



Daily The Spokesman

A Leading National Daily



فرمان رسول ﷺ
ہم سے عربوں نے بیان کیا کہ ہم سے
ابو قادیس رضی اللہ عنہ نے بیان کیا کہ نبی
کریم صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم ہر شخص سے اسے اور
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کے شان مبارک پر تھیں پھر نبی کریم صلی
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Trump warns Iran to take US proposals seriously

US President Donald Trump has warned Iranian authorities to "get serious" about the US proposals, claiming that Tehran is "militarily obliterated" and has no chance of recovering if talks fail. In a series of tweets on Thursday, Trump described the Iranian negotiators as "very different and strange" and said they publicly claim that they are merely "looking at our proposal". The US president warned them to urgently pursue a deal "before it is too late".



Iranian official: US plan for ending war 'one-sided'

A U. S. proposal for ending nearly four weeks of fighting is "one-sided and unfair", a senior Iranian official told Reuters on Thursday, while also stressing that diplomacy had not ended despite the lack for now of a realistic plan for peace talks. The official said the proposal, conveyed to Tehran by Pakistan, "was reviewed in detail on Wednesday night by senior Iranian officials and the representative of Iran's Supreme Leader".

Simultaneously published from Islamabad, Lahore and Multan

Shawwal 7, Friday, March 27, 2026

www.dailyspokesman.net

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Daily Spokesman Vol: 19, Issue: 339 Price Rs. 25.00 Pages 8

High-level Meeting

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari chairing a high-level meeting at Aiwan-e-Sadr along with Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), HJ, COAS & Chief Of Defence Forces and cabinet members.



Photo: PID

US-Iran indirect talks taking place as Pakistan relaying messages: Dar



City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Ishaq Dar on Thursday said that the indirect talks between the United States and Iran were taking place through the messages being relayed by Pakistan.

"In reality, US-Iran indirect talks are taking place through messages being relayed by Pakistan," the deputy prime minister wrote on his X timeline.

He said that there had been unnecessary speculation in the media regarding peace talks to

end the ongoing conflict in the Middle East.

Deputy Prime Minister Dar said that the United States had shared 15 points, being deliberated upon by Iran.

He said that the brotherly countries of Turkey and Egypt, among others, were also extending their support to this initiative.

"Pakistan remains fully committed to promoting peace and continues to make every effort to ensure stability in the region and beyond. Dialogue and Diplomacy is the only way forward," the deputy prime minister remarked.

High-level meeting reviews economy, energy and regional situation

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari on Thursday chaired a high-level consultative meeting at Aiwan-e-Sadr to review the evolving economic and energy situation in the backdrop of oil supply constraints and rising petroleum prices, alongside regional security developments.

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and Field Marshal

Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), HJ, Chief of the Army Staff and Chief of Defence Forces also attended the meeting, according to a President House press release.

Other participants included Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar, Chairman PPP and ex-Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Minister for Interior Senator Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi, Federal Minister for

Finance Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, Federal Minister for Energy and Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik, Federal Minister for Economic Affairs Ahad Khan Cheema and Secretary Finance.

The meeting reviewed the impact of fluctuations in global oil and gas supplies and prices on Pakistan's economy, with particular focus on managing inflationary pressures and ensuring energy security.

The ministers for finance and petroleum briefed the meeting on ongoing measures to stabilise petroleum prices, manage the effects of rising fuel costs on other sectors of the economy and enforce fiscal discipline through austerity measures to reduce expenditure pressures.

The broader regional situation also came under discussion, including its implications for Pakistan's security, economic outlook

and food security.

The meeting emphasised the need for a coordinated national response, noting that policy decisions must prioritise stability while safeguarding the interests of the public.

The meeting also emphasised the need for public awareness to reduce fuel consumption, encourage the use of public transportation and promote shared ride systems.

Engr Amir Muqam, APHC leadership condemn sentences of Kashmiri leaders, calls for global action

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs, Gilgit Baltistan and SAFRON Engr Amir Muqam on Thursday strongly condemned the sentencing of prominent Kashmiri leader Asiya Andrabi to life imprisonment, along with 30-year jail terms awarded to her associates Fahmida Sofi and Nahida Nasreen, terming the move a "grave injustice" and a violation of fundamental human rights.

Addressing a joint press conference organised by the All Parties Hurriyat Conference



(APHC) in Islamabad, Federal Minister Engineer Amir Muqam said the verdicts reflect political victimization and an attempt to suppress dissent in Jammu and Kashmir. He alleged that judicial mechanisms are being used as tools to sustain what he described as "illegal policies," raising serious concerns about the impartiality of the system.

APHC Convener Ghulam Muhammad Safi and Madam Shamim Shawl also spoke on the occasion and rejected the verdict outright, describing it as part of a broader pattern of repression in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu

and Kashmir (IIOJ&K).

The press conference concluded with an expression of solidarity with detained Kashmiri leaders and a reaffirmation of Pakistan's commitment to supporting their cause at all levels.

Senior Hurriyat leader Mehmood Ahmad Sagar, Haji Muhammad Sultan, Sheikh Yaqub, Haji Muhammad Sultan, Zahid Safi, Imtiaz Wani, Syed Gulshan, Adeel Mushtaq, Manzoor Dar, Muhammad Shafi Dar, Muhammad Ashraf Dar and Mushtaq Ahmed Butt were also present.

Middle East tensions disrupt flights as dozens cancelled across Pakistan

Commerce Desk

KARACHI: Ongoing tensions in the Middle East have severely disrupted international flight operations from Pakistan, with dozens of flights cancelled across major airports over the past 48 hours.

According to aviation sources, a total of 84 two-way flights to and from various Middle Eastern destinations were cancelled during this period, causing significant inconvenience to passengers.

At Jinnah International Airport, 22 flights to destinations including Doha, Kuwait, Bahrain, Iran and Iraq were cancelled over two days.

Similarly, Islamabad International Airport saw 10 flights affected to cities such as Dubai, Doha, Bahrain, Kuwait and Muscat, while 14 flights from Allama Iqbal International Airport to Kuwait, Doha, Bahrain and Abu Dhabi were cancelled.

At Bacha Khan International Airport, 24 flights to multiple destinations including Doha,

Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah, Iran, Iraq, Dubai and Abu Dhabi were called off. Meanwhile, six flights from Multan and 10 from Sialkot were also cancelled.

In contrast, flight operations at Faisalabad International Airport continued as normal. Authorities noted gradual improvement in flight restoration for Middle Eastern routes from Islamabad and Lahore.

Sources further revealed that over the past 27 days, a total of 2,252 flights from Pakistan to the Middle East have been cancelled,



intensifying travel difficulties for passengers.

Meanwhile, SalamAir has issued a fresh travel advisory, suspending flights to Iran, Iraq

and Lebanon until 30 April. The airline has also cancelled flights to Kuwait, Sharjah and Doha until 15 April, citing passenger safety as its top priority.

Tarar slams PTI founder's sons for shunning Pakistan, links them to anti-state plot

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information Attaullah Tarar on Thursday said that Kasim Khan's "dictated" speech at the UNHCR in Geneva was part of an anti-state plot facilitated by Zulfi Bukhari and tied to Arif Ajakia and Naseem Baloch to undermine Pakistan's GSP Plus trade status.

He also accused Imran Khan's sons of not coming to Pakistan on NICOP and vowing such conspiracies would not derail the country's progress.

Talking to media, he alleged they were linked to conspiracies against Pakistan despite the government's goodwill in facilitating their telephonic contact with their father.

Linking Zulfi Bukhari to Arif Ajakia—whom he branded an "Indian agent"—Tarar alleged a conspiracy against Pakistan's



economy, while also criticizing PTI's record in government and insisting such attempts will not derail the country's progress.

He alleged close ties between Zulfi Bukhari and Arif Ajakia, citing photographs of their interactions, and claimed Zulfi acted as a facilitator in shaping Khan's statement.

Tarar described Arif Ajakia as a "known traitor," alleging he is campaigning internationally against Pakistan alongside Baloch nationalist Naseem Baloch. He said Ajakia's nexus with Zulfi Bukhari was part of a conspiracy to strip Pakistan of its GSP Plus trade status and damage the economy.

Pakistan opens Torkham border for Afghan refugees return

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Government of Pakistan has temporarily reopened the Torkham Border to facilitate the safe and dignified return of Afghan refugees.

The decision, taken under state policy, aims to ensure the phased repatriation of undocumented Afghan nationals residing in Pakistan. The process began on March 26, 2026, with authorities directing key institutions—including the Federal Investigation Agency, National Database and Registration Authority, customs authorities, and the National Logistics Corporation—to ensure full coordination and preparedness.

Strict security meas-

ures have been enforced in Torkham, Landi Kotal, and surrounding areas to protect the repatriation process from potential threats.

Officials said refugees will be transferred in an organized manner through designated points, particularly the Hamza Baba Camp, while movement will initially remain controlled to avoid mismanagement.

The government emphasized that the move reflects its commitment to national security, border management, and immigration law enforcement, while ensuring a respectful return for Afghan refugees. Authorities added that security forces and civilian institutions are working in close coordination to implement the process effectively.

AJK PM praises Pakistan's role as trusted global mediator

Bureau Report

MUZAFFARABAD: Prime Minister of Azad Kashmir, Faisal Mumtaz Rathore, has said that it was a matter of great pride that the world views Pakistan not only as a reliable partner but also as a trusted mediator in addressing critical global issues.

He made these remarks while addressing a condolence reference organized by Jinnah Dental Hospital in honor of its former executive director, the late Dr. Abdul Haleem Khan.

Speaking on the occasion, the AJK premier said that a strong military was the guarantor of the country's security, sovereignty, and stability.

Highlighting the importance of maintaining public trust, he said that a loss of faith in the system often leads to the formation of action committees.



He stated that plans were underway to enhance the beauty of Muzaffarabad city.

"Efforts are being made to implement measures with long-term impact despite limited time", he maintained.

He also mentioned that the PC-I for the Dental College has been prepared and would be included in the current budget.

The Prime Minister paid rich tribute to Dr. Abdul Haleem, calling

him a person of integrity and honesty. His services to society, he said, would always be remembered.

He added that when the government took office, the situation was challenging, but conditions were now improving.

He also announced that a dedicated space would be allocated adjacent to the central cemetery (graveyard) for performing funeral rites.

Other speakers at the event also paid tribute to Dr. Abdul Halim Khan, describing him as a sincere and compassionate physician.

The speakers also noted his significant role in the development of Jinnah Dental Hospital.

The reference was also attended by government ministers including Sardar Zia Qamar, Syed Bazil Naqvi, and others.

Tensions in ME surge, but diplomacy still offers a critical exit ramp: Masood Khan

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Masood Khan, former President of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and former Ambassador of Pakistan to the United States, China and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, has emphasized that despite ongoing military escalation in the Gulf, all parties involved increasingly recognize the urgent need for a diplomatic pathway to avert wider strategic and economic devastation.



Responding to questions in TV interview on the credibility of emerging dialogue efforts, Ambassador Khan noted that while public posturing and denial of negotiations persist, there is substantial evidence of behind-the-scenes diplomatic engagement. He observed that military deployments, including the movement of United States Marine Expeditionary Units to the region, are part of a broader strategy of deterrence and coercive signalling rather than a contradiction of diplomacy. "Escalation and diplomacy are proceeding simultaneously," he stated, adding that such parallel tracks are often designed to strengthen negotiating positions, though they inevitably narrow the political space for compromise.

He cautioned, however, that the prevailing trust deficit—particularly from Iran's perspective—remains a major obstacle. He pointed out that previous disruptions to nuclear negotiations, including military actions during ongoing talks, have eroded confidence, making any future dialogue fragile and complex.

DFP denounces Indian court ruling against three Kashmiri women activists



Spokesman Report

SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir Democratic Freedom Party has strongly denounced an Indian court ruling that sentenced three Kashmiri women including Asiya Andrabi to life imprisonment.

Calling it a politically motivated decision, the DFP spokesman advocate Arshad Iqbal in a statement issued here today, said that the judgment was political in nature and intended to suppress legitimate political voices that have refused to follow Indian diktats.

He maintained that the ruling amounts to a serious breach of international law as well as core principles of justice.

He noted that the life sentences handed down to Asiya Andrabi, Nahida Nasreen, and Fahmeeda Sofi reveal a fundamentally compromised judicial system of India that ignores globally accepted human rights standards, including the right to a fair trial, due process, and safeguards against arbitrary detention.

He said that depriving the accused of the right to present a proper defense has rendered the entire legal process deeply flawed and unjust.

Kashmiri Women Commission Condemns Andrabi Sentencing as 'Miscarriage of Justice'

City Desk

MUZAFFARABAD: Chairperson Women Commission Ms. Rehana Khan has strongly condemned the sentencing of Asiya Andrabi and her fellow Kashmiri women, terming the decision of the Indian courts as a miscarriage of justice. She said that India is afraid of the Hurriyat leadership, whether men or women, youth or children, fabricated and baseless cases are being filed against everyone.



Punishing Asiya Andrabi, Fahmeeda Sofi, Naida Nasreen is against the requirements of justice and a violation of international human rights. The decision of the Indian court is against the requirements of justice. Rehana Khan said that the use of black laws to suppress the Hurriyat leadership is unacceptable. The sentence of 30 life sentences to Asiya Andrabi and her colleagues is a so-called democracy. She also demanded that the international community take notice of the atrocities on Kashmiris. She said that human rights violations should be stopped. The international community should play its role in the immediate release of Asiya Andrabi and other women and Hurriyat leaders. India's judicial system is becoming a shameful practice in the world. A country whose courts are designed for revenge is actually nearing its end.

PSCA's Advanced Surveillance System Ensures Foolproof Security Arrangements to Hold PSL Season 11 in Lahore

Bureau Report

LAHORE: Punjab Safe Cities Authority (PSCA) has finalized special and comprehensive security arrangements to ensure a safe environment during the Pakistan Super League (PSL) Season 11 matches. A joint security strategy has been implemented by PSCA and Lahore Police to secure Gaddafi Stadium, Allama Iqbal International Airport, team hotels, and match routes.

According to PSCA's spokesperson, more than 950 modern cameras are actively monitoring the city during the matches. The security system has been further strengthened through the use of facial recognition, artificial intelligence-based analytics, and other advanced technologies. A state-of-the-art digital wall at the Safe City Control Room is ensuring 24/7 surveillance of Gaddafi Stadium, its surroundings, and adjacent areas. Additionally, Safe City drones are being deployed for aerial monitoring of the stadium, team routes, hotels, and the airport vicinity.

Tree plantation campaign launched

MUZAFFARABAD: Prime Minister Faisal Mumtaz Rathore formally launched the tree plantation campaign by planting a sapling in the Prime Minister's House. Forest Minister Sardar Javed Ayub and officers of the Forest Department were present at the ceremony.



Azad Kashmir PM vows no child left behind on education



Bureau Report

MUZAFFARABAD: Prime Minister of Azad Kashmir, Faisal Mumtaz Rathore, has said that the government's foremost priority was to ensure that no child is deprived of education due to lack of resources.

He made these assertions while addressing an important meeting that

was convened here today to discuss pros and cons of the proposed education package.

The meeting was attended by government ministers including Chaudhry Muhammad Rasheed, Sardar Zia-ul-Qamar, Secretary of Higher Education Tehzeeb-un-Nisa, Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education Qazi Inayat, Secretary of Finance Hassan

Mahmood, and others.

The Prime Minister, on the occasion, instructed authorities concerned to ensure that children from underprivileged and disadvantaged groups receive quality education in accordance with need and merit.

Highlighting the need for technical education, the PM directed the relevant authorities to take practical steps

to promote technical and vocational education so that youth can be equipped with skills.

He underscored the importance of integrating modern technology, particularly artificial intelligence, into the curriculum. During the meeting, the secretary of schools and the secretary of higher education gave a detailed briefing on the proposed education package.

Attique Ahmed Khan slams court rulings in Kashmir

Bureau Report

DHIRKOT: Former Prime Minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and President of All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference Sardar Attique Ahmed Khan has strongly condemned the sentences of Asiya Andrabi, Fahmeeda Sofi and Naheed Nasreen and said that an attempt is being made to wall up the Hurriyat leadership with black laws.

The situation Kashmir freedom movement cannot be suppressed by the decisions of

puppet courts. He expressed these views while talking to media representative who came to Mujahid e Awwal House, Ghaziabad, Dhirkot yesterday.

Sardar Attique Ahmed Khan said that India's panic can be gauged from the punishment of innocent women. He is now very afraid and the time is not far when Modi will also face the same fate as Netanyahu.

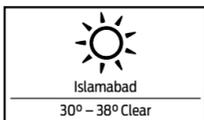
It is clear from the 30-30-year prison sentence that India



is engaged in its last unsuccessful attempt to suppress the

Hurriyat leadership through force.

The international community should take notice of India's human rights violations in occupied Kashmir and take action against retaliatory punishments. play its role in ending the occupation of Kashmir; this decision is a miscarriage of justice, India is using institutions and courts to prolong its unconstitutional, illegal and immoral rule over occupied Kashmir, Asiya Andrabi's punishment is a miscarriage of justice.



SERVICES

Namaz Timings

Fajr 4:40 am
 Zohr 12:14 pm
 Asr 4:38 pm
 Maghrib 6:24 pm
 Isha 7:48 pm

Nestlé Waters & Premium Beverages reach global water stewardship milestone in Pakistan

Commerce Desk

LAHORE: Pioneering a global achievement in water stewardship, global business Nestlé Waters & Premium Beverages (NW&PB) that operates the brand Nestlé PURE LIFE in Pakistan, became the first food and beverage company worldwide to secure 100 per cent certification of all its 39 bottling sites to the Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) Standard. This landmark accomplishment includes the local bottling sites in Pakistan at Sheikhpura, Islamabad and Karachi, as well as Nestlé's Kabirwala factory.

As increasing water stress and extreme weather events place growing pressure on rivers, aquifers and communities, effective water stewardship requires action that goes beyond factory boundaries and addresses shared water challenges at the catchment level.

Emphasizing the importance of collective action, Sheikh Waqar Ahmad, Head of Corporate Affairs and Sustainability at Nestlé Pakistan, said, "Water is a shared resource, and shared challenges demand collective solutions. This is why we launched the Caring for Water Pakistan (C4W Pakistan) initiative in 2017. Through this platform, we collaborate with key partners including Pakistan Agricultural Research Council, Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) and WWF Pakistan to strengthen long term water resilience for communities, nature and business continuity." Nestlé under the Caring for Water-Pakistan initiative, also operationalized drip irrigation across 244 acres in Sindh and 55 acres in Punjab, while smart soil moisture sensors were deployed across 722 acres in 2025.

Samra Maqbool, Business Executive Officer, Nestlé Waters & Premium Beverages Pakistan commented, "We are pleased to lead water regeneration efforts at Nestlé Pakistan. In 2017, our Sheikhpura Factory became the first site in Pakistan—and the first Nestlé site worldwide—to earn Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) Certification.

Talking about the effort, Hammad Naqi, CEO, World Wide Fund-Pakistan (WWF-Pakistan) said, "It is encouraging to see Nestlé provide invaluable learnings for driving impact at scale as it continues to be an important ally in advancing water stewardship globally."

Honored

UMT Achieves Significant Global Recognition in QS World University Rankings by Subject 2026

Bureau Report

LAHORE: The University of Management and Technology (UMT) has achieved another important milestone in the global academic arena by securing notable positions in the QS World University Rankings by Subject 2026, reflecting the university's growing international reputation and academic excellence.

Chairman UMT Ibrahim Hasan Murad congratulated the faculty, researchers, students and the entire UMT community on this significant achievement. He stated that this recognition is the result of the institution's collective efforts, professional dedication and commitment to maintaining high academic standards.

According to the QS Subject Rankings 2026, UMT has secured promi-

nent global positions in several disciplines, including Mathematics (501-600), Economics & Econometrics (551-700) and Computer Science & Information Systems (751-850). This achievement highlights UMT's strong focus on quality teaching, impactful research and an innovation-driven academic strategy. These global rankings are awarded annually based on comprehensive indicators including

academic reputation, employer's reputation, research impact and faculty excellence.

Murad further expressed that UMT remains committed to promoting modern research, innovation, and quality education. He emphasized that the university is not only strengthening its global academic profile but is also

bringing pride to Pakistan at the international level.

The UMT Chairman reaffirmed the university's commitment to continuing its journey toward excellence in education, global collaboration, research and innovation to further strengthen Pakistan's presence in the international academic community.



Historical Place

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



Photo: Online by Sultan Bashir

Transgender persons face torture risk in Pakistan, new policy brief warns

Asim Tanveer

LAHORE: Transgender persons in Pakistan face a heightened risk of torture and police abuse, a new policy brief launched by Justice Project Pakistan (JPP) in collaboration with REDRESS at Emerald Hall, Faletti's Hotel, Lahore warns.

Opening the event, Sarah Belal, Executive Director of Justice Project Pakistan, highlighted the urgent need to move beyond legal frameworks toward meaningful protection in practice.

Talking to the media, Neeli Rana, a transgender rights activist and community mobiliser, underscored the importance of accountability and effective implementation of existing laws.

Transgender persons in Pakistan are not just marginalised by systems, they are rejected by society at large. From everyday discrimination to violence and harassment, their lives are shaped by exclusion at every level. When society refuses to recognise their



dignity, it becomes easier for abuse to go unchecked.

A panel discussion on Policy Dialogue brought together Mahnoor Chaudhary, Program Director at Khawaja Sira

Society; Dr. Khurram Sohail Raja, Head of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology at Aziz Fatima Medical and Dental College; and SP Monazza Karamat, First Lady SP Headquarters Lahore.

AC Kamalia chairs meeting with revenue officers

Zafar Chishti

TOBA TEK SINGH: Assistant Commissioner Kamalia Erum Shahzadi chaired an important meeting with revenue officers and staff to review departmental recovery matters in detail. The meeting focused on the collection of government dues, pending cases and the overall performance of recovery efforts across various departments.

On this occasion, Assistant Commissioner Erum Shahzadi issued clear directives to ensure the timely and 100 percent recovery of government dues. She emphasized that no negligence, delay or carelessness in the recovery process would be tolerated and instructed officers to take immediate steps to improve performance.

She further stated that all revenue staff must fulfill their professional responsibilities with dedication and work actively in the field to achieve assigned targets, thereby contributing to an increase in government revenue.

During the meeting, detailed discussions were held on various revenue cases, outstanding dues and the current status of the recovery campaign. The Assistant Commissioner warned of strict action against officials showing poor performance, stating that those found negligent would face action in accordance with rules and regulations.

Relevant revenue officers presented their performance reports and also shared suggestions to make the recovery process more effective. The Assistant Commissioner reviewed these proposals and directed that practical measures be taken to achieve recovery targets as soon as possible.

Chairman FBR visits KCCI



Commerce Desk

KARACHI: The Chairman of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), Mr. Rashid Mahmood Langrial, accompanied by the Member Customs Operations, Chief Collector Customs Appraisalment (South), and Chief Commissioner LTO (Karachi), visited the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) to discuss issues and challenges faced by the business community of Karachi.

During the meeting, senior representatives of KCCI gave a comprehensive briefing outlining the challenges currently faced by Karachi's business community encompassing both policy and operational aspects. Key topics raised included timely processing of tax refunds, issues related to super tax installments, and other procedural bottlenecks impacting business operations.

In response, the Chairman FBR directed the Chief Commissioner Large Taxpayer Office (LTO) and the Chief Collector Customs Appraisalment (South) to prioritize and expedite the resolution of these issues. This directive reflects Chairman FBR's commitment to addressing legitimate concerns of the business community and ensuring smoother operational processes for local enterprises.

SECP Licenses First Provincial Government-Owned Life Insurer

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan has granted a license to M/s Punjab Life Insurance Company Limited (PLIC), marking the establishment of Pakistan's first provincial government-owned life insurance company.

The Punjab Government, through this company, intends to efficiently manage its social health insurance programs. As per the business proposal, PLIC will work towards Insured-Pakistan, particularly the Insured Punjab objective, thus increasing the insurance penetration in Pakistan.

The Company will also provide innovative financial protection and savings solutions to the underserved segments, including the salaried class, small business owners, farmers, and daily wage workers. It will help expand coverage to low-income and vulnerable groups through sustainable insurance products.

In addition, the PLIC plans to develop pension-related solutions and annuity products over time. It will also introduce digital insurance products and work closely with the public sector institutions in Punjab to expand outreach and improve service delivery.

SECP has actively facilitated this initiative as part of its broader efforts to develop Pakistan's insurance sector. The company will operate under SECP's regulatory framework, ensuring compliance with financial soundness, corporate governance, and policyholder protection requirements.

With this addition, the total number of life insurers in Pakistan has increased to 13. This reflects steady growth in the sector and supports the expansion of long-term, protection-oriented insurance products across the country.

An awareness seminar on road safety, organized at Masood Textile Mills Limited

Abdul Majid

FAISALABAD: An awareness seminar on road safety was organized at Masood Textile Mills Limited. The special guest of the event was Nasir Javed Rana (SSP), Chief Traffic Officer Faisalabad. Chaudhry Nasir Ali Zia attended the event on a special occasion.

Addressing the event, the CTO said that road safety is the common responsibility of all of us. Follow traffic rules completely, be alert at all times. Avoid distracting activities and respect the rights of other road users.

A moment of caution can save precious lives—travel safely and reach



your destination safely.

Chaudhry Nasir Ali Zia, in his message on Pakistan Day, said that March 23 reminds us of unity, courage and the inspiring vision that laid the foundation of Pakistan in the form of the historic Lahore Resolution.

Let us pay tribute to the sacrifices of our national heroes and further strengthen our homeland with integrity, discipline, a strong nation, a united people, a proud Pakistan and unwavering determination.

Finally, Chaudhry Nasir Ali Zia presented a commemorative shield to Asar Javed Rana (SSP), Chief Traffic Officer, Faisalabad.

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USA-Iran War: Oil, Deception, and Illusions

The unfolding conflict involving the United States, Israel, and Iran has entered a phase where perception and reality are dangerously misaligned. Publicly, the language of mediation, ceasefire, and diplomacy dominates official statements. Privately and on the battlefield, however, the tempo of war continues to intensify. What appears to be a pause for peace is, in fact, a calculated window—used by all sides to reposition militarily, economically, and strategically for what could become a far more devastating phase of conflict.

At the core of this crisis lies a deep distrust of U.S.-led diplomacy. Iran's skepticism is not theoretical; it is rooted in recent experience. During earlier rounds of negotiations in mid-2025 and again in early 2026, diplomatic engagement coincided with military escalations. To Tehran, this pattern suggests that negotiations are being used as a tactical cover—buying time for force buildup rather than genuinely seeking peace. This perception has shaped Iran's current posture: resistant, cautious, and unwilling to accept any framework that resembles surrender.

The United States, under Donald J. Trump, has reportedly advanced a comprehensive mediation framework—often described as a 15-point proposal. These demands include dismantling Iran's nuclear facilities, surrendering enriched uranium stockpiles, halting its ballistic missile program, ending support for regional allies such as Hezbollah and other groups, accepting intrusive international inspections, and aligning its regional policies with U.S. and Israeli security interests. Additional expectations reportedly extend to granting

oversight of critical waterways such as the Strait of Hormuz, and contributing toward war-related compensation.

From Iran's perspective, these are not negotiation points but conditions of capitulation. Accepting even a fraction would dismantle its deterrence capability, undermine sovereignty, and expose it to future vulnerabilities. Consequently, Iran has rejected these proposals outright and presented its own counter-framework: guarantees against future attacks, recognition of its right under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to pursue peaceful nuclear enrichment under International Atomic Energy Agency supervision, preservation of its ballistic missile program, refusal to abandon regional alliances, and compensation for war damages.

This stark divergence has rendered the mediation process effectively a non-starter. Countries such as Pakistan, Oman, Turkey, and Egypt have attempted to bridge the gap, but their efforts are constrained by the fundamental incompatibility of the positions.

Meanwhile, Israel has used the current operational window to intensify its campaign against Iranian targets. Its objective appears clear: degrade Iran's military infrastructure, energy facilities, and command networks as much as possible before any ceasefire takes hold. Iran, in response, has escalated its missile and drone operations with increasing effectiveness. Despite Israel's advanced defense systems—Iron Dome, David's Sling, and Arrow—there have been

instances where Iranian projectiles have penetrated these layers, causing damage in key urban and industrial areas.

The asymmetry of geography and scale is critical here. Israel's small territorial footprint makes it particularly vulnerable to sustained bombardment. In contrast, Iran's vast size, large population of approximately 85–90 million, and extensive military reserves—including the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and hundreds of thousands of trained personnel—position it for prolonged resistance. Historical precedents reinforce this reality: even non-state actors such as Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah

in Lebanon have withstood sustained campaigns. A state-level adversary like Iran presents a far more complex challenge.

For the United States, the situation is increasingly precarious. With an estimated 40,000 to 50,000 troops deployed across the Middle East, supported by carrier strike groups and amphibious forces, the logistical burden is immense. These forces depend on regional bases and supply lines for fuel, food, and operational continuity. Iran has explicitly warned that any entity supporting these supply chains could become a target, raising concerns about the sustainability of prolonged deployment.

The economic dimension of the war is equally significant—and perhaps even more consequential. The partial disruption of the Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly 20% of global oil supply flows, has triggered volatility in energy

markets. Oil prices have surged, driving inflation across major economies. In the United States, rising gasoline prices are translating into higher living costs, increased transportation expenses, and broader economic anxiety.

For Middle Eastern economies, the impact is even more severe. Countries that rely heavily on oil exports are facing declining revenues due to disrupted production, damaged infrastructure, and soaring shipping insurance costs. This financial strain is directly affecting their ability to honor previously pledged investments in the United States—commitments that reportedly approached \$3 trillion. These investments, once seen as pillars of economic partnership, are now under threat as regional governments prioritize domestic stability over external commitments.

This shift has broader implications. The erosion of financial flows from the Gulf to the United States weakens a key channel of economic interdependence. At the same time, trust in U.S. security guarantees is diminishing. Many regional actors now question whether U.S. military presence serves their interests or primarily protects Israel. This perception is reshaping alliances and recalibrating geopolitical alignments.

On the global stage, the United States is encountering increasing isolation. European allies, while historically aligned with Washington, have shown reluctance to fully support the current conflict. Many have emphasized diplomacy and restraint, wary of being drawn into a prolonged war with uncertain outcomes. This divergence reflects a broader shift toward multipolarity, where alignment with U.S. policy is no longer automatic.

Continued on Page 7



Qamar Bashir

PHA Digitises Outdoor Advertisement Approvals

In a bid to improve ease of doing business, the Punjab Horticulture Authority (PHA) has fully digitised the process of outdoor commercial advertisements, a spokesperson said Thursday.

In the first phase, applications related to three services—registration of firms, no-objection certificates (NOCs) for commercial installations such as billboards and temporary campaign permissions—have been moved to e-Biz, a one-stop digital platform to streamline and digitize the complete lifecycle of registration, licenses, certificates and other permits. Unlike conventional RLCO digitization systems, eBiz adopts a business-oriented approach, ensuring ease, transparency and efficiency for entrepreneurs and investors.

Through e-Biz, the PHA's marketing wing has introduced a single-window system allowing firms to apply, submit documents and pay fees through one streamlined platform. The system automatically routes applications to relevant officials and provides real-time tracking and updates to ensure transparency.

The initiative eliminates the need for physical visits, reduces processing time and costs and aims to attract investment through a more efficient and predictable approval process.

A meeting of the managing directors of all 21 district horticultural agencies was held on Thursday under the chairmanship of Additional Director General Mirza Waleed Baig. The participants were informed that, in the first phase, marketing-related services have been launched for the older district agencies, including Lahore, while services for the newly established agencies will be digitised within the next few days.

The newly established agencies have become operational in Jhang, Rahim Yar Khan, Khushab, Nankana Sahib, Sheikhpura, Okara, Gujrat, Jhelum, Murree, Khanewal and Muzaffargarh districts.

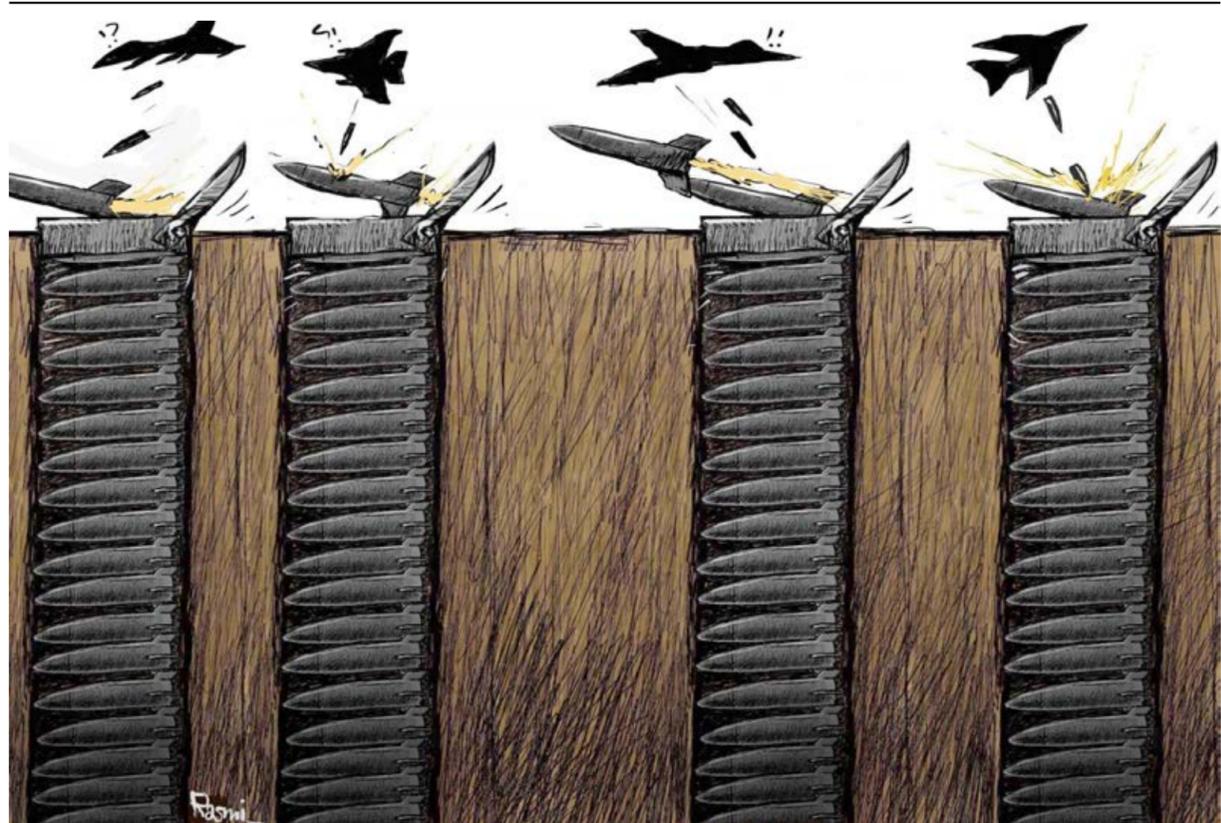
In the next phase, additional services—such as horticulture NOCs for housing societies, the 'adopt-a-park' scheme and road access permits—will also be brought onto the digital platform, the meeting was informed.

The meeting also discussed impediments to the complete digitisation of services offered by the provincial body. A representative of the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB) also attended.

Commenting on the development, Director General Raja Mansoor Ahmad said the digitisation of services was a step toward making PHA a more business-friendly organisation as envisioned by the chief secretary. "We want to remove every unnecessary hurdle that businesses face when seeking approvals," he said. "This portal ensures that applicants no longer have to make repeated visits to our offices."

He added that transparency was a key goal of the initiative. "With real-time tracking, both the applicant and the authority can monitor the status of an application at every stage," he said. "This reduces the chances of delays and removes room for discretion."

Speaking about the next phase, Mr Baig said the authority was committed to bringing all its services online within a defined timeline. "Our teams are working closely with PITB to identify and resolve any technical or administrative bottlenecks," he said. "The goal is a fully paperless system across all 21 district agencies."



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

When Invoking History Becomes a Crime

Nissar Ahmed Thakur

The Indian judiciary's controversial decision to sentence Asiya Andrabi and her two close associates to life imprisonment under the widely debated Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act has sparked intense debate across political and legal circles. Known as the 'Iron Lady of Kashmir', Ms. Andrabi was sentenced to life imprisonment by a special court of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) under the UAPA and Sections 120B and 121A of the Indian Penal Code. Her associates, Sofi Fehmeeda and Nahida Nasreen, were each sentenced to 30 years, marking the first time Kashmiri women faced such harsh penalties for 'waging war against the State [sic]'. What sets Andrabi's case apart from other Kashmiris previously handed life sentences is the nature of the charges. For the first time, the court appears to have imposed such a severe penalty primarily on the basis of social media posts and public speeches, raising serious questions about freedom of expression and the thresholds of criminal liability.

To many, the ruling came as a shock. But for Kashmir-watchers, who closely monitor developments since the revocation of Article 370, it reflects an unfolding reality—where laws such as the UAPA are no longer exceptional tools, but central instruments shaping the post-2019 governance framework of intensified control over the majority population. While Indian courts have previously sentenced numerous Kashmiri leaders on alleged terrorism charges involving "killing of civilians", however, this is the first case in which life imprisonment has been imposed solely for speeches and social media posts. It underscores the deepening crisis in the region, where a significant portion of the population aligns

with the political ideology championed by the Dukhtar-e-Millat chairperson. However, it remains to be seen how this judgment will affect those who have been involved in this kind of social activism for years.

Anyhow, the ruling has set forth a chilling precedent, punishing individuals not for acts of violence, but for the words they spoke and the history they invoked. Beneath the veneer of legalese, a more unsettling question emerges: can the mere act of invoking history itself be criminalized? Could a social media post reflecting one's political beliefs—or even chanting a slogan at a public gathering—trigger repercussions of unimaginable magnitude? It is, in effect, a judicial coup against Kashmiri voices that have refused to accept Indian diktats and its claims over the Kashmir dispute.

Kashmir has long been recognized as a disputed region, its origins tied to the turbulent events of the 1947 partition of the subcontinent. For decades, it has often been described—politically and historically—as an "unfinished agenda" of the partition. This is not merely rhetoric; it is rooted in international agreements, including multiple United Nations resolutions that acknowledged the contested nature of the region and called for its final settlement in line with the wishes and aspirations of the Kashmiri people.

One may agree or disagree with these interpretations. One may reject them entirely. But can their mere articulation be equated with terrorism?

It is also important to situate the case within the ideological position of Dukhtar-e-Millat, the organization with which Andrabi has long been heading. The group has historically advocated for a political resolution of the Kashmir dispute, framing its stance in alignment with United Nations Security Council

(UNSC) resolutions. While its position is often viewed through a particular geopolitical lens, it exists within a broader spectrum of political opinion in the region.

In its judgment, the court concluded that the accused were not simply expressing a political view but were actively promoting secessionism. Video evidence presented by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) was cited to show that they claimed Kashmir belonged to Pakistan and was under Indian occupation. Yet, this is precisely where the line between speech and crime begins to blur. If a political issue has, for decades, been debated at international forums, documented in historical records, and discussed across generations, how does invoking that same issue transform an individual into an "anti-national" or a threat to the State? When does a contested narrative—however uncomfortable—cross the threshold into criminality?

These questions are not about endorsing or rejecting anyone's position on Kashmir. They are about safeguarding the space in which such positions can be expressed freely. Sadly, in Kashmir, the UAPA serves less to prevent danger and more to regulate and control political expression. Its real danger lies not just in punishment but in how it repeatedly crushes Kashmiri voices and stifles freedom of expression. Ms. Andrabi's case is a litmus test of whether the world's so-called largest democracy can reconcile its democratic ideals with the use of law to control thought, erase historical narratives, and suppress dissent in a contested territory—awaiting final settlement under the UN resolutions.

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Energy Crisis Triggered by the Blockade of the Strait of Hormuz: Implications and Strategic Pathways for Pakistan

The recent blockade of the Strait of Hormuz in March 2026 has precipitated one of the most severe global energy crises in modern history. Responsible for nearly 20% of global oil and a significant share of LNG trade, this chokepoint is indispensable to international energy flows. Its closure has disrupted approximately 11 million barrels of oil per day, surpassing even the oil shocks of the 1970s, the Tankers War from 1981 to 1988 or closure of Suez Canal in 2021.

The immediate market reaction has been dramatic. Brent crude prices surged beyond \$ U.S. 120 per barrel, briefly touching \$ U.S. 126, while global gas markets experienced even sharper stress due to limited rerouting capacity. The LNG infrastructure disruptions particularly in Qatar have further tightened supply, with up to 17% of export capacity affected, amplifying price volatility across Asia.

For Pakistan, these developments are not merely external shocks they expose deep structural vulnerabilities. The country relies on the Strait of Hormuz for 70 to 80% of its crude oil imports and nearly all LNG supplies, making it acutely sensitive to disruptions. Furthermore, Pakistan imports around 90% of its oil from the Gulf, underscoring its near total dependence on this single maritime route.

The financial implications are equally alarming. According to recent data, Pakistan's energy import bill reached \$ U.S. 15.9 billion in FY2025, including \$ U.S. 5.96 billion in petro-

leum products, \$ U.S. 5.45 billion in crude oil, and \$ U.S. 3.48 billion in LNG. With global prices surging, this bill is expected to rise sharply, intensifying pressure on foreign exchange reserves and widening the current account deficit.

The crisis has already translated into domestic economic strain. Fuel prices have increased by nearly 20%, while austerity measures including reduced working days and energy conservation policies have been introduced to manage demand. Simultaneously, LNG shortages have disrupted industrial output and household energy access, highlighting the fragility of Pakistan's energy supply chain.

Yet, the crisis also reveals an opportunity for strategic transformation.

In the short term, Pakistan must urgently diversify its energy supply routes. Efforts to reroute oil shipments through alternative ports, such as Saudi Arabia's Red Sea facilities (Yanbu), have already begun but remain insufficient. Expanding such arrangements and strengthening regional energy diplomacy particularly with Central Asian states can provide partial insulation from maritime disruptions. Saudi 1200 Km long East West Crude Oil Pipe Line and UAE's 360 km Habshan-Fujairah oil pipeline have a capacity of 3.6 and 1.5 million barrels per day amounting to 20% of oil passing through Hormuz.

Equally critical is the expansion of strategic fuel reserves. Unlike advanced economies that maintain emergency stocks, Pakistan's limited reserves

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Dr. Hasan Yaser Malik

Shehbaz briefs Malaysian PM on Pakistan's diplomatic efforts for US-Iran negotiations

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday received a telephone call from his Malaysian counterpart Anwar Ibrahim and briefed him on the latest diplomatic efforts, including discussions with leaders of Gulf countries and Iran, to bring the US and Iran to the negotiating table.

During their warm and cordial conversation, the two leaders exchanged Eid-ul-Fitr greetings and prayed for the unity and progress of Muslim Ummah.

The prime minister conveyed his deep appreciation to the Malaysian Prime Minister for his strong message of support for Pakistan's leadership and endorsement of Pakistan-led mediation efforts to end the ongoing hostilities in the Middle East.

While appreciating the prime minister for his outstanding leader-

ship, the Malaysian prime minister also apprised him of his own conversations with various world leaders, wherein he had also emphasized the immediate need to end the Middle East war. He offered Malaysia's full support to Pakistan's peace efforts.

Prime Minister Shehbaz thanked Anwar Ibrahim and assured him that Pakistan would continue its sincere and genuine efforts in de-escalating the prevailing situation in the region. Both leaders agreed to remain in touch.

On Wednesday, Prime Minister Ibrahim, in a video statement, welcomed Pakistan's "timely and constructive" offer to host dialogue between the United States and Iran.

"Pakistan's relationships with the relevant parties, and its standing as a credible voice in the Muslim world, place it in a strong position to help create the conditions for meaningful negotiations," he said.

He assured Malaysia's support for the

initiative and encouraged the United States and Iran to respond in the spirit in which it was offered.

"I note with cautious hope the signals, however incomplete, that suggest some space for diplomacy may still exist. That space should be treated with the seriousness it deserves."

Ibrahim said that in recent days, he had held discussions with leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Türkiye, Egypt, Indonesia, Japan, Pakistan and other partners to better understand the situation and to advocate for de-escalation.

On the same day, Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar also held a telephone conversation with the Foreign Minister of Malaysia Mohamad Hasan.

The two leaders discussed recent regional and international developments of mutual interest and emphasized the importance of de-escalation, dialogue, and diplomacy to address ongoing challenges.



Russia 'outraged' by strikes on areas near Iran's Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant

News Desk

MOSCOW: Russia on Wednesday strongly criticized strikes on areas near Iran's Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant (NPP).

In a statement, the Foreign Ministry said that a "new and extremely dangerous strike" was carried out on Tuesday in the immediate vicinity of the operating power unit No. 1 at the Bushehr NPP.

"We are extremely outraged by this reckless, irresponsible manifestation of a destructive course. One gets the impression that the aggressors are deliberately seeking to cause a large-scale nuclear catastrophe in the region in order to conceal and justify their criminal acts," the ministry said.

It emphasized that the US-Israeli actions have "already resulted in



numerous casualties among the peaceful Iranian population."

"Washington and West Jerusalem must understand no less than we do – a hit on the Bushehr NPP would inevitably lead to irrevers-

ible humanitarian and environmental consequences," it stressed.

The ministry said "only by a miracle has a tragedy not yet occurred," warning that strikes are being carried out "increasingly closer" to the

operating power unit.

"The lives of the station's personnel, including Russian specialists, are under constant threat. This is categorically unacceptable to us," it said.

The ministry demanded

that "those who recklessly, irresponsibly, and without justification attacked Iran return to reason, cease their unprovoked aggression, including strikes on Iran's nuclear energy infrastructure."

The ministry pointed out that the Bushehr NPP falls under the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement, as well as facilities located in its immediate vicinity.

"We expect a clear, unequivocal position and decisive action from the IAEA, the UN, and their leadership to prevent further such attacks," it said.

Meanwhile, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Washington has provided no assurances that the Bushehr nuclear power plant would not be targeted.

Iranian Ambassador Calls on Minister Abdul Aleem Khan

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Iranian Ambassador, Dr. Reza Amiri Moghadam called on the Federal Minister for Communications Abdul Aleem Khan, today to discuss the current regional situation and matters of mutual interest. During the meeting, Federal Minister Abdul Aleem Khan expressed his profound grief and condolences over the martyrdom of Iran's Supreme Leader and the significant loss of life and property resulting from recent events. Federal Minister remarked that the Pakistani nation pays rich tributes to Iran and its people, noting that over the past 26 days, Iran has set a new example of courage and bravery. He emphasized that the hearts of the entire Muslim Ummah beat in unison with Iran and conveyed a message of goodwill, expressing hope for a brighter and better future for the brotherly nation.



The Iranian Ambassador, Dr. Reza Amiri Moghadam, thanked the Federal Minister for Communications Abdul Aleem Khan for his prompt message of condolence and expressed his gratitude to the great Pakistani nation for its support. He stated his firm belief that, just as in the past, Iran would once again be blessed with victory. The meeting also featured a detailed discussion on various trade and bilateral issues between Iran and Pakistan. Both sides reached an agreement to further strengthen Pak-Iran relations across different sectors and to promote enhanced mutual connectivity. The discussion concluded with a shared commitment to fostering deeper ties and ensuring stability and prosperity for both nations.

Yango Pakistan Launches Transport Service to Simplify Public Transport Journey

Commerce Desk

KARACHI: Yango Pakistan, part of a global technology company Yango Group, today announced the launch of its Transport service in Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad, and Rawalpindi. Integrated into the Yango Superapp, the new service gives users access to public transport routes and schedules in one place, empowering residents and visitors to navigate the cities efficiently. The service already includes up-to-date schedules for more than 60 public transport routes, covering over 1,000 kilometers across the four cities, and expands Yango's growing ecosystem in Pakistan.



With the new Transport service, users can build routes by public transport directly in the app and compare available options based on travel time, route details, and transfer points. The service covers several types of public transport, including regular buses, Metrobus (BRT), and Metro, making trip planning more convenient, especially for daily commuters. By bringing this information together in a single interface, Yango Superapp helps reduce the need to switch between different sources when planning a trip.

Miral Sharif, Country Manager of Yango Pakistan: "Public transport is an essential part of urban mobility for millions of people in Pakistan, and with the launch of Transport service, we want to make trip planning clearer and more accessible. By integrating route and schedule information into the Yango Superapp, we are giving users a practical tool to move around major urban centers across the country with greater ease and confidence."

Looking ahead, Yango Pakistan sees further potential to expand Transport in the country through partnerships with local mobility and infrastructure players, as well as public sector organizations.

Urs Hazrat Madho Lal Hussain (RA): Punjab Govt. committed to providing exemplary facilities to devotees, says Dr. Ehsan Bhutta

Bureau Report

LAHORE: Secretary/Chief Administrator Auqaf Punjab Dr. Ehsan Bhutta has said that the Government of Punjab will utilize all available resources to ensure a peaceful, well-organized and spiritually enriching environment for devotees during the annual Urs of Hazrat Madho Lal Hussain (RA).

He was addressing a meeting held to review the arrangements for the Urs at the shrine of Hazrat Madho Lal Hussain (RA). The meeting was attended by Director General Religious Affairs Shahid Hassan Kalyani, Additional Secretary Auqaf Nabeela Javed, Director Finance Alvina Faiz, Zonal Administrators Shahid Hameed Virk and Mian Muhammad Aslam, and Manager Circle 5 Ghulam Rasool, along with other officers of the Auqaf Department. He said that special committees headed by designated officers



have been constituted for the effective management of the Urs. These committees will ensure VIP movement, crowd control during peak hours, coordinated security arrangements and uninterrupted provision of basic facilities to devotees. He added

that officers have been assigned specific responsibilities to maintain discipline, ensure hospitality and complete all Urs-related activities in an organized manner.

Moreover, Dr. Ehsan Bhutta also chaired a detailed review meeting

regarding the Data Darbar extension project and the development scheme for the shrine of Hazrat Bulleh Shah (RA) in Kasur. The meeting was attended by Additional Secretary Auqaf Nabeela Javed, Director Projects Auqaf Rafiq Noor Wattoo, General Manager NESPAK Adil Nazir, Superintendent Engineer Buildings Isa Bin Moeen, Executive Engineer Buildings Fahad Naveed, Project Director TEPA Muhammad Asad, Executive Engineer Buildings Kasur Ghulam Abbas Maitla, and Administrator Data Darbar Muhammad Ali Khan, among others.

The meeting discussed in detail the progress on the outer project underpass, piazza, land acquisition, internal development works under C&W and proposals related to hydraulic canopies. He further stated that the completion deadline for the Hazrat Bulleh Shah (RA) shrine development project has been set for the 20th of next month.

Strategic Patience and Shifting Power: How Pakistan is Redefining Regional Dynamics

In the complex chessboard of South Asian geopolitics, leadership is often tested not by rhetoric, but by strategy, restraint, and timing. Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir appears to have approached India with the calculated precision one reserves for a cunning and deceptive adversary. This approach, many argue, explains the visible unease and agitation now emanating from across the border.

India today appears increasingly unsettled—its tone, language, and official statements reflecting a state grappling with anxiety. Rather than projecting the composure expected of a responsible state, it has at times resorted to language reminiscent of street-level hostility. Labeling Pakistan's peace efforts as "brokerage" is

not only inappropriate but indicative of a deeper diplomatic frustration—an attempt to mask its own strategic setbacks.

Over the past year and a half, India has encountered a series of significant geopolitical setbacks that have collectively shaken the foundations of its foreign policy.

From being compelled to step back from the Chabahar initiative to reducing its engagement in Russian oil procurement, New Delhi's strategic flexibility appears constrained. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also had to recalibrate his posture in the face of China's assertiveness, reflecting a shift in regional power balances.

Simultaneously, India's ties with Bangladesh have deteriorated, culminating in the fall of a pro-India govern-

ment—an outcome that has weakened its influence in Dhaka. During the May escalation with Pakistan, India not only faced military challenges but also suffered reputational damage on the diplomatic front, with its carefully curated global image facing scrutiny.

In Afghanistan, India's strategy has faltered further. Attempts to leverage indirect security pressures—reportedly through support channels linked to Afghan Taliban dynamics—have backfired, creating vulnerabilities for India itself. Instead of gaining strategic depth, New Delhi has found itself increasingly exposed

to security risks.

Major regional connectivity projects have also faced setbacks. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), once touted as a transformative initiative, is now mired in uncertainty. Growing tensions between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have slowed momentum, while Saudi Arabia's expanding defense cooperation with Pakistan has emerged as a strategic concern for India.

Meanwhile, new regional alignments are rapidly taking shape. The strengthening of China-Pakistan cooperation in Bangladesh is

being perceived as the formation of a consolidated security bloc that challenges India's traditional sphere of influence. In Afghanistan, logistical routes that once benefited India have been curtailed, and key installations—such as the Ayni air base—have been vacated. Support structures linked to Dugm Port are also reportedly diminishing.

These developments point toward a broader trend: India is increasingly being pushed into a defensive posture, while its rival is expanding its strategic outreach beyond the region, forming new alliances and security frameworks.

Within a remarkably short span of one to one and a half years, India has faced a convergence of challenges—each contributing to its current state of strategic strain. In contrast, Pakistan

has demonstrated notable progress in both diplomatic engagement and strategic positioning.

This divergence is reflected in the tone of official discourse. India's growing sharpness and intensity in statements signal not strength, but discomfort. The louder the reaction, the clearer the indication that Pakistan's diplomatic trajectory is exerting pressure on its strategic calculus.

History consistently shows that true regional dominance is not achieved through noise or aggression, but through wisdom, patience, and effective diplomacy. That, it seems, is precisely the game currently unfolding.

As new alliances emerge and old equations shift, the balance of power in the region is being quietly but decisively rewritten.



Analysis

Kiran Asim

Bull & Bears
PSX 100-Share
Index Fluctuation

Pakistan: PSX 100-Share Index		
Current	Prev. Close	
152,907.96	158,313.44	
Day's High	Day's Low	
157,591.23	152,668.07	
Index Value	Change	
23,246,171,893	-5405.48	
Percentage	Time	
-3.41%	26 Mar, 2026 4:30 pm	
Europe: FTSE 100 Index		
Index Value	Change	
9,972.17	-134.67	
Percentage	Time	
-1.33%	26 Mar, 4:35 pm GMT	
USA: Dow Jones Industrial Average		
Index Value	Change	
46,024.32	-405.17	
Percentage	Time	
-0.87%	26 Mar, 1:30 pm GMT-4	
Asia Pacific: Nikkei Stocks Average		
Index Value	Change	
53,603.65	-145.97	
Percentage	Time	
-0.27%	26 Mar, 3:45 pm GMT+9	
Open Market Forex Rates		
Australian Dollar	195.05	198.10
Australian Dollar	190.63	194.10
Bahrain Dinar	732	742.75
Canadian Dollar	200.10	205.25
China Yuan	36.65	37.6
Danish Krone	43.25	43.65
Euro	322.36	330.05
Hong Kong Dollar	34.97	35.97
Indian Rupee	2.1	2.36
Japanese Yen	1.7253	1.8245
Kuwaiti Dinar	889.50	900.35
Malaysian Ringgit	65.25	66.45
New Zealand \$	160.81	165.35
Norwegians Krone	27.65	27.95
Omani Riyal	719.15	729.45
Qatari Riyal	73.33	74.3
Saudi Riyal	74.25	75.35
Singapore Dollar	215.32	220.32
Swedish Korona	30.20	30.50
Swiss Franc	355	358.85
Thai Bhat	8.05	8.2
U.A.E Dirham	75.75	77.10
UK Pound Sterling	372.68	381.27
US Dollar	279.50	280.25

Zong leads climate action through afforestation drive in Islamabad

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: Reinforcing its position as a responsible technology leader, Zong, Pakistan's leading technology service enterprise has advanced its sustainability agenda through a tree plantation drive in collaboration with the Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Government of Pakistan and the Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency (Pak-EPA). The initiative was held at Shakarparian National Park and graced by Dr. Musadik Masood Malik, Honorable Federal Minister for Climate Change & Environmental Coordination.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Musadik Malik, Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, said, "Greenhouse gas emissions increase temperatures. Trees absorb carbon dioxide and produce essential oxygen. Planting trees is a form of ongoing charity. The trees we plant today will grow to contribute to the nation's development, economic and environmental progress. Following March 31, large-scale tree plantations will continue, with equal emphasis on protecting the trees."

Ms. Nabila Yazdani, Director Strategy at Zong, emphasized the company's long-term



commitment to environmental stewardship, stating, "This initiative reflects our belief that sustainability must be embedded at the core of how we operate as a technology enterprise. Beyond planting trees, we are fostering a culture of environmental responsibility, empowering

our people to actively contribute to climate action and adopt sustainable practices in their everyday decisions. At Zong, this is an ongoing journey toward building a greener, more resilient future"

Beyond this initiative, Zong is driving a clear

strategic agenda: integrating green technology and environmental responsibility into the core of its operations. By delivering energy-efficient, future-ready solutions and sustainable innovation, the enterprise is enabling a cleaner, greener Pakistan.

Meeting

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, holding a meeting with H. E. Mr. Nicolas Galey, Ambassador of France to Pakistan, at the Finance Division to discuss economic cooperation and bilateral engagement.



Photo: PID

PFC appreciates Pak efforts to de-escalate tension in Mideast crisis

Commerce Desk

LAHORE: Chief Executive Officer Pakistan Furniture Council (PFC) Mian Kashif Ashfaq Thursday commended the visionary diplomatic efforts of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Asim Munir for offering mediation to the United States and Iran to help carve out a result oriented and viable settlement of the ongoing Middle East crisis giving peace a chance prevail in the region.

Talking here today to a delegation of industrialists led by Nisar Ahmad Hanif Gujjar he said this initiative would pave the way for result-ori-

ented talks, urging all stakeholders to give peace a chance for the collective good of the region and beyond. Pakistan's proactive and balanced approach reflects its commitment to global peace, dialogue and constructive engagement.

Leader of delegation Nisar Ahmad Hanif Gujjar said such peace initiatives would not only help defuse regional tensions but also create an environment conducive to trade, investment and economic cooperation. He said sustainable peace in the Middle East would positively impact developing economies, including Pakistan, by ensuring stability in energy supplies and international markets.

CCP Authorizes Acquisition of Pakistan General Insurance Company Limited

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has authorized the acquisition of shareholding in M/s Pakistan General Insurance Company Limited by Mr. Muhammad Shahzad Habib and his family members, following a Phase-I review conducted under the Competition Act, 2010.

The transaction was brought before the Commission as an ex-post facto application, as the acquisition had been consummated prior to obtaining the mandatory approval required under Section 11 of the Act. The Commission took notice of this procedural lapse and emphasized that pre-merger approval is a statutory requirement that must be obtained before giving effect to any notifiable

transaction. During the proceedings, the Acquirers submitted that the transaction would not result in any adverse impact on competition in the relevant market. The Commission conducted a detailed assessment of the transaction, including its structure, the profile of the acquiring parties, and the competitive dynamics of the general insurance sector in Pakistan.

The relevant market was identified as "general insurance" within Pakistan. The Commission noted that the target company has only recently resumed its operations and currently holds negligible market share. Furthermore, the general insurance sector in Pakistan comprises multiple players operating across different scales, indicating a competitive and regulated market environment.

Multan Chamber and Police Pledge Joint Security Boost for Business

Kiran Asim

MULTAN: Continuous communication will be maintained between Multan Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Police Department for the improvement of security and business environment. Mian Bakhtawar Tanveer Sheikh, President Multan Chamber, RPO Multan Usman Akram Gondal and CPO Multan Sadiq Ali Dogar visited the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Multan. Mian Bakhtawar Tanveer Sheikh, President Multan Chamber of Commerce and Industry met with him.

Former President Khawaja Muhammad Hussain identified issues related to police station culture and stressed the need for a more people-



friendly and business-friendly policing system. He appreciated the personal interest of senior police officers and hoped that their active role is bringing positive results. The participants generally appre-

ciated the efforts of RPO Multan and CPO Multan to maintain law and order and ensure public safety. The police officers assured full cooperation and reiterated their commitment to resolve the problems

of the business community on priority basis. The meeting was attended by Mian Rashid Iqbal, Khawaja Sohail Tufail, Sheikh Asim Saeed, Iftikhar Ali Shah and Secretary General MCCI Muhammad Shafiq.

Supply chain attacks emerged as a top threat for businesses in past year: Kaspersky

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: Kaspersky's recent study* on supply chain and trusted relationship risks showed that supply chain attacks have emerged as a top threat for businesses, with every third organization hit by such an attack over the past year. Study has identified the lack of qualified IT security workers and the need for global organizations to prioritize various security tasks to mitigate the risk of supply chain and trusted relationship attacks. Both factors are cited by nearly half (42%) of the respondents.

According to the survey, one of the key barriers to reducing supply chain and trusted relationship risks is the lack of a qualified workforce. Among other primary obstacles, respondents noted the need to juggle multiple cybersecurity priorities. This reflects the fact that security teams are stretched across too many tasks at once, which might leave supply



chain threats unaddressed.

Beyond resource constraints, respondents also point to structural issues: 39% say

their contracts lack clear IT security obligations for contractors. Further 32% note that nonIT security staff often do not fully under-

stand these risks.

Globally, according to the survey, an overwhelming 85% of businesses admit their organizations need to upgrade protection against supply chain and trusted relationship risks, with only 15% of enterprises considering their current security measures effective.

At the same time, the results of the survey showed that current mitigation practices for third-party risks remain fragmented, with no way of protection getting more than 40% of current adopters. Even the most common protective measure, two-factor authentication, is used by only 38% of respondents. In addition, only 35% of organizations conduct regular reviews of contractors' cybersecurity postures. As a result, nearly two thirds of businesses lack ongoing visibility into the security of their partners, leaving them exposed to evolving vulnerabilities across their ecosystems.

CocaCola Pakistan Recognized with Two Sustainability Awards



Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: CocaCola Pakistan received two awards at the 15th International Summit on Corporate Social Responsibility, recognizing its work in water stewardship and sustainability innovation. The company was presented with the Excellence in Water Stewardship Award and the Innovation in Sustainability Award.

The awards were presented by the summit's chief guest, Syed Mustafa Kamal, Federal Minister for National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination, and received by Dr. Faisal Hashmi, Senior Director of Public Affairs, Communications, and Sustainability at CocaCola Pakistan. Speaking at the event, Dr. Hashmi said the recognition reflected the company's ongoing efforts to contribute to Pakistan's sustainability objectives.

The summit brought together senior representatives from a wide range of international and national organizations, including Mondelez, Engro, KFC, Toyota, Martin Dow, Telenor, Abbott, Novo Nordisk, Packages Limited, Lucky Core, National Bank, and Bank Alfalah. The International CSR Summit is an annual forum that convenes leaders from government, industry, and development sectors to recognize corporate initiatives and discuss emerging trends in sustainable business practices in Pakistan.

CM Punjab encourages cricketers at PSL Opening Match in Lahore

Tahir Amin Malik

LAHORE: Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif visited Gaddafi Stadium to support players during the opening match of the Pakistan Super League. She was warmly received by Mohsin Naqvi and other officials upon her arrival.

During the visit, she met with the owners of all eight teams, extended her best wishes, and interacted with both local and international players, appreciating their commitment to the game. She was also introduced to players from Hyderabad Kings and Lahore Qalandars, and joined them for a group photograph.

Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif paid tribute to foreign players



participating in the league and praised the organizers for successfully hosting the tournament despite challenging

circumstances. She expressed her desire to see Pakistan emerge as a cricketing superpower and highlighted the

unifying strength of sports. Meeting legendary cricketer Wasim Akram, who brought the PSL trophy onto the field,



she remarked that while fans may be physically distant from the stadium, their connection with cricket remains strong.

Emphasizing the importance of peace and youth engagement, she stated that the government aims to promote

sports over conflict, adding that young people should hold bats and balls in their hands, not weapons.

Pakistan Super League Cricket Edition 11

Asim Tanveer

LAHORE: Hyderabad Kingsmen lost in their PSL debut match. Defending champions Lahore Qalandars made their ambitions clear by winning the first match of PSL 11 by 69 runs.

The HBL PSL 2026 has started at the Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore. It was a strange step to have PSL 11 in their own country without cricket fans behind closed doors, but it is only the PCB that can take such decisions.

Shaheen Shah Afridi won the toss from his opponent captain Marnus Labuschagne and announced to bat first and set a match-winning total of 199 runs on the scoreboard. After an opening start of 84 runs in 8 overs, such a total was bound to be made. Mohammad Naem 30, Abdullah Shafiq 4 and Fakhar Zaman were out for 53 runs off 39 balls. There were 10 fours in their innings. Parvez Hussain made 14 and Haseebullah Khan made 40. The impor-



tant thing was that Sikandar Raza scored 24 runs off 10 balls and Shaheen Afridi



scored 12 runs off two balls to regulate the score. At one point, the score was only 131 in 16 overs.

For Hyderabad Kingsmen, Riley Meredith took 39 runs and Hassan Khan took two wickets each for 30 runs. Mohammad Ali was hit for 50 runs in three overs. Labo Shane gave away 26 runs in three overs.

In reply, the Hyderabad Kings team was playing PSL for the first time, but some of its players had played before. Despite this, their start was disastrous. At

65 runs, half the team was sitting in the pavilion watching the match and this was the fans' place as fans were not allowed. Usman Khan scored 9, Saim Ayub 17 and Kaushal Perera returned to the pavilion after scoring one run. Irfan Khan scored four and Labuschagne, who is the captain, was out for 26 runs. The sixth wicket fell at a score of 84 when Hassan Khan was caught on 14.

After this, Rizwan Mahmood was out for 8 and Hammad Azam for 10. Akif Javed could make one. The Hyderabad Kingsmen team was bowled out for 130 runs in 20 overs. Thus, Lahore Qalandars won the first match by a huge margin of 69 runs.

For Qalandars, Haris Rauf took two wickets for just 22 runs in four overs. Sikandar Raza took two wickets for 27 runs in four overs. Obaid Shah took two wickets for 27 runs in 4 overs. Shaheen Shah Afridi took a single wicket for 28 runs in 4 overs. Mustafizur Rahman took one wicket for 19 runs in four overs.

India set to host Australia for five-match Test series in 2026-27 season

India will host Australia in a high-profile five-match Test series starting January next year to end the 2026/27 home season, the country's cricket board announced on Thursday.

"The season will culminate with the prestigious and much-anticipated Border-Gavaskar Trophy, featuring a five-match Test series against Australia, beginning on January 21, 2027, in Nagpur," the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said.

"The contest will then move to Chennai, Guwahati, Ranchi and Ahmedabad," the board said.

India suffered a 2-0 Test whitewash against South Africa at home last year and are placed sixth in the World Test Championship (WTC) table, led by Australia.

India's home season will begin with a white-ball series, comprising three one-day matches and five T20 Internationals against the West Indies, starting on September 27.

The cricketing powerhouse will host Sri Lanka in December 2026 for a white-ball series, comprising three ODIs and three T20Is.

Zimbabwe will be in India for three 50-over matches in January.

National Women's T20 Tournament Kicks Off March 27 Led by Star Captains

Tahir Amin Malik

LAHORE: The five-team National Women's T20 Tournament 2025-26 will begin on Friday, 27 March with defending champions Stars taking on Challengers at the Ghani Glass Cricket Ground. The first ball of the match will be bowled at 10am, with the toss to take place at 9.30am.

Stars will be led by Pakistan international leg-spinner Tuba Hassan, while Challengers will be captained by right-arm fast bowler Diana Baig, who has represented Pakistan in 128 international matches.

The other three teams in the tournament are Conquerors, Invincibles and Strikers. Last year's finalists Conquerors will be led by Pakistan white-ball captain Fatima Sana, while wicketkeeper-batter Muneeba Ali, who has two T20I centuries to her name, will captain Invincibles. Left-arm spinner Nashra Sundhu, who has taken 184 international wickets will lead Strikers.

A total of 80 players will feature in the tournament, with each of the five teams comprising 16 players in their squads for the 17-day event.

The prize pot for the tournament is PKR 3.3 million, with the winners receiving PKR 1.5 million, while the runners-up will get PKR one million.

The tournament provides players an opportunity to stake a claim for national selection, as Pakistan women's upcoming international assignments include a home bilateral series against Zimbabwe, a T20I tri-series in Ireland, and the ICC Women's T20 World Cup scheduled to take place in England and Wales from 12 June to 5 July.

As defending champions, we will look to play good cricket and take the team forward.

"With experience players like Sidra Ameen in the side, I will continue to learn from my seniors and also implement the guidance provided by our coaches to achieve positive results for the team."

Nashra Sundhu, Strikers: "I am fortunate to have a mix of senior and junior players in the side. I will try to support the younger players, guide them in different match situations and help them grow.

"Our objective is to implement our plans in domestic cricket and

prepare players for international challenges, including series against Zimbabwe and tour to Ireland. We want players to have clarity in their roles and be ready for those opportunities."

Challengers: Diana Baig (captain) (Gilgit), Aman Fatima (Khaneval), Arijah Haseeb (Karachi), Eman Naseer (Islamabad), Eyman Fatima (Lahore), Natalia Parvaiz (Bhimber), Neelam Mushtaq (Lahore), Rameen Shamim (Karachi), Rehmat Noreen (Bahawalpur), Sana Talib (Bahawalpur), Shawaal Zulfiqar (Lahore), Sidra Nawaz (Lahore), Syeda Masooma Zehra (Karachi) (head coach), Shakir Qayum (assistant coach), Ramzan Silachi (strength & conditioning coach) and Tehreem Sumbal (physio)

Support staff: Umaid Asif (mentor), Maria Gulnaz (manager), Shoaib Khan (head coach), Shaker Qayum (assistant coach), Ramzan Silachi (strength & conditioning coach) and Tehreem Sumbal (physio)

Conquerors: Fatima Sana (captain) (Karachi), Aleena Shah (Peshawar), Anosha Nasir (Karachi), Aqsa Bibi (Multan),

Areesha Noor (Lahore), Ayesha Zafar (Lahore), Ghulam Fatima (Lahore), Gull Rukh (DG Khan), Hafsa Khalid (Karachi), Komal Khan (Lahore), Laraib Malik Aziz (Lahore), Lubna Behram (Gilgit), Noor-ul-Iman (Bahawalpur), Rida Aslam (Mirpur), Samiya Afsar (Lahore) and Yusra Amir (Karachi)

Support staff: Humayun Farhat (mentor), Najma Zafar (manager), Tahir Khan (head coach), Naeem Tayyab (assistant coach), Saira Iftikhar (strength and conditioning coach) and Lailma Maqbool (physio)

Invincibles: Muneeba Ali (captain) (Karachi), Amber Kainaat (Lahore), Farzana Farooq (Rawalpindi), Gull Feroza (Multan), Haniyah Ahmer (Karachi), Iram Javed (Lahore), Javeria Siddique (Multan), Maham Anees (Islamabad), Mahnoor Zeb (Mardan), Momina Riasat (Abbottabad), Noreen Yaqoob (Lahore), Rozina Akram (Wah Cantt), Saima Malik (Quetta), Saigra Riaz (Lahore), Syeda Aroob Shah (Karachi) and Tayyba Imdad (Abbottabad)

Support staff: Adnan Rasool (observer), Nisar Dilawari (head coach), Jaweria



Rauf (assistant coach), Haseena Khusboo (manager), Moeen Nadeem (strength & conditioning coach) and Iraj Athar (physio)

Stars: Tuba Hassan (captain) (Lahore), Aleesa Mukhtiar (Bahawalpur), Ayesha Bilal (Lahore), Ayesha Rehman (Multan), Eisha Naeem (Karachi), Huraina Sajjad (Karachi), Kaynat Hafeez (Lahore), Laiba Mansoor (Rawalpindi), Laiba Nasir (Lahore), Neha Sharmin Nadeem (Karachi), Omaira Sohail (Karachi), Samina Aftab (Bahawalpur), Sania Rasheed (Rawalpindi), Shabnam

Hayat (Karachi), Sidra Amin (Lahore) and Waheeda Akhtar (Chiniot)

Support staff: Abdul Majeed (mentor), Waseem Yousufi (head coach), Nahida Bibi (assistant coach), Zubaida Sattar (manager), Pervaiz Nabi (strength & conditioning coach) and Surakhsha Shaker (physio)

Strikers: Nashra Sundhu (captain) (Lahore), Aliya Riaz (Lahore), Aliza Sabir (Karachi), Areesha Ansari (Kasur), Dua Majid (Faisalabad), Fatima Khan (Lahore),

Fatima Zahra (Rawalpindi), Manahil Rafiq (Faisalabad), Najila Alvi (Karachi), Quratulain (Sialkot), Rabia Rani (DI Khan), Sadaf Shamas (Lahore), Saira Jabeen (Chitral), Tasnia Rubab (Jhang), Umm-e-Hani (Faisalabad) and Zaibun Nisa (Charsadda)

Support staff: Abdul Rehman (mentor), Kamran Hussain (head coach), Nouman Khan (assistant coach), Shugufra Kazmi (manager), Taimoor Mahmood (strength & conditioning coach) and Ameena Waheed (physio).

USA-Iran War: Oil, Deception, and Illusions

Continued from Page 4

Domestically, the pressure is mounting. Public opinion in the United States is shifting as the economic costs of the war become more visible. Rising inflation, job market uncertainty, and fiscal strain are fueling dissatisfaction. Media narratives are increasingly questioning the justification and objectives of the conflict. Calls for de-escalation are growing louder, creating a challenging environment for policymakers.

Adding to this complexity are concerns about market behavior during the conflict. Reports of unusually large oil futures trades occurring shortly before major policy announcements have raised questions about information asymmetry and market integrity. While such movements may reflect anticipatory trading by sophisticated investors, they contribute to a perception that economic interests are intertwined with geopolitical decisions.

The composition of the U.S. negotiating team has also become a point of contention. Iran has expressed reservations about individuals perceived as closely aligned with Israeli interests, arguing that their presence

undermines the credibility of mediation efforts. Adjustments, including greater involvement of senior officials such as Vice President JD Vance, have been considered to address these concerns. However, rebuilding trust remains a formidable challenge.

Taken together, these dynamics create a powerful matrix of pressure on U.S. policy. Economically, the war is straining both domestic and international systems. Diplomatically, it is isolating Washington from traditional allies. Strategically, it is entangling U.S. forces in a complex and potentially prolonged conflict. Politically, it is eroding public support.

At the same time, Iran appears prepared for a long war. Its strategy is not to seek immediate ceasefire but to endure, escalate selectively, and leverage its geographic and strategic advantages. By threatening key chokepoints and maintaining pressure on adversaries, Iran is positioning itself as a resilient actor capable of imposing significant costs.

The risk, however, extends far beyond the immediate participants. A prolonged conflict could trigger a global economic downturn, disrupt supply chains, and exacerbate infla-

tion worldwide. Energy shortages, rising prices, and financial instability could push vulnerable economies into recession and deepen global inequality.

In this context, the current mediation efforts resemble less a pathway to peace and more a strategic pause—one that masks ongoing preparation for further escalation. The illusion of diplomacy cannot indefinitely conceal the realities of war.

If a genuine resolution is to emerge, it will require a fundamental shift: from maximalist demands to realistic compromise, from strategic maneuvering to genuine engagement, and from unilateral pressure to mutual recognition of sovereignty and security concerns.

Until then, the world remains caught in a dangerous paradox—where the language of peace coexists with the machinery of war, and where every pause may simply be the prelude to a more devastating confrontation.

The writer is Press Secretary to the President (Rtd), Former Press Minister, Embassy of Pakistan to France, Former Press Attaché to Malaysia and Former MD, SRBC. He is living in Macomb, Michigan.

Energy Crisis Triggered by the Blockade of the Strait of Hormuz: Implications and Strategic Pathways for Pakistan

Continued from Page 4

leave it exposed to supply shocks. Building storage capacity for at least 60-90 days of consumption should be treated as a national security priority.

On the demand side, immediate efficiency measures can yield tangible benefits. Government-led conservation initiatives, including reduced working hours and restrictions on non-essential energy use, have already demonstrated potential. However, these must evolve into long-term behavioural and technological changes, including energy-efficient industrial practices and urban planning reforms.

The most compelling pathway, however, lies in accelerating the transition toward renewable energy. Encouragingly, Pakistan has already made notable progress. As of 2024, solar energy accounts for nearly 20% of the national grid, driven largely by decentralized rooftop installations. This shift has helped the country avoid approxi-

mately \$ U.S 12 billion in fuel imports, providing a crucial buffer against global price shocks.

Considering the scenario that Strait of Hormuz predicament indicates no signs of an imminent resolve—crude oil prices surpassed \$ U.S 100 per barrel on 8 March, and Iran has indicated it will keep the strait closed to US, Israeli, and Western-allied shipping, the PN may need to sustain Operation Muhafiz-ul-Bahr for weeks or months. Moreover, Pakistan must address structural inefficiencies within its energy sector. Circular debt, transmission losses, and weak governance continue to undermine financial sustainability. Without institutional reform, even increased energy supply will fail to translate into reliable and affordable access.

It is the right time for Pakistan to assert its rightful response and must complete the Iran Pakistan Gas Pipeline at the earliest. More over Islamabad must adopt such policies to make a pragmatic and a prudent use

of Gwadar Port in such eventualities. Finally, regional energy integration offers a strategic advantage. Projects such as cross-border electricity trade and gas pipelines, despite geopolitical challenges, can diversify supply sources and stabilize long-term energy availability.

In conclusion, the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz has laid bare the vulnerabilities of Pakistan's energy architecture. However, it has also created a critical inflection point. With nearly 80 to 90% dependence on imported energy routed through a single chokepoint, the risks of inaction are no longer theoretical—they are immediate and severe.

Pakistan's response must therefore be decisive and multidimensional. By combining short-term mitigation strategies with long-term structural reforms particularly in renewable energy, supply diversification, and institutional governance the country can transform this crisis into an opportunity for resilience and self-reliance.

ECC Meeting

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, chairing a meeting of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) at the Finance Division, on Thursday.



Photo: PID

ECC approves Rs. 100 billion TSG for PM's Austerity Fund 2026

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet met today at the Finance Division under the chairmanship of the Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb.

The ECC considered and approved a summary submitted by the Finance Division seeking a Technical Supplementary Grant (TSG) of Rs. 100 billion for onward transfer to the Prime Minister's Austerity Fund 2026. The Committee

was informed that, in light of evolving developments in the Gulf region and their potential impact on international petroleum prices, the Prime Minister had directed the mobilization of Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) resources to meet price differential requirements on petroleum products and to cushion consumers from price volatility.

During the discussion, the ECC noted that the proposed allocation is being met through rationalization and surrender of PSDP funds by

various ministries and divisions, as coordinated by the Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Division in consultation with Principal Accounting Officers. It was emphasized that the reallocation exercise has been undertaken to minimize disruption to priority and well-performing projects while creating the required fiscal space. The Committee also took note that initial surrenders have already been received and the remaining adjustments are being finalized to meet the overall requirement.

The ECC also considered a summary submitted by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research regarding procurement of wheat for federal strategic reserves under the Interim National Wheat Policy (INWP) 2025-26 through private sector participation. The Committee was apprised of the current supply and demand outlook, including production estimates, evolving weather conditions, and existing public and private stock positions. It was noted that while projections suggest improved

crop conditions, uncertainties remain, warranting a cautious and calibrated approach to maintaining adequate reserves.

The meeting was attended by Federal Minister for Commerce Mr. Jam Kamal Khan, Federal Minister for Investment Mr. Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, and Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Mr. Rana Tanveer Hussain, who all participated virtually, along with federal secretaries and senior officials from the relevant ministries, divisions and regulatory authorities.

Saudi Ambassador praises Pakistan's responsible diplomacy amid Iran-related Gulf attacks

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Saudi Ambassador Nawaf bin Saeed Al-Malki praised Pakistan's responsible stance and consistent diplomatic efforts, highlighting the country's positive role in promoting regional peace.

Addressing recent concerns, he described Iranian attacks on Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries as alarming acts of unjustified aggression targeting residential areas, airports, and civilian infrastructure. He emphasized that these attacks violate



international law and pose risks extending to the Strait of Hormuz, impacting global

interests, economic stability, and energy security.

The ambassador noted that the threat is not merely regional but a global humanitarian issue affecting people's lives and development rights. He stressed that regional stability is a shared responsibility, calling for respect for international law to safeguard the future.

He further commended Pakistan's actions as reflective of efforts to peacefully resolve crises, underlining the country's constructive role in strengthening regional security and stability.

Pakistan, Oman vow to expand energy partnership amid regional situation

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Oman have reaffirmed commitment to expand energy partnership amid evolving regional situation.

This resolve was expressed at a meeting between Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik and Omani Ambassador Fahad Bin Sulaiman Bin Khalaf Alkharusi in Islamabad today.

They discussed the evolving energy situation in the region and avenues for strengthening bilateral cooperation in the energy sector. Ali Pervaiz Malik reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to further expand the bilateral energy partnership and explore new areas of collaboration.

He apprised the Ambassador of Pakistan's ongoing efforts to diversify its energy imports and ensure supply resilience, particularly by exploring alternative routes and sources outside



the Strait of Hormuz in light of the changing regional dynamics. The Ambassador welcomed Pakistan's push towards diversification and

conveyed that Oman stands ready to support Pakistan in enhancing its energy security.

In this regard, the Minister expressed optimism that Oman would consider Pakistan's request for preferential energy cargoes to meet its growing requirements.

The Ambassador responded positively and assured that the request would be considered favourably. Meeting also discussed opportunities for enhanced cooperation in the upstream sector, including exploration and production, and underscored the importance of expanding collaboration in oil and gas development projects.

It was noted that Pakistan State Oil and Oman Trading International are also engaged in constructive discussions to explore the possibility of additional oil cargoes to help meet Pakistan's energy demand.

PM lauds China's economic support; reaffirms commitment to advance CPEC 2.0



Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday appreciating China's steadfast economic support, reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to advancing CPEC 2.0, with a focus on agriculture, industrial cooperation, and priority infrastructure projects.

The prime minister, in a meeting with the Chinese Ambassador in Pakistan Jiang Zaidong here, emphasized continued close coordination at all levels on issues of mutual interest while reaffirming the enduring Pakistan-China All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Special Assistant to PM Syed Tariq Fatemi, and the Foreign Secretary also attended the meeting.

The prime minister felicitated the Chinese leadership on the successful conclusion of the "Two Sessions" and thanked President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Qiang, and Foreign Minister Wang Yi for their warm Pakistan Day greetings.

Ambassador Jiang commended Pakistan's economic resilience and reform efforts, and reaffirmed China's continued support, particularly in trade and investment.

Both sides expressed satisfaction at ongoing exchanges and looked forward to high-level engagements to mark the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations.

Prime Minister Shehbaz also highlighted Pakistan's constructive role in promoting de-escalation and regional stability while discussing the regional situation.

PTI Punjab organiser Aliya Hamza arrested in Lahore

Bureau Report

LAHORE: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Punjab Chief Organiser Aliya Hamza was arrested in Lahore, police sources confirmed on Thursday.

She was taken into custody from her residence in the Defence area and shifted to Shadman police station, where a case had already been registered against her.

Sources said she was later moved from the station to an undisclosed location. No official statement has yet been issued by authorities regarding her transfer.

Aliya Hamza had previously



been convicted in multiple cases linked to the May 9 incidents and was sentenced to 10 years in each case. Further legal proceedings are expected.

Islamabad court issues non-bailable warrants against KP CM Sohail Afridi

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: The district and sessions court of Islamabad on Thursday issued non-bailable arrest warrants for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi in a case related to levelling allegations against state institutions.

The court also directed authorities to arrest him and present him at the next hearing.

The case was heard by Senior Civil Judge Abbas Shah.

During the hearing, the court noted the absence of Sohail Afridi and ordered the issuance of non-bailable warrants.

According to the case details, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chief minister is accused of making statements that allegedly misled the public and damaged the reputation of state institutions.

The case has been registered under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) by the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA).

The court directed law enforcement authorities to ensure the arrest of the accused and his appearance before the court.

Following the proceedings, the judge adjourned the hearing until April 9 for further action.

Pakistan stresses on reducing regional tensions, calls for ceasefire

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office emphasized on Thursday on reducing tensions in the region and called for a ceasefire, stating that Pakistan is actively playing its role for peace in the region.

Foreign Office spokesperson Tahir Hussain Andrabi, while addressing a press conference, said that Pakistan is making hectic efforts to establish peace in the Middle East, and progress is ongoing at the diplomatic level in this regard.

According to the spokesperson, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is in continuous contact with leaders of various countries. He held detailed



discussions with the Saudi Crown Prince on the current situation and also exchanged views with the President of Iran. In addition, diplomatic engagement has been established with several countries, including Norway, Saudi Arabia, and Azerbaijan.

The spokesperson further stated that the prime minister has also held talks with the leaders of Lebanon, Egypt, and Bangladesh.