefed the Pope on the dangerous situation in Jerusalem, highlighting ongoing Israeli violations against holy sites, particularly the continued closure of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to worshippers, and the prevention of prayers there, especially during the holy month of Ramadan.



President Abbas further informed the Pope of the gravity of the situation in the West Bank, citing escalating colonist violence, annexation plans, colonial settlement expansion, and the continued withholding of Palestinian tax funds, all of which threaten to undermine the institutions of the State of Palestine.

President Abbas also addressed the dire conditions in the Gaza Strip, emphasizing the ongoing suffering of citizens due to the suspension of humanitarian aid and the closure of the Rafah Crossing.

The President affirmed the State of Palestine's condemnation of the

Iranian attacks targeting the Gulf countries and the region, expressing Palestine's rejection of any violation of their sovereignty, security, stability, and the safety of their citizens.

President Abbas reiterated the State of Palestine's solidarity with the Gulf states, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and the countries subjected to what he described as "brutal Iranian attacks," and its support for any measures they choose to take.

The President emphasized the importance of halting the war and resuming dialogue to achieve security and stability in the region. Concurrently, the State of Palestine affirmed its condemnation and deep concern over Israeli attacks on Lebanon and the destruction of towns in the south.

President Abbas underscored the need, once the war in the region ends, to work toward convening an international peace conference and implementing the Arab Peace Initiative in a manner that leads to ending the

Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and Arab territories in Lebanon and Syria, thereby paving the way for a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

For his part, Pope Leo XIV reaffirmed the Vatican's steadfast support for the rights of the Palestinian people and the attainment of peace in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem, stressing the importance of ensuring the continued delivery of aid to the Gaza Strip.

The Pope also expressed hope for an end to the suffering of the Lebanese people as a result of the war, calling for the cessation of hostilities and the realization of peace, justice, and security for all countries in the region.

President Abbas and Pope Leo XIV exchanged greetings on the occasion of the approaching holidays of Eid al-Fitr and Easter, and agreed to maintain ongoing communication and consultation between the two sides.

Middle East Conflict Could Disrupt Remittances and Trigger Return of Pakistani Workers, Warns PIDE Study



Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) has released a new policy brief highlighting the potential economic and labour market consequences of the ongoing Middle East conflict for Pakistan. The study, titled "The Middle East Conflict and Its Implications for Pakistani Migrant Workers," authored by Dr. Shujaat Farooq, Professor of Economics and Dean of Research at PIDE, warns that prolonged instability in the region could significantly disrupt overseas employment opportunities and remittance inflows that are vital to Pakistan's economy.

According to the policy brief, Pakistan's economic stability is closely tied to the Middle East labour market, which hosts approximately six million Pakistani workers and accounts for more than half of the country's total remittances. Each year, nearly 700,000 to 800,000 Pakistanis migrate to the region for employment. However, escalating geopolitical tensions could reduce labour outflows and trigger large-scale return migration, placing additional pressure on Pakistan's already strained domestic labour market.

The study estimates that if the conflict persists, around half a million new workers may not be able to migrate to the Middle East in 2026, while a similar number of existing migrants could be forced to return home. Such a scenario would significantly impact labour markets, particularly in provinces like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab, where overseas migration traditionally absorbs a substantial share of new labour entrants.

Remittances, which currently contribute nearly 10 percent to Pakistan's GDP and have grown from about \$1 billion two decades ago to nearly \$40 billion today, could also face a decline of \$3-4 billion annually if the conflict continues. A reduction of this magnitude could put pressure on Pakistan's exchange rate, widen the current account deficit, and weaken the country's overall economic stability.

The policy brief also highlights the broader economic risks associated with prolonged conflict in the Middle East, including rising energy prices, disruptions in trade routes, and increased inflationary pressures. Approximately 11 percent of Pakistan's exports are destined for Middle Eastern markets, regional instability could further complicate Pakistan's external sector performance.

PIDE emphasizes that while overseas migration has historically provided relief to Pakistan's labour market by absorbing a significant portion of new workers entering the labour force, excessive reliance on a limited number of destination countries exposes the economy to external shocks. Over the past decade, nearly 90 percent of officially documented Pakistani migrant workers have been employed in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates serving as the primary destinations.

To mitigate potential risks, the study recommends immediate policy measures to support Pakistani workers in the Middle East and to prepare for possible return migration. These include strengthening diplomatic engagement with Gulf countries to safeguard workers' rights, establishing dedicated support portals for overseas Pakistanis, and developing comprehensive reintegration programs to assist returning migrants in finding employment or starting businesses.

In the longer term, PIDE underscores the importance of diversifying Pakistan's overseas labour destinations beyond the Middle East. Expanding migration opportunities in East Asia, Australia, and other emerging labour markets, alongside investing in globally competitive skills development programs, could help reduce the country's vulnerability to regional crises and ensure greater economic resilience.

The policy brief concludes that while Pakistan has made progress in stabilizing its economy under ongoing reforms, external shocks such as geopolitical conflicts can quickly undermine these gains. Proactive policy planning, labour market diversification, and stronger institutional support for migrant workers will therefore be essential to safeguard Pakistan's economic stability in the years ahead.

All Development Work at Data Darbar Must Be Completed Within Target Timeline: Dr. Ehsan Bhutta

Bureau Report

LAHORE: Secretary/Chief Administrator Auqaf Punjab Dr. Ehsan Bhutta has said that the ongoing development works at the shrine of Ali Hijveri (Hazrat Data Ganj Baksh RA) are being carried out to enhance facilities for devotees and to improve the infrastructure of the historic shrine. He said the government is committed to completing the development projects at Data Darbar in a timely and efficient manner.

He expressed these views while addressing a review meeting held to assess the progress of the ongoing development work at the shrine. The meeting was attended by Director

General Religious Affairs Auqaf Shahid Hassan Kalyani, Director Project Auqaf Rafique Noor Watto, General Manager NESPAK Muhammad Adil, Project Director Traffic Engineering and Planning Agency Muhammad Asad, Deputy Director TEPA Ali Sumair, Superintending Engineer Communication and Works Department Punjab Issa Bin Moeen, XEN C&W Muhammad Fahad, Khateeb Data Darbar Maulana Ramzan Sialvi, Administrator Data Darbar Muhammad Ali Khan, SDO Data Darbar Muhammad Qaiser, and other concerned officials.

Dr. Ehsan Bhutta said that the development project is being carried out in line with the vision of Chief Minister

Punjab Maryam Nawaz, aimed at providing modern facilities to devotees and improving the overall environment and accessibility of the shrine area.

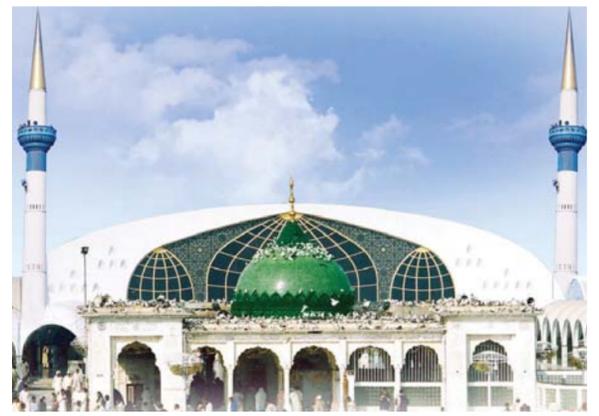
He further said that the progress of the project is also being closely monitored by Chief Secretary Punjab Zahid Akhtar Zaman to ensure that all development works are completed within the stipulated timeframe while maintaining the highest standards of quality.

Referring to the briefing given by the Project Director TEPA, Dr. Ehsan Bhutta said that the Piazza Drain underpass side has been completed while PCC work in the available area has also been completed except the road lane portion. He said that the underpass bed, walls

and roof slab deck have been completed and the grey structure is almost finished except for the remaining work on the stairs.

Dr. Ehsan Bhutta further stated that dismantling work at the front veranda area falling under TEPA's scope has been completed. He said that installation of tuff tiles on the walkway area from Gamay Shah to Data Darbar is in progress, along with façade uplifting to further improve the appearance and accessibility of the shrine area.

He added that the brickwork and roof slab of the toilets block have also been completed. He further informed that dismantling work by the C&W Department is continuing at the courtyard, side



areas and frontal portions of the shrine, and approximately 75 percent of the verandas have already been dismantled as part of the development plan.

Dr. Ehsan Bhutta said that work on the additional four kanal area is also progressing rapidly and the houses located in the front portion are being

dismantled at a fast pace to clear the site for further development activities.

Dr. Ehsan Bhutta directed the concerned departments to ensure timely completion of all development works so that better facilities can be provided to the devotees visiting the shrine of Hazrat Data Ganj Baksh (RA).

AlHuda CIBE UAE and EIFFPA Ethiopia Sign Strategic Partnership

Commerce Desk

DUBAI, UAE: AlHuda Centre of Islamic Banking and Economics (AlHuda CIBE), a globally recognized advisory, research, and capacity-building institution in Islamic banking and finance, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ethiopian Interest Free Finance Professionals Association (EIFFPA), Ethiopia. The agreement marks an important step toward promoting the development of interest-free finance through professional collaboration, institutional capacity building, advocacy support, and knowledge sharing in Ethiopia.

The MoU establishes a framework for cooperation between the two institutions to promote Islamic finance literacy, professional development, and institutional strengthening. Under this partnership, AlHuda CIBE and EIFFPA

will collaborate in key areas including advocacy and consultancy, education and training, conferences and seminars, public awareness initiatives, knowledge-sharing platforms, and professional exposure visits. These areas are explicitly outlined in the MoU as the core domains of collaboration between the parties.

Through this alliance, both institutions aim to support the growth and expansion of interest-free finance by engaging relevant stakeholders, developing policy and advocacy materials, and strengthening the professional knowledge and technical capacity of industry practitioners. The partnership also provides for short-term training courses, webinars, distance learning programs, conferences, symposiums, workshops, and financial literacy initiatives to promote best practices and sustainable sector development.

Mr. Muhammad Zubair Mughal,

Chief Executive Officer of AlHuda CIBE, stated: "We are pleased to partner with the Ethiopian Interest Free Finance Professionals Association to support the advancement of interest-free finance in Ethiopia. This collaboration reflects our continued commitment to strengthening emerging markets through professional education, technical support, advocacy, and institutional partnerships. Ethiopia presents strong potential for the development of interest-free finance, and we believe this alliance will contribute meaningfully to building sector knowledge, industry linkages, and long-term growth."

Under the agreement, AlHuda CIBE will contribute by developing and delivering training content, learning materials, and industry-focused programs in Islamic banking and finance. It will also provide technical expertise, facilitate

exposure visits, and help design agendas and learning outcomes for collaborative programs. EIFFPA, on the other hand, will identify and nominate qualified participants, promote the programs through its networks, facilitate stakeholder engagement, and provide local market insights relevant to the Ethiopian interest-free finance sector. The MoU also assigns several joint responsibilities, including client and participant sourcing, marketing and communication support, and technical input for policy and regulatory discussions.

Mr. Abdulkadir Wolela, Chief Executive Officer of EIFFPA, said: "This partnership with AlHuda CIBE brings valuable international expertise and practical knowledge to Ethiopia's growing interest-free finance industry. By working together on training, advocacy, policy engagement, and exposure opportunities, we aim to enhance profes-



sional standards, expand awareness, and contribute to the development of a more inclusive and sustainable financial ecosystem in Ethiopia."

The agreement also provides for mutual promotion of each party's services and activities and allows both institutions to display each other's logos and website links under strategic partnership arrangements on their respective platforms and promotional materials. The MoU is valid for an initial period of two years and may be renewed upon

mutual written agreement.

This strategic partnership reinforces AlHuda CIBE's growing footprint in Africa and reflects its mission to promote Islamic banking and finance through advisory excellence, education, policy support, and sustainable institutional collaboration. It also highlights EIFFPA's commitment to advancing the professional and institutional ecosystem of interest-free finance in Ethiopia through global partnerships and sector-focused initiatives.

Bull & Bears PSX 100-Share Index Fluctuation

Pakistan: PSX 100-Share Index	
Current	Prev. Close
149,178.66	153,866.16
Day's High	Day's Low
153,943.69	148,747.72
Index Value	Change
17,120,216,964	-4687.50
Percentage	Time
-3.05%	16 Mar, 2026 4:30 pm

Europe: FTSE 100 Index	
Index Value	Change
10,317.69	+56.54
Percentage	Time
+0.55%	16 Mar, 4:35 pm GMT

USA: Dow Jones Industrial Average	
Index Value	Change
46,918.46	+359.99
Percentage	Time
+0.77%	16 Mar, 12:49 pm GMT-4

Asia Pacific: Nikkei Stocks Average	
Index Value	Change
53,751.15	-68.46
Percentage	Time
-0.13%	16 Mar, 3:45 pm GMT+9

Open Market Forex Rates		
Currency	Buying	Selling
Australian Dollar	193.40	197
Bahrain Dinar	730.65	730.70
Canadian Dollar	202.18	206.50
China Yuan	36.50	37.75
Danish Krone	43.32	43.72
Euro	320.59	324.05
Hong Kong Dollar	34.8	35.8
Indian Rupee	2.4	2.85
Japanese Yen	1.7177	1.8164
Kuwaiti Dinar	889.45	900.25
Malaysian Ringgit	65.25	66.45
New Zealand \$	162.77	166.25
Norwegians Krone	27.61	27.91
Omani Riyal	715.65	725.65
Qatari Riyal	74.6	75.3
Saudi Riyal	73.75	74.7
Singapore Dollar	214.34	219.25
Swedish Korona	30.15	30.45
Swiss Franc	355	358.85
Thai Bhat	8.05	8.15
U.A.E Dirham	75.50	76.75
UK Pound Sterling	371.65	375.25
US Dollar	279.00	280.35

CCP authorizes acquisition of Jura Energy shares by IDL investments

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has authorized the acquisition of shares of Jura Energy Corporation by IDL Investments Limited from Phoenix Exploration Limited, following a review under the Competition Act, 2010.

The transaction involves the purchase of common shares of Jura Energy by IDL Investments pursuant to a Share Purchase Agreement dated 5 March 2025. Jura Energy, a publicly listed company incorporated in Alberta, Canada, is engaged in oil and gas exploration and development and operates in Pakistan through its wholly owned subsidiaries Spud Energy Pty Limited and Frontier Holdings Limited, which hold working interests in various exploration licenses and leases.

IDL Investments Limited, incorporated in the British Virgin Islands, functions as an investment holding company with a diversified portfolio. Prior to the transaction, IDL already held a shareholding in Jura Energy. Through this acquisition, IDL has increased its owner-

ship stake in the company.

The seller Phoenix Exploration Limited, incorporated in Mauritius, is an investment holding company with investments in energy and allied sectors across several jurisdictions, including oil and gas exploration ventures.

The CCP conducted a Phase-I competition assessment to evaluate the potential impact of the transaction on competition in Pakistan. The relevant market was identified as upstream oil and gas exploration and production in Pakistan.

The CCP observed that the acquirer does not have independent operational activities in Pakistan other than its existing shareholding in Jura Energy. Consequently, the transaction results primarily in a change in shareholding at the level of the parent company, without affecting the operational structure of Jura's subsidiaries in Pakistan.



Eid Preparation

ISLAMABAD: Women busy in buying artificial jewelry at a stall to preparation Eid-ul-Fitr festival, in the Federal Capital.



Photo: Online by Sultan Bashir

FPCCI warns Dnata's ad-hoc cargo charges hurting Pakistan's export competitiveness

Commerce Desk

KARACHI: Saquib Fayyaz Magoon, Chairman BMP-Progressive and Senior Vice President Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FPCCI), has strongly criticized Gerry's Dnata for imposing an ad-hoc handling charge of Rs50 per kilogram (excluding taxes) on export cargo, terming the move unfair, unilateral and detrimental to Pakistan's already strained export sector.

In a statement, Saquib Fayyaz Magoon, said exporters were already grappling with severe economic pressures, including rising cost of



doing business, record-high international freight rates and a challenging global market environment. "In such circumstances, the sudden imposition of an additional handling fee will directly undermine the competitiveness of Pakistani products in international markets," he said.

NGC Achieves Key Milestones in Transmission & Grid System Upgradation

Commerce Desk

LAHORE: National Grid Company of Pakistan (NGC) has achieved two significant milestones aimed at strengthening the country's power transmission network and improving system reliability in Lahore and Hyderabad.

The up-gradation work of 220kV Transmission Line Sheikhupura-Bund Road Lahore CCT (I & II) has been successfully completed from Tower No. 01 to Tower No. 55, during approved shutdown period from 03 January to 14 March 2026. The transmission line has been energized on load on an interim basis, marking an important milestone in the project's progress.

During a recent site visit, DMD (AD&M) Engr. Rasheed A. Bhutto reviewed the ongoing activities and appreciated the progress of the project. NGC has also energized a new 220/132 kV, 250 MVA Autotransformer at 220kV Grid Station Tando Mohammad Khan Road, Hyderabad, making another step forward in strengthening the national transmission infrastructure. The autotransformer has been installed by NGC's Project Delivery South Formation under World Bank-funded National Transmission Moderni-



zation Project (NTMP-I). The addition of this autotransformer will enhance transformation capacity, improve system reliability and ensure a more stable voltage profile for consumers of Hyderabad Electric Supply Company (HESCO).

Managing Director NGC, Engr. Altaf Hussain Malik, appreciating the efforts of project teams, stated that timely completion of these works will strengthen the national transmission network and support reliable power supply to consumers.

Global Energy Markets and Supply Chains Facing Severe Uncertainty, Zubair Tufail

Commerce Desk

KARACHI: President of United Business Group (UBG) and former president of Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), Zubair Tufail, has said that the prolonged conflict between United States and Iran is now beginning to negatively affect the economies of Asian and Gulf countries. He stated that global energy markets and supply chains are facing serious uncertainty, while Pakistan's exports have also been impacted.

Tufail said that the closure of the Strait of Hormuz has severely disrupted global oil and gas supplies. Oil production in the Middle



East is facing a reduction of up to 10 million barrels per day, and energy companies report that maritime shipping is difficult without Iran's consent. According to industry assessments, it may take several weeks or even months for the situation to return to normal.

Farid Hosts Elite Iftar Dinner Drawing Federal Ministers and Ambassadors

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: Renowned business personality and former President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mian Akram Farid, hosted an Iftar dinner attended by several high-profile figures. The prominent guests included Federal Law Minister Malik Muhammad Aqeel, MNA Chaudhry Tanveer, Qamar-uz-Zaman Kaira, FPCCI President Atif Ikram, Prime Minister's Advisor on Tourism Sardar Yasir Ilyas, Chairman Founder group Tariq Sadiq, Islamabad Chamber President Sardar Tahir Mehmood, Group Leader Pindi Chamber Sohail Altaf, President Pindi Chamber Usman Shukat, German Ambassador Ina Lepel, Moroccan Ambassador Mohamed Karmoune, Managing Director Group Rameeza Nizami, Resident Editor of Nawa-i-Waqt, Aziz Alvi Mohsin Baig, and ILO Pakistan head Geir Tonstol.

Gold prices fall 0.2% Monday



NEW YORK: Gold edged lower on Monday, weighed down by waning hopes of near term US interest rate cuts due to elevated energy prices, while a softer dollar helped limit losses.

Spot gold was down 0.2 percent at \$5,007.58 per ounce, as of 02:40 GMT.

US gold futures for April delivery fell 1 percent to \$5,011.10.

Spot silver fell 1.2 percent to \$79.57 per ounce.

Spot platinum gained 0.8 percent to \$2,042.98 and palladium rose 1 percent to \$1,566.91.

inDrive Pakistan Distributes Ramadan Ration Packages to drivers

Commerce Desk

KARACHI: During the holy month of Ramadan, inDrive Pakistan launched a special initiative to distribute ration packages among its driver community in Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad. As part of this activity, the ride-hailing platform partnered with well-known social media influencers who booked rides through the app and then surprised randomly selected drivers with Ramadan ration packages and appreciation gifts.

Sharing his thoughts about the initiative, Awaiz Saeed, Country Manager of inDrive Pakistan, said "Behind all our activities as a platform, the real driving force is our drivers. This Ramadan, we wanted to appreciate their hard work in a way that would truly benefit them and their families.

inDrive currently operates in 1,065 cities



across 48 countries and is moving toward becoming a super app by introducing additional local urban services. The company has completed more than 7 billion trans-

actions worldwide, and its app has been downloaded over 390 million times, making it the second most downloaded ride-hailing app in the world.

PSCA's "Mera Pyara" Team Reunites Two Missing Young Sisters with Their Parents

City Desk

LAHORE: The Punjab Safe Cities Authority (PSCA) "Mera Pyara" team has achieved another notable success by reuniting two missing young sisters with their parents. Due to timely response of PSCA and effective strategy of the field team, both children were safely returned to their home. According to details, a 5-year-old girl had lost her way while carrying her 6-month-old baby sister. The two children were found unattended and were subsequently shifted to the Child Protection Center Lahore for their safety and security. The PSCA "Mera Pyara"

field team strived to trace their family by engaging the elder child in conversation to gather useful information.

The spokesperson of PSCA stated that during the conversation, the child could only recall a single word "Jalalpur." Using this clue, the team began their search. Since several areas share the name Jalalpur, the team continued gathering additional information. When the name Raiwind was mentioned, the child immediately recognized it. The "Mera Pyara" team then took the children to Jalalpur Raiwind, where the girl successfully identified her neighbourhood and guided the team to her home.

Petrol Prices Monitoring Meeting

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, chaired a meeting of the Committee to Monitor Petrol Prices to review petroleum stocks, global supply chain developments, and national energy preparedness at the Finance Division on Monday.



Photo: PID

Finance Minister chairs daily meeting, assures public against fuel hoarding

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Committee to Monitor Petrol Prices met again today at the Finance Division under the chairmanship of the Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, as part of the Committee's ongoing daily review of developments in the energy sector in light of evolving regional conditions.

The meeting was attended by Federal Minister for Petroleum Mr. Ali Pervaiz Malik, Federal Minister for Mari-

time Affairs Mr. Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry, the Governor State Bank of Pakistan, and federal secretaries and senior officials from the concerned ministries, divisions and regulatory authorities.

The Committee undertook a comprehensive review of petroleum product stock positions across the country and was briefed in detail on the current national inventory of crude oil and refined petroleum products, ongoing import arrangements, and supply chain logistics.

The Committee was

informed that the country remains adequately positioned in terms of fuel availability, with March requirements fully secured. It was further noted that, based on current cargo planning and supply arrangements, coverage is available up to mid-April and efforts are underway to extend coverage further towards the end of April. Overall stock levels and scheduled imports indicate that the country maintains comfortable inventories of crude oil and key petroleum products for March, with sufficient planning in place to

ensure continued availability during April.

Speaking during the meeting, the Finance Minister emphasized that the government remains fully focused on ensuring uninterrupted availability of petroleum products across the country. He noted that the current stock position and supply outlook remain stable and that, based on the reports presented, there is no basis for panic buying or unnecessary stockpiling of fuel.

The meeting directed the relevant authorities, in coordination with OGRA and the

provincial governments, to closely monitor stock levels and market activity to check any incidence of hoarding. It was emphasized that any attempts to create artificial shortages or disrupt normal supply would be dealt with strictly in accordance with the law.

The Committee will continue to meet on a daily basis to review petroleum stocks, import flows, market conditions and supply chain developments to ensure uninterrupted availability of fuel across the country.

Tragic stampede: Eight dead, over 65 hurt in BISP payment center collapse

Asim Tanveer

MULTAN: As many as eight women died and more than 65 injured when the roof of a shop collapsed during distribution of Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) payments in Rahim Yar Khan district on Monday.

The Rescue 1122 and police personnel rushed to the site and shifted the bodies and the injured to hospital.

The district administration issued an alert for urgent treatment of the injured women at the Shaikh Zayed Hospital.

According to authorities, there was quite a rush at the BISC centre and suddenly the roof came down with a bang.

The poor women lined up



since morning to get hold of some money before Eidul Fitr at the weekend. More than 200

women were present at the site — a local shop in Chak 123-P Tibba locality of the district.

Survivors said the tragedy happened after the shop owner directed the women to

come to the roof for payments. Meanwhile, BISP Chairperson Rubina Khalid has expressed deep sorrow and regret over Rahim Yar Khan incident.

On the instructions of President Asif Ali Zardari, Senator Rubina Khalid immediately left for Rahim Yar Khan to visit the site to assess the situation and meet the affected families.

Rubina Khalid said that a notice has been issued to the relevant partner bank for possible negligence and a heavy fine is also being imposed on the partner bank.

Senator Rubina said financial assistance of Rs1 million will be given to the families of the deceased women while each injured will given financial assistance of Rs. 3 lakh.

Pakistan engages Iran for safe passage of vessels through Strait of Hormuz, officials confirm

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has raised the issue of passing its oil tankers through the Strait of Hormuz with Iranian authorities amid the evolving regional security situation, according to senior officials.

Officials confirmed that the authorities are in contact with Iran to secure permission for Pakistani vessels to transit the strategic waterway.

According to senior officials, if an understanding is reached with Tehran, Pakistan's oil tankers currently awaiting clearance will be able to pass through the strategic strait.

The Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's most critical maritime routes



for global energy supplies, connecting the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman

and beyond. Officials also revealed that India had

similarly engaged with Iran regarding the passage of its vessels.

Following those discussions, the Indian LNG cargo ships were reportedly allowed to transit the strait.

Senior officials noted that under normal circumstances, Pakistan's oil shipments would reach the country within four days via the Strait of Hormuz route.

However due to the current situation, alternative shipments through the Red Sea are taking around 12 days to arrive.

The development highlights the growing logistical and strategic challenges for energy supplies in the region as countries seek safe maritime routes for vital oil shipments.

Iran thanks Pakistan for support amid US-Israel attacks



Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has expressed gratitude to the government and people of Pakistan for showing solidarity with Iran amid attacks by the United States and Israel.

In a statement on Monday, Araghchi said he was deeply thankful for the "full support and solidarity" extended by Pakistan's authorities and citizens to Iran and its people during this challenging period.

Posting a message in Urdu on

social media, the Iranian minister described Pakistan's support as a demonstration of strong backing for Iran's government and citizens in the face of "aggression by the US and the Zionist regime."

Araghchi added that Pakistan's stance during this difficult time reflects the close relations and ongoing cooperation between the two countries.

He reaffirmed Iran's commitment to defend its sovereignty and regional integrity with perseverance and reliance on God.

Senate Secretariat dismisses "misleading" reports over Chairman's vehicle purchase

Kiran Asim

ISLAMABAD: The Senate Secretariat has officially addressed and refuted recent media reports concerning the purchase of a Land Cruiser for the Honourable Chairman Senate, terming such reports "misleading, factually incorrect," and rooted in "incomplete information and malafide intentions."

In a detailed clarification issued by the Media Directorate on Monday, March 16, 2026, the spokesperson for the Senate Secretariat stated that the vehicle in question was not an isolated acquisition. Instead, it was duly purchased in May 2025, during the financial year 2024-2025, as part of a transparent procurement process under

an overall vehicle replacement plan.

The Secretariat emphasized that the procurement was part of a broader initiative to modernize the fleet. The replacement plan included vehicles allocated to:

Deputy Chairman Senate, Chairman Standing Committees, The Leader of the House, The Leader of the Opposition and The Senate Secretariat

Further clarifying the timeline to dispel any confusion regarding current spending, the spokesperson noted that while the vehicle was delivered in March 2026, the financial obligation had already been met nearly a year prior. The payment was made in May 2025 utilizing savings from the previous year's budget.

PM directs increase in number of freight trains

Bureau Report

LAHORE: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif directed the Pakistan Railways to increase the number of freight trains.

According to official sources here on Monday, measures to shift cargo transport from roads to rail are being accelerated.

The Pakistan Railways has started contacting chambers of commerce and commercial organizations.

Traders and industrialists are invited to book freight through the Pakistan Railways.

Compared to other modes of transport, trains are the cheapest

means for cargo transportation.

The Pakistan Railways is fully prepared to increase freight operations.

On the direction of the Railways minister, the manufacturing of freight wagons has been urgently



accelerated.

An increase in the number of freight trains is expected soon, which will help save fuel at the national level.

DPM, Saudi FM exchange views on regional situation



ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar on Monday spoke with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan and exchanged views on the latest developments in the ongoing region-

al situation and its broader implications.

DPM/FM emphasized the importance of diplomatic engagement, dialogue, and sustained efforts to promote peace, stability, and security in the region.