



# Islamabad POST

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**Turkish envoy pays tribute to Quaid-e-Azam**

Detailed News On Page-08

**UAE envoy shares Christmas joy with children**

Detailed News On Page-03

**Konstas shines on Australia debut Test**

Detailed News On Page-08



**US, EU, UK have already raised objections**

## May 9: Mily courts sentence 60 more

Imran Khan's nephew Hassan gest 10 years rigorous imprisonment; All convicts retain the right to appeal and other legal recourses, as guaranteed by the Constitution and law

STAFF REPORT/DNA

RAWALPINDI: Sequel to the announcement of the May 9 punishments in light of the Supreme Court's decision, the Field General Court Martial has promulgated the punishments to the following remaining 60 culprits after examining all evidences, ensuring the provision of all legal rights to the convicts, completion of due process and the appropriate legal proceedings.

1. Hassan Khan Niazi s/o Hafizullah Niazi, 10 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Jinnah House incident.
2. Mian Abbad Farooq s/o Amanat Ali, 2 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Jinnah House incident.
3. Raees Ahmed s/o Shafi Ullah, 6 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Jinnah House incident.
4. Arzam Junaid s/o Junaid Razzaq, 6 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Jinnah House incident.
5. Ali Raza s/o Ghulam Mustafa, 6 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Jinnah House incident.
6. Raja Danish s/o Raja Abdul Waheed, 4 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in GHQ attack incident.
7. Syed Hassan Shah s/o Asif Hussain Shah, 9 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in GHQ attack incident.
8. Ali Hussain s/o Khalil ur Rehman, 7 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in AIMH Rawalpindi attack incident.
9. Zahid Khan s/o Muhammad Nabi, 2 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in PRC Mardan incident.
10. Sohrab Khan s/o Riaz Khan, 4 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in HQ Dir Scouts

**May 9 events**

### PTI to file appeals against sentences

Military trials should only be conducted for those who are in uniform or retired personnel

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Barrister Gohar stated that PTI founder Imran Khan and the party leadership condemned the May 9 events. Barrister Gohar said that a judicial commission should be formed to determine who was involved in the May 9 incident and how accountability can be ensured. He added that a fair trial conducted through the judicial commission would be acceptable to all. The PTI chairman further mentioned that PTI had already filed a petition in the Supreme Court to form a judicial commission. He reiterated PTI's principled stance that civilians should not be tried in military courts. Barrister Gohar expressed hope that the Supreme Court would rule in favour of civilians, stating that trying civilians in military courts is unconstitutional. He clarified that military trials should only be conducted for those who are in uniform or retired personnel.

Timergara incident.

11. Brig (Retd) Javed Akram s/o Chaudhary Muhammad Akram, 6 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Jinnah House incident.
12. Khuram Liaqat s/o Liaqat Ali Shahid, 4 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Multan Cantt Checkpost incident.
13. Zakir Hussain s/o Shah Faisal, 7 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Chakdara Fort incident.
14. Ameen Shah s/o Mashter Khan, 9 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Bannu Cantt incident.

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### PM Shehbaz phones Azeri President

Tells him that the entire Pakistani nation shared the sorrow of the brotherly people of Azerbaijan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister condoles with President Ilham Aliyev over the tragic plane crash Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif spoke with the President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan on telephone this evening and conveyed his heartfelt condolences and Pakistan's solidarity with the people of Azerbaijan on the loss of precious lives in the tragic Azal Airlines crash on 25 December, 2024. The Prime Minister said that the entire Pakistani nation shared the sorrow of the brotherly people of Azerbaijan and was praying to Allah the Almighty for the bereaved families, as well as for speedy recovery of the injured. He said that the brotherly people of Azerbaijan would certainly overcome this tragedy, with their exemplary resilience and strength. Recalling the excellent bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries, the Prime Minister assured President Aliyev that Pakistan was ready to extend any support required by Azerbaijan at this challenging time. President Aliyev thanked the Prime Minister for his support and solidarity in the wake of the tragic incident. He said that this thoughtful gesture was reflective of the enduring bonds of friendship between the two nations, which had always stood by each other through thick and thin. Both leaders reaffirmed their strong commitment and resolve to further strengthen the strong bonds of friendship between Pakistan and Azerbaijan. Earlier, the Prime Minister also paid a visit to the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Islamabad to pen his remarks and sign the condolence book opened by Azerbaijan in memory of yesterday's tragic plane crash.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif meets the Ambassador of Azerbaijan Khadar Farhadov at the Embassy of Azerbaijan to offer his condolences for the unfortunate accident of an Azeri airplane in Aktau, Kazakhstan. - DNA

### Sought enhanced security coop

## Strikes on Afghan border conducted on 'authentic intelligence'

FO says 2024 remained an active year for Pakistan's diplomatic and foreign policy landscapes

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office (FO) on Thursday said that Pakistani forces conduct "operations in border areas to protect the people of Pakistan from terrorist groups", a day after the Taliban administration accused the country of carrying out an airstrike on its territory on Tuesday. Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have been strained due to frequent border skirmishes and Islamabad repeatedly demanding Kabul to take action against the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) for using Afghan soil to launch attacks in Pakistan. Kabul denies the allegations. The FO spokesperson's statement - the first formal word by the government on the matter - comes after Pakistan carried out air strikes in the neighbouring country on Tuesday, which security officials said

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### Russian envoy spells out conditions for talks with Ukraine

Russian envoy said that their key points include the withdrawal of Ukrainian armed formations from the new Russian regions

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Russia to Pakistan, Albert P. Khorev on Thursday said that Russia has been trying to find a peaceful, political and diplomatic solution to the crisis in Ukraine, but unfortunately, these efforts have

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## Briefs

### Major martyred, 13 Khawarij killed

Major Mohammad Owais was martyred while bravely fighting during the intense firefight

DNA

RAWALPINDI: On 25-26 December 2024, thirteen Khawarij were sent to hell in three separate engagements in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. On reported presence of Khawarij, an intelligence based operation was conducted by the Security Forces in general area Jani Khel, Bannu District. During the conduct of operation, own troops effectively engaged the khawarij location and resolutely, two Khawarij were sent to hell. Another intelligence based operation was conducted in North Waziristan District. In ensuing fire exchange, five Khawarij were effectively neutralised by security forces, while eight khawarij got injured.

### Rasheed challenges indictment

He claimed that none of the 95 witnesses in the case had identified him

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: Former interior minister and Awami Muslim League chief Sheikh Rasheed Thursday challenged his indictment in the GHQ attack case. Rasheed filed plea in the Supreme Court through his lawyer Sardar Abdul Razzaq Khan. In his petition, Sheikh Rasheed argued that there is no solid evidence against him to support the imposition of charges. He claimed that none of the 95 witnesses in the case had identified him, and he was not named in the FIR. Sheikh Rasheed further asserted that he had no involvement in the GHQ attack case.

### After meeting Imran

## PTI 'sets' deadline for completion of talks

"Imran Khan ready to forgive everyone for ill-treatment he suffered for the sake of Pakistan," says Hamid Raza

KHAYAM ABBASI

RAWALPINDI: The negotiation committee of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has set January 31, 2025 timeframe for the ongoing negotiations with the government to reach a "logical conclusion", reiterating the demands of judicial probe into May 9 riots and November 26 late-night crackdown and release of "political prisoners". "PTI founder [Imran Khan] is ready to forgive everyone for all the ill-treatment he has suffered for the sake of Pakistan," Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) chief Sahibzada Hamid Raza said while speaking to journalists after meeting the incarcerated former prime minister. The PTI negotiators briefed Imran on the first round of talks, held on Monday, and consulted him on future strategy, sources told Geo News. After months of heightened political tensions, the embattled former ruling party and the government finally held their first round of dialogue this week. The inaugural meeting, on the government's part, was attended by

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### Karachi Bar challenges 26th Amendment

The Bar has also pleaded cancellation of the constitutional benches

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Karachi Bar Association has challenged the 26th Constitutional Amendment in the Supreme Court of Pakistan on Thursday. Faisal Siddiqui advocate has filed petition in the apex court on behalf of the Karachi Bar seeking abrogation of the amendment. The Bar has also pleaded cancellation of the constitutional benches formed under the 26th Amendment and their decisions. Petitioner argued that the constitutional legislation has been

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### KP terms 100 children's deaths in Kurram 'fabricated'

Barrister Saif says all essential commodities being provided to Kurram residents on a priority basis

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government spokesperson Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif has termed the report of 100 children's deaths because of a shortage of medicines in violence-hit district

Continued on Page 06

## Pakistan's tax gap balloons to over Rs 7 trillion

Rashid Mahmood Langrial says action will be taken against those failing to submit their tax returns

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Amid Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's government's strenuous efforts to expand the tax net and increase revenue generation, Federal Bureau of Revenue (FBR) Chairman Rashid Mahmood Langrial has revealed that the country faces a mammoth tax gap of Rs7.1 trillion. Speaking at a press conference in Islamabad on Thursday, the FBR chief said that the income tax gap stood at Rs2.4 trillion. Underscoring the reforms in the tax sector, Langrial revealed that the tax authority issued notices to 19,000 people, out of which 38,000 submitted their tax returns amounting to Rs370.7 million. "Our focus is on the top five per cent," he said while warning that action would be taken against those who didn't file their tax returns. Flanked by Federal Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, State Minister for Finance and Revenue Ali Pervaiz Malik and Information Minister Attaullah Tarar, the FBR chairman underscored the reforms in the tax sector, saying that the authority was digitising the invoicing process and was digitally monitoring the sugar industry.

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### Imran admits govt stabilised economy

'Economy has been stabilised, and it has been saved from bankruptcy, but it has not seen growth yet': Imran Khan

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Imran Khan, founding chairman of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), has acknowledged that the current government has managed to stabilise Pakistan's struggling economy, which was on the verge of collapse. While speaking to the media from Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail, Imran stated, "The government has successfully prevented the economy from becoming bankrupt." When questioned by journalists about whether he was conceding that the government had improved the economy, Imran responded,

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## Benazir remembered forever in people's hearts: Kundi

PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, on Thursday expressed that the memory of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto will forever remain etched in the hearts of the people. In a statement at the eve of 17th martyrdom anniversary of Benazir Bhutto, Governor Kundi said, "On December 27th, we are reminded of the martyrdom of a great leader who sacrificed her life, leaving a beacon of light for the people of Pakistan." He emphasized that her sacrifice continues to inspire and guide the nation, and her legacy will never be forgotten. The sacrifice of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto taught us that everything can be sacrificed in the love for the country, he added. Governor Kundi emphasized that the memory of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto will always remain alive in our hearts. He said that December 27th marks a tragic chapter in Pakistan's history, when Benazir Bhutto, with her blood, tried to write the country's destiny. He further said that after her martyrdom, we realized that her dream, struggle, and determination continue to empower us to move forward. Today, we remember her sacrifice and pledge to follow her path, striving to give Pakistan the position it deserves, said Faisal Karim Kundi. He called December 27th a grievous tragedy that deprived Pakistan of its unparalleled leader. Governor Kundi reiterated that the martyrdom of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto was not just a sacrifice of one individual, but became an integral part of Pakistan's destiny. He also remarked that the spirit of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto remains with us, and we are ready to sacrifice even our lives to make her dream a reality.—APP

## Efforts afoot to empower youth: Mashood

LAHORE: Chairman Prime Minister's Youth Programme Rana Mashood Ahmed Khan said on Thursday that the government was providing equal opportunities to the youth to move forward. "There was immense talent in Pakistan's IT sector and we will bring next year's budget without IMF," he said, while addressing an awards ceremony organised by Assort Tech Private Limited (IT Company) at a local hotel here. A large number of IT experts associated with the company, including Assort Tech Chief Executive Officer Aftab Ahmad, Senior Vice President Engineer Khalid Usman, COO Usama Ali Khan and Motivational Speaker Qasim Ali Shah were present on the occasion. Addressing the ceremony, Rana Mashood Ahmed Khan said that Prime Minister Muhammad Shabbaz Sharif had a vision that Pakistan's IT industry should be improved in every way, the government's job was not to do business but to help business people.—APP

## Paintings exhibition showcases mountain heritage, landscape

RAWALPINDI: The Punjab Arts Council Rawalpindi and Devcom-Pakistan jointly organized a painting exhibition titled "Mountain Heritage and Landscape" on Thursday at the Rawalpindi Arts Gallery, in connection with the 14th Pakistan Mountain Festival. The festival is a signature initiative aimed at mainstreaming mountain challenges and celebrating the rich cultural and environmental heritage of Pakistan's mountainous regions. The exhibition featured an impressive array of artworks created by talented artists and students. The exhibits reflected the vibrant cultural heritage, traditional architecture, and sports associated with Pakistan's mountainous communities. Artists employed a variety of mediums, offering diverse perspectives on the theme. The event served as a visual celebration of mountain life and an artistic reminder of the urgent need to preserve this invaluable heritage in the face of environmental



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Science & Technology Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui along with Coordinator General COMSTECH Prof. Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Choudary visited Embassy Of Palestine.

## Randhawa wants rapid development in Islamabad's sectors

Chairman CDA stressed that the pace of development must be accelerated to meet these goals. During the briefing, progress on various sectors was discussed in detail

### DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) Muhammad Ali Randhawa on Thursday issued clear directives to expedite development across Islamabad's key sectors. The meeting, held on Thursday, included CDA Members and senior officials, and focused on overcoming delays in sector de-

velopment projects. Chairman Randhawa highlighted the urgency of meeting Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi's directives, which call for timely project completion and swift handover of possession to allottees. He stressed that the pace of development must be accelerated to meet these goals. During the briefing, progress on various sectors was discussed in detail. For Sector C-14, Chairman Randhawa directed that develop-

ment activities be expedited, with possession handed over before the final installment is paid. Officials reported that over 85% of road infrastructure and 35% of drainage and sewerage works in the sector are already complete. In Sectors C-15 and C-16, Chairman Randhawa instructed officials to prioritize resolving legal and Built-Up Property (BUP) issues, emphasizing that these hurdles must not delay

progress. Turning to Sector I-12, he called for the immediate initiation of possession handovers. The meeting was informed that 78% of development work in this sector has been completed, with the remaining work expected to wrap up soon. For Sector E-12, progress in Sub-sectors E-12/2 and E-12/1 was reviewed. Chairman Randhawa directed the Member Estate to devise a comprehensive strategy to re-

solve BUP issues in the area. he development of Sectors C-13, D-13, E-13, and F-13 also came under review. Chairman Randhawa urged the Engineering and Estate Wings to swiftly eliminate obstacles and assured officials of his personal visits to monitor progress. Reiterating CDA's commitment to Islamabad's urban development, Chairman Randhawa said the Authority aims to provide modern infrastructure

## OGDCL enhances oil production from Pasakhi-5 Well

ISLAMABAD: Oil & Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL), Pakistan's largest exploration and production company, has successfully revived and enhanced oil production from the Pasakhi-5 well, located in Hyderabad district of Sindh. According to a new release, the well is part of the Pasakhi Development & Production Lease (D&PL), with OGDCL holding a 100% working interest. As part of a strategic optimization initiative, OGDCL deployed a rig to install an artificial lift system (ESP) at the well to enhance oil production. Previously, the well was producing 480 barrels of oil per day (BPD) on natural flow. Following the installation, oil production from the well has increased significantly to 900 BPD, marking an impressive increase of 420 BPD. OGDCL's initiative aligns with its broader strategy to optimize energy output and ensure sustainable energy supply, contributing to Pakistan's energy security and economic growth.—APP

## Cycle rally in solidarity with Gaza people ends in Lahore

ISLAMABAD: Haroon General and Hamza Niazi undertook a 300 km ride from Islamabad to Lahore on Thursday (25 December) via the Grand Trunk Road to express solidarity with the people of Palestine. The rally was sponsored by Bank Alfalah and CanOlive; whereas this event was held in collaboration with the Gaza Sunbirds, a para-cycling group from Palestine. The ride commenced from Faisal Mosque, Islamabad, when cyclists arrived in Jhelum, additional cyclists joined in to demonstrate their commitment to stand with the people of Palestine during these challenging times, the press release said on Thursday. A cyclist who participated in the event, Haroon General, stated, "The ride is all about endurance, but it is nothing compared to what the people of Palestine and Gaza have to endure due to the occupation and the ongoing genocide. We want them to know that they are always in our thoughts and prayers." Another rider, Hamza Niazi, added, "The people of Palestine have shown the world what courage is, and this is our little dedication to them.—APP

## Parveen Shakir remembered on 30th death anniversary

Floral wreaths laid on late poetess' grave by PST, FTO, Pakistan Customs & PAL

### STAFF REPORT

Poets, writers, former colleagues and members of the Parveen Shakir Trust (PST) led by Chairperson of the trust Mrs Parveen Qadir Agha observed on Thursday 30th death anniversary of their dear colleague and Pakistan's prominent poet Parveen Shakir who breathed her last on Dec 26, 1994 after she succumbed to her injuries in a fatal accident. They gathered at her grave to offer Fateha and pay respects to the departed poet. A contingent of the Pakistan Customs and a delegation of the Pakistan Academy of Letters also joined the mourners and laid floral wreaths on her grave in the H-8 graveyard. Besides, a large number of the fans of Parveen Shakir's poetry also turned up at the grave and recited her popular couplets. They called her a trendsetter who gave voice to women's sensibilities in her poems. Even today, she is considered a symbol of women empowerment and a role model



for the young emerging women writers and poets. Among Parveen Shakir's former colleagues who had arrived to pay their respects included ex-collector Customs, Najeeb Rehman Abbasi, Income Tax group's retired officer Muhammad Siddique, Shalimar Recording Company's Mr Anwar Jahangiri, Registrar of the FTO, Khalid Javed, Director General (DG) Khuldoonul Haq, ex-Member Customs,

Salman Nabi, another colleague from the Customs Group Zafar Baig and Director Administration Farhan Khan. Eminent poet Mehbub Zafar and Director General of the PAL, Sultan Nasir also laid floral wreath and offered Fateha there. Members of the PST Riffat Haider, Dr Rubina Siddique, Seema Anwar and Muneeza Syed also paid glowing tributes to Parveen Shakir on the occasion. They pledged

to relieve her memory from the trust's platform through various events such as Mushaira, Seminars, literary dialogue and above all the annual Aks-e-Khushbu Award for the best works of poetry and fiction, etc. One such event is being organized next year in February, said a PST member. Parveen Shakir's poetry collections "Khushbu" and others are among the best sellers even today.

## Military courts judgments hailed

ISLAMABAD: Adviser in the Ministry of Law and Justice Barrister Aqeel Malik has hailed judgments of the Military Courts in cases relating to the riots on May 9, 2023 and said that it will help the state establish its writ and send a strong message to miscreant. In a short statement on social media outlet X, the Adviser appreciated the sentences of imprisonment and rigorous imprisonment ranging from two to ten years and said it is a decisive step towards upholding the rule of law and maintaining order. The Adviser said accountability of the culprits of the May 9 incidents is a clear message. "Rule of law and ensuring dispensation of justice is the top priority of the state. The verdicts of the military courts fully enjoy confidence of the nation. It shows that no hurdle is acceptable in provision of justice and national commitment in ensuring the rule of law is beyond any doubt", the adviser said in his tweet. It may be worth mentioning that sentences to almost 60 accused were announced under the Field General Court Martial in cases of attack on Jinnah House, the General Headquarter, Army Institute of Military History (AIMH) Rawalpindi, Punjab Regiment Centre Mardan, Headquarter Dir Scout, Timargara, Multan Cantt Check Post, Chakdara Fort, Dir, military Installation in Bannu cant, PAF Bas Mianwali, ISI office Faisalabad and other some places. The Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court of Pakistan has permitted the Military Courts to announced judgments in cases against civilian whose proceedings are already completed.—APP

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## National Days and Armed Forces Days

### DECEMBER

- Dec 01/Romania National Day
- Dec 02/United Arab Emirates National Day
- Dec 02/Laos Republic National Day
- Dec 05/Thailand National Day
- Dec 06/Finland Independence Day
- Dec 07/India Armed Forces Flag Day
- Dec 09/Tanzania National Day
- Dec 11/Oman Armed Forces Day
- Dec 12/Kenya Independence Day
- Dec 12/Turkmenistan Neutrality Day
- Dec 16/Bahrain National Day
- Dec 16/Kazakhstan Independence Day
- Dec 18/Qatar National Day
- Dec 18/Niger National Day
- Dec 23/Philippines Armed Forces Day
- Dec 23/Japan National Day

### Hotels & Restaurants



Serena Hotel.....111 133 133  
Marriott.....051- 2826121  
Monal.....0334-5421812



Turkish Airlines.....8494949



### Emergency

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



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PIA Cargo.....9280979  
Railway Inquiry.....117  
Railway Exchange 9270831-5  
WASA Rawalpindi.5555489  
CAA.....9281092



### Hospitals

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DHQ.....5556311-4  
RGH.....9290301-7  
Holy Family.....9290322-7  
PIMS.....9261170-79  
Polyclinic.....9218300-09  
Shifa International 4603666



### Departments

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CDA.....9208301-04  
Met Office.....9250360-6  
RDA.....5555864  
TMA.....5770886  
Cantonment Board 9270151-3

### Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

## UAE envoy shares Christmas joys with school children

DNA

ISLAMABAD: UAE AMBASSADOR Hamad Obaid Alzaabi has said we celebrate the Christmas, I extend my warmest greetings to all. This festive season is a time of reflection, joy, and the reaffirmation of our shared values of love, peace, and goodwill. He expressed these views during his visit to Convent school. He said that during his recent visit to the Convent of Jesus & Mary School, he was inspired by the importance of nurturing our youth and interfaith harmony. The teachings of Jesus resonate deeply, emphasizing compassion and unity among all communities and promoting these values in our diverse society. He said the UAE and Pakistan share a strong bond rooted in mutual respect, let us renew our commitment to peace and coexistence, ensuring that everyone feels valued and included. "May this Christmas bring joy, hope, and prosperity to all. Wishing you a Merry Christmas," he concluded.



## Maqbool reaffirms Pak unwavering support for Palestinian cause

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Science, Technology and Education, Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui Thursday said that Pakistan is committed to extend practical support for the rehabilitation of educational institutions in Palestine. The minister was speaking during a meeting with the Ambassador of the State of Palestine to Pakistan, Dr. Zuhair Zaid during his visit to the Embassy of Palestine in Islamabad, accompanied by Coordinator General of COMSTECH, Prof. Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Choudhary. The federal minister reaffirmed Pakistan's unwavering support for the Palestinian cause. Sharing insights from his recent visit to Oman, he revealed discussions with educational ministers from other countries about joint actions to assist Palestine in the education sector. To further strengthen these efforts, Dr. Siddiqui stated that he has already proposed convening an extraordinary meeting of education ministers from OIC member countries in Islamabad to devise a comprehensive long-term plan for supporting Palestine. During the visit, Prof. Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Choudhary highlighted COMSTECH's initiatives aimed at supporting Palestinian youth, including the provision of 5,000 scholarships and fellowships. He elaborated on COMSTECH's commitment to fostering educational opportunities for Palestinians and strengthening their access to quality education. Ambassador of Palestine to Pakistan, Dr. Zuhair Zaid, expressed heartfelt gratitude to the government, COMSTECH, and the people of Pakistan. He acknowledged their steadfast support, emphasizing that these efforts will never be forgotten by the Palestinian people. This visit reflects Pakistan and COMSTECH's continued commitment to standing in solidarity with Palestine and contributing to its educational and institutional development.—DNA

## Rehman calls for strengthening Industry-academia linkages

DNA

ISLAMABAD: In a significant step towards fostering collaboration between academia and industry, Dr. Anis, Vice Chancellor of Riphah International University, visited the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI). The meeting served as a platform for an engaging discussion on strengthening academia-industry linkages to bridge the gap between educational institutions and the corporate sector.

The session was attended by prominent members of the ICCI, including senior executives, industry experts, and key faculty members from Riphah University. Both sides emphasized the critical role of academia-industry collaboration in enhancing research, innovation, and employability of graduates. Abdul Rehman Siddiqui, Acting President ICCI welcomed the Vice Chancellor and appreciated Riphah University's dedication to

academic excellence and societal contribution. He underscored the significance of joint ventures, internships, and research initiatives that can bring meaningful outcomes for both sectors. Dr. Anis

Senior Vice President of ICCI, emphasized the need for continuous dialogue between academia and industry. He stated that fostering a culture of collaboration would not only address skill

initiative is expected to create new opportunities for students, promote innovation, and contribute to national economic growth. The meeting concluded with a mutual commitment to maintain



highlighted the importance of aligning academic curricula with the evolving needs of the industry. He stressed that universities must not only focus on theoretical knowledge but also equip students with practical skills, entrepreneurial mindsets, and exposure to real-world challenges. Nasir Mehmood Chaudhry, Act-

gaps but also drive innovation and competitiveness in the market. During the meeting, both parties agreed to establish a formal framework for collaboration. Key areas of focus included research partnerships, capacity-building programs, internships, and organizing joint seminars and workshops. This

regular communication and work towards implementing the discussed initiatives effectively. The visit by Dr. Anis marks a significant milestone in building stronger connections between academia and industry, setting the stage for sustainable development and knowledge-driven growth.

### 2024 round-up

## Police achieves 75% reduction in serious crimes

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police has marked a significant achievement, reporting a 75% reduction in serious crimes in 2024 compared to the previous year. This milestone was shared during the annual review meeting led by Inspector General (IG) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi and Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Operations Syed Ali Raza in the federal capital, an official told APP. 2024 round-up: Islamabad Police achieves 75% reduction in serious crimes Serious crime statistics According to official data, serious crimes in Islamabad decreased from 269 cases in 2023 to 200 in 2024. This significant decline is attributed to the proactive measures and strategic planning implemented by the Operations Division. DIG Syed Ali Raza emphasized that the police's vigilant efforts, including targeted operations and improved intelligence systems, have played a pivotal role in enhancing the city's security. Arrests and recoveries The Operations Division made 24,387 arrests in various criminal cases throughout the year, recovering stolen goods valued at over Rs. 2.38 billion. The crackdown on criminal elements also led to the dismantling of 657 gangs involving 1,531 individuals. Vehicles recovered included 429 cars and 763 motorcycles. Under the "Nasha Ab Nahi" campaign, the Islamabad Police registered 1,723 cases and apprehended 1,811 individuals involved in drug trafficking. This included 45 suspects targeting educational institutions. Recovered contraband included 417 kg of hashish, 533 kg of heroin, 24 kg of crystal meth (ice), and 18,931 bottles of alcohol. Specialized units and new initiatives The introduction of specialized units such as Margalla Patrol, Ababeel Squad, and City Watchers has contributed significantly to crime prevention. These units are tasked with ensuring constant surveillance and rapid response to incidents. Achievements and challenges The Islamabad Police managed security at 1,628 law and order events during the year, with commendable dedication despite numerous challenges. Tragically, four officers embraced martyrdom in the line of duty, while 29 were recognized for their bravery and awarded medals. "Protecting the lives and property of our citizens remains our foremost responsibility. Our teams are working relentlessly to make Islamabad a model of safety," DIG Ali Raza remarked, expressing his gratitude to the force for their unwavering commitment.—DNA

## Cylinder blast in Khuzdar hotel claims one life

ISLAMABAD: A powerful cylinder blast ripped through inside a hotel in Wadh Bazar on Thursday morning, leaving one person dead and another injured. According to rescue sources, the blast occurred when a gas cylinder exploded inside the hotel, causing widespread destruction and chaos, as a result, one was killed on the spot, a private news channel reported. Rescue teams and police rushed to the site immediately after the blast and shifted the injured to a nearby hospital for medical treatment. The rescue efforts were led by the local administration and law enforcement agencies, who worked swiftly to evacuate the area and provide aid to those affected. The police have cordoned off the area and are collecting evidence to determine the circumstances surrounding the explosion.—DNA

## SECP ceases guarantees business of Crescent Star insurance Limited

ISLAMABAD: The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has ceased the guarantee business of Crescent Star Insurance Limited (Crescent Star) through a Direction, under section 60 of the Insurance Ordinance, 2000 (Ordinance). Crescent Star had issued guarantees amounting to Rs. 229 billion without obtaining requisite collateral and any valid reinsurance arrangements, said a press release issued here on Thursday.

In order to ensure adherence to due process of law and provide Crescent Star with an opportunity to explain its position regarding the highlighted violations of the regulatory framework, a notice was issued to it on January 31, 2024. However, the company challenged the notice in the Honourable Islamabad High Court. The Honourable Court did not grant any relief to Crescent Star and directed it to participate in the proceedings initiated by SECP.

SECP provided six opportunities of hearings to Crescent Star and four written responses were submitted by it during the proceedings. Despite these opportunities, Crescent Star failed to demonstrate the requisite compliance with regulatory requirements to carry on guarantees business including obtaining proper collateral and reinsurance arrangements.

Crescent Star's With regard to claim of Crescent Star to have obtained reinsurance arrangement against its guarantees business, SECP approached the concerned insurance company which categorically denied any such arrangement. This confirmed SECP's findings with regard to non-compliance with regulatory requirements to carry on the guarantees business and also exposed the misstatements of facts by Crescent Star Insurance.

It was concluded that guarantees business of Crescent Star was being conducted without obtaining any requisite collateral or reinsurance cover. In order to protect the integrity of the insurance sector, SECP ceased its guarantee business with the direction not to rollover existing guarantees in any form and fulfil its obligations as and when due. Crescent Star has also been required to submit a comparative statement of outstanding guarantees on monthly basis to SECP.—APP

## KS relief distributes 500 food packages to Khurram IDPs

ISLAMABAD: The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSrelief), in collaboration with the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), the Relief, Rehabilitation, and Settlement Department (RR&SD), and the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) KP, has launched a major initiative to combat food insecurity among vulnerable communities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and its merged districts. This initiative is part of the first cycle of the Food Security Support Project for 2024-25, which aims to distribute 10,000 food packages across 14 districts in KP, targeting individuals living below the poverty line. As part of this effort, 500 food packages were distributed to displaced beneficiaries from the Kurram district, who are currently residing in Tehsil Thall and facing urgent food insecurity. The distribution took place in a camp in District Hangu, providing timely relief to displaced families in need. Each food package, weighing 95 kilograms, contains 80 kilograms of flour, 5 litres of cooking oil, 5 kilograms of sugar, and 5 kilograms of Daal Chana. The distribution was carried out with full transparency in coordination with district and local authorities, with the assistance of KSrelief's implementing partner, the Peace and Development Organization (PADO). This initiative highlights KSrelief's ongoing commitment to supporting vulnerable communities and addressing food insecurity across Pakistan.—APP

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## Briefs

**ANF recovers 149 kg drugs in 7 operations**

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) in 7 operations recovered over 149 kg drugs worth over Rs 40 million and arrested 4 drug dealers, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman. He informed that 30 heroin-filled capsules were recovered from the stomach of a passenger going to Jeddah at Peshawar International Airport. In another operation, 31 intoxicated tablets were recovered from a parcel near a park in Islamabad and a suspect was arrested. 150 grams ice was recovered from a parcel sent to Australia through a courier office in Karachi. In an operation, 90 kg opium and 10 kg heroin hidden for smuggling were recovered in Chagai district, Balochistan. In 5th operation, 45 kg hashish was recovered from an uninhabited area of Coastal Line Pasni in Balochistan. 3 kg hashish was recovered from a suspect in Hyderabad. In 7th operation, 1 kg heroin and 500 grams ice were recovered from the possession of a motorcyclist intercepted near Iqbal Shaheed Toll Plaza Attock. Cases have been registered against the arrested accused under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.

**Plan to launch express train between Lahore-Karachi**

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways is planning to launch a high-speed express train between Lahore and Karachi, similar to the Green-Line Express that operates between Islamabad and Karachi via Lahore. "The primary goal of this new train service is to provide passengers with advanced amenities and an enhanced travel experience," an official in the Ministry of Railways told media. Currently, the official said the teams from relevant departments are working on preparations for the launch of this modern train, which is expected to begin by the end of January next year. The official emphasized that Pakistan Railways is focused on improving passenger services, using new technology to locally produce coaches, which will eliminate the need for imports. Additionally, he said the department is working to enhance food quality and cleanliness to ensure a comfortable and clean environment for passengers. The Green-Line Express, which was inaugurated in 2015 by the then Prime Minister at Islamabad's Margalla Railway Station, currently takes about 20 hours to travel from Islamabad to Karachi Cantonment Station, with stops at key locations such as Rawalpindi, Lahore, Khanewal, Bahawalpur, Sukkar/Rohri, Hyderabad, and Drigh Road. The official said the train offers various classes, including AC, AC parlour, and Economy Class, along with a modern dining car that provides high-quality services.—APP

# Naqvi opens state-of-the-art passport, immigration HQs

Citizens will now receive their passports on time," he assured, adding that previously, delays of up to six months were common. The inauguration ceremony also highlighted the Minister's vision for improved service delivery

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior, Mohsin Naqvi on Thursday inaugurated the newly built state-of-the-art Passport and Immigration Headquarters and the Islamabad Regional Passport Office with an aim to provide better services to citizens, with the Islamabad Regional Passport Office now operating 24/7. Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, Mohsin Naqvi announced a series of reforms and improvements in passport services nationwide. He stated that 24/7 passport issuance services would soon be available at NADRA mega centers in 14 cities, ensuring greater accessibility and convenience for the public. The Minister revealed that the long-standing backlog in passport processing has been completely eliminated. "Citizens will now receive their passports on time," he assured, adding that previously, delays of up to six months were common. The inauguration ceremony also highlighted the Minister's vision for improved service delivery. Naqvi toured the new reception area, online services section, production center, and data center, praising the upgraded facilities. He presented shields and cash prizes to staff members who had shown exceptional performance in passport production. The Minister also announced plans to establish model passport centers in Karachi and Lahore, further expand-



ing the availability of top-tier services across the country. Naqvi emphasized the government's commitment to eradicating corruption and ensuring transparency in the system. The event was attended by prominent figures, including NADRA Chair-

man Lieutenant General Muhammad Munir Afsar, Chief Commissioner Islamabad Muhammad Ali Randhawa, and IG Islamabad Police Ali Nasir Rizvi. DG Passports Mustafa Jamal Qazi also praised the improvements, stating that they were in line with the Minister's vision of excellence in public service. The minister shared his satisfaction following recent visits to passport and NADRA centers in Lahore and Karachi, where citizens expressed contentment with the improved services. "The conditions have drastically improved,

with no long queues or delays," he said. This initiative marks a significant step toward modernizing public services in Pakistan, ensuring that citizens have access to efficient and timely passport and immigration facilities.

with no long queues or delays," he said. This initiative marks a significant step toward modernizing public services in Pakistan, ensuring that citizens have access to efficient and timely passport and immigration facilities.

## Govt committed to protecting country's sovereignty: Daniyal

ISLAMABAD: Parliamentary Secretary for Information and Broadcasting Barrister Daniyal Chaudhry issued a stern warning on Thursday, emphasizing that Pakistan's armed forces and government are committed to protecting the country's sovereignty. Daniyal Chaudhry asserted that external interference in Pakistan's internal affairs will not be tolerated and any attempts to compromise the nation's sovereignty will be firmly resisted. In an interview with a private news channel, Chaudhry said that the government was committed to resolving issues, whether internal or external through dialogue, which is the most effective and peaceful solution. Chaudhry stated that the government does not believe in resolving conflicts through war or violence, it instead advocates for the settlement of disputes within the framework of law and constitutional values. Barrister Daniyal has expressed his belief that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party's strategies will ultimately fail as Pakistan moves forward under the leadership of the PML-N government.—APP

## Govt stands firm against PTI pressure tactics: Talal

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz Senator Talal Chaudhry issued a stern warning on Thursday, emphasizing that the government will not succumb to external or internal pressure from the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party and all matters will be addressed in accordance with the law and the constitution. In an interview with a private news channel, the Senator criticized PTI's attempts to sway foreign entities will be unsuccessful. Senator emphasized that PTI's foreign lobby will not achieve its goals. Instead, he urged PTI to focus on resolving internal issues through dialogue within the country. Talal Chaudhry stated that Pakistan seeks to maintain cordial ties with its neighboring countries, but will not hesitate to take action against any entity that attempts to disrupt the nation's peace and stability. Senator emphasized that PTI should cease its hate-based lobbying efforts and instead adopt a more mature approach to addressing issues.—APP

## Govt decision to increase tax revenue is right

ISLAMABAD: Business leader and former President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Dr. Shahid Rasheed Butt, said on Thursday that the government's decision to significantly increase tax revenue in three years is correct. He said that the business community across the country supports the government's decisions. The culture of tax evasion is common in Pakistan. He added that if tax revenue does not increase, the country will need loans, and no facilities will be provided to the people. Shahid Rashid Butt said in a statement issued here that Federal Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb has indicated to increase in the tax-to-GDP ratio from 10.3 percent to 13.5 percent in the next three years, which is indispensable for the country's financial stability. He said that non-taxpaying and low-tax-paying sectors should be targeted to increase tax revenue, and the tax imposed on salaried individuals should be reduced. He noted that all the measures taken by the current government to increase tax revenue have made the life of the ordinary person miserable while the wealthy have been spared. Shahid Rashid Butt said that the government should end the policy of continuously increasing the burden on taxpayers and tightening the noose against tax evaders. He noted that in a country with a population of 250 million, only 4.8 million people pay income tax. He observed that many sections of society who pay utility bills worth lakhs of rupees a month and travel abroad are still outside the tax net. The business leader said that bringing such sections into the tax net could quickly increase the number of taxpayers. He underlined that along with increasing the tax net, it is also essential to stop tax evasion because many big companies collect sales tax from the public but do not deposit it in the government treasury, and no action is taken against them, which reveals the weaknesses of our tax system. He said that the country could not move forward without correcting these issues.—APP

## CDA eyes major investment through auctioning prime location commercial plots

"We aim to provide investors with high-quality opportunities while contributing to the city's overall development"

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Capital Development Authority (CDA) is gearing up to offer a diverse range of lucrative commercial plots in Islamabad, following a high-level meeting chaired by Chairman Muhammad Ali Randhawa on Thursday. The initiative aims to attract significant investments while bolstering the city's

economic and infrastructural development. In the meeting, attended by CDA Members and senior officials, Chairman Randhawa emphasized the importance of creating investor-friendly opportunities. He directed the identification of prime, business-suitable locations to ensure maximum returns and encourage widespread participation in the upcoming auction. The auction will feature a variety of plots, including commercial

spaces, agro farms, Class-III shopping centers, industrial plots, I&T centers, hotel plots, and apartment complexes. These options are designed to cater to a diverse group of investors, ensuring a wide range of development across the city. To streamline the process, a special committee under the supervision of Member Finance has been established. This committee, comprising officials from Estate, Environment,

Enforcement, and Law departments, will address any challenges related to the offered plots and provide actionable recommendations to ensure a smooth auction process. "The auction is a significant step towards fostering a business-friendly environment in Islamabad," said Chairman Randhawa. "We aim to provide investors with high-quality opportunities while contributing to the city's overall development."

## Pakistan-Turkiye ties to develop further in future: Tarar

Tarar said during his recent visit to Turkiye, he met the Head of Presidential Communications Dr Fahrettin Altun and it was agreed to enhance cooperation in the realm of art and culture

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage and Culture Attaullah Tarar said on Thursday that Pakistan-Turkiye friendship defied borders and people of the two countries had centuries-old bonds which were getting stronger and stronger with the passage of time. Addressing the inauguration ceremony of Yunus Emre Institute, Turkish Culture Center at Allama Iqbal Open University, he said Pakistan, Turkiye friendship had its roots in history even before the creation of Pakistan. Referring to the Khilafat movement in early 20th century, he said family elders used to tell touching stories about how the Muslims of the subcontinent donated for their brothers in Turkey.

He said Pakistanis visiting Turkiye, on return testify that the respect, warmth and affection they received there was second to none. Expressing his gratitude to the leadership, government and people of Turkiye, he said hearts of both people beat in unison. He said Yunus Emre was a great Sufi poet and scholar whose writings were still as relevant as they were in his times. Paying tributes to Dr Halil Tokar, Director Yunus Emre Institute, Pakistan, the minister said that he had made a great contribution to promoting Turkish culture in Pakistan. Tarar said during his recent visit to Turkiye, he met the Head of Presidential Communications Dr Fahrettin Altun and it was agreed to enhance cooperation in the realm of art and culture. He said that Turkish

television plays have been telecast in Pakistan and they were very popular here. He said he proposed that classic PTV dramas should be dubbed and telecast in Turkiye. He said Pakistan and Turkiye had many things in common which reflected in language, culture and religion. "We are so close in a culture that bonds us together through culture, history, and religion that is why this is an unbreakable bond". He said only a few people would know that besides in Lahore, one symbolic grave Allama Iqbal was built in the mausoleum of Maulana Rumi in Konya, Turkiye to show how philosophically both scholars were related. He expressed the hope that with the establishment of Yunus Emre Institute, here cultural exchanges and people-to-people re-

lations between the two countries would further grow and it would also help in better understanding of the Turkish nation, close to Pakistanis hearts. He said there was a need to hold seminars literary conferences and think tank meetings on how to further promote bilateral relations. He said that there was a lot of scope to promote bilateral tourism. He said that both countries could also join hands to promote the teachings of Allama Iqbal and Yunus Emre and visits of poets and writers could be arranged. He maintained that Pakistan's friendship with Turkiye had stood the test of time and it was an everlasting bond. He assured that as Minister for Information and Broadcasting, National Heritage and Culture, he would work for the promotion of cultural exchanges between the two countries.

## Ahsan chairs meeting on 100MW solar power plant for GB

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Thursday chaired a meeting regarding the installation of a 100-MW solar power plant in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), an area that remained neglected and faced long-duration electricity load-shedding. The meeting was attended by the GB Chief Secretary, Chief Minister of Kashmir Affairs & GB, Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Planning, Chief of the Energy Ministry of Planning and senior officers concerned, according to a news release. Addressing the meeting, Ahsan Iqbal termed the severe power shortage in Gilgit-Baltistan as criminal negligence and said that the 18-hour load shedding was creating a sense of deprivation among the people. He stated that in such circumstances, no investor would be willing to invest in the area. During his recent visit to China, the minister mentioned that he invited Chinese companies to install solar systems in Gilgit-Baltistan. He directed the Power Division to immediately initiate work on solar energy and complete a transparent bidding process to select the best company for the purpose. Ahsan Iqbal further said that off-grid solar power was the best source of providing electricity and emphasized that immediate steps should be taken for this project. He also directed that a clear time-line and matrix be set to increase power generation in GB, instructing that the solar project be included in PC-1 and a comprehensive strategy be prepared for its generation and operation.—DNA



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## MENA's transformative role in climate change

CLIMATE change continues to be a firm fixture on the agendas of governments in the Middle East and North Africa due to the profound impact it has on the region's economies, communities and ecosystems. Cities and areas across the MENA region are at the center of multifarious climate risks, highlighting the urgent need for ambitious adaptation and mitigation efforts. Experts are sounding the alarm on the necessity of climate action plans to mitigate the effects of climate change on the region, where vulnerabilities are intensifying by the day. The MENA region is prone to extreme heat, with a World Bank study forecasting that temperatures will soar as high as 56 degrees Celsius if global temperatures rise by 4 C above pre-industrial levels. This would translate to summer heat in parts of Algeria, Saudi Arabia and Iraq intensifying by up to 8 C by 2100, highlighting the dire implications of inaction for one of the world's hottest regions. Furthermore, data derived from 2018 figures published by the Food and Agriculture Organization paints a gloomy outlook for water resources. The MENA region is currently the most water-stressed area globally, with about 60 percent of the population residing in areas experiencing severe water stress. According to projections made by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, an increase in temperature of up to 2 C could lead to devastating impacts, with freshwater availability in the region declining by between 15 percent and 45 percent. Consequently, this climate-driven water scarcity is projected to negatively impact the region's gross domestic product growth, potentially causing a substantial decrease of 6 percent to 14 percent by 2050. The MENA region is also facing heightened risks from rising sea levels. Nearly a quarter of the region's coastal GDP and a fifth of its urban coastal areas are highly susceptible to these changes. By 2030, some 100 million residents could be exposed to coastal flooding, threatening critical infrastructure, including 43 major port cities. Due to these multiple uncertainties, climate change is likely to weaken regional food systems and domestic agricultural productivity, thereby severely aggravating the food insecurity situation in the region and pivoting communities to increased reliance on food imports, which are frequently subject to price and supply fluctuations. The World Bank estimates that 132 million people will be flung into poverty due to severe climate events jeopardizing the lives and livelihoods of low-income communities. Moreover, extreme weather events will pose significant public health risks, with an estimated 40 percent of lost working hours being due to heat stress by 2030. This will also exacerbate existing health burdens, leading to a number of heat-related illnesses and deaths, particularly among vulnerable populations. Furthermore, it is estimated that the rates of climate migration will increase substantially due to the effects of climate change. Such perilous projections accentuate the urgency for regional governments to adopt sustainable climate adaptation strategies in order to mitigate the effects of climate change. That is why last year's COP28 climate change conference was a pivotal milestone toward accelerating the progress toward a more sustainable future in the region.



## 2025 a year of great struggle

CHINA and its rival superpowers face tough years ahead as decades-old drivers of growth worldwide lose steam, the tailwinds promised by artificial intelligence prove more illusory than real and uncertainties multiply amid geopolitical conflagrations involving nuclear-armed adversaries. Those difficulties add to deep-seated challenges that are kindling societal discontent. The ageing population is one. This global demographic challenge will further slow economies after tepid growth as governments strain to provide healthcare and consumer demand weakens. In China, roughly 28 per cent of its total population will be aged 60 and over by 2040. Globally, that share will be approaching 20 per cent and growing. Longevity and low birth rates are why. Nations will continue moving away from multilateral institutions to embrace bilateral and regional transactions. In doing so, they will replicate the economic nationalism spearheaded by US president-elect Donald Trump. In trade wars, more is lost than won. The investment bank Goldman Sachs forecasts that an increase of 20 percentage points in the effective tariff rate imposed by the incoming Trump administration on Chinese goods will cut China's real gross domestic product by 0.7 percentage points in 2025. Is there a game of chicken ahead? Will retaliation follow Trump's first moves on trade? Will Beijing's stimulus offset the impact of US tariffs and stanch emerging public unrest? These questions will hound the year ahead. Sovereign debt will reach new highs. The consequences will overtake central banks' actions as the determinant of interest rates. According to Statista, China's national debt is projected to increase by US\$10.6 trillion between 2024 and 2029, reaching a total of US\$27.2 trillion. Global public debt is likely to exceed US\$100 trillion, or about 93 per cent of global GDP by year-end. It could approach 100 per cent of GDP by 2030, according to the International Monetary Fund. Servicing the debt means slashing social programmes and job-creating investments, more factors that will undermine long-term growth. Developing and emerging-market countries will suffer the most. Their plight could push them more deeply into Beijing's embrace. Less apparent are trends that will secure a solid footing next year and beyond. Perhaps the most transformative for China and the global economy is the emergence of a flat US equities market cycle which could outlast the decade ahead after the current bull market ends. Since 1900, there have been four such cycles, ranging in length from 12 to 24 years. A fifth is on the starting block. Goldman Sachs and the mutual fund provider Vanguard forecast paltry 3 per cent annual yields for US equities next year. Nobel laureate Robert J. Shiller predicts similarly modest returns. Berkshire Hathaway recently moved more of its capital into what is now a record cash pile. Equity valuations have reached record levels seemingly overnight. The chipmaker Nvidia has traded at more than 50 times earnings during the past 12 months. The combined market capitalisation of the "Magnificent Seven" tech stocks is estimated to be around US\$16 trillion, nearly 35 per cent of the S&P 500's total market value.

## Putin's ideological war

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



Domestically, Putin has consolidated power through extensive economic and societal reorganization. Russia's defense budget for 2025 is projected to reach unprecedented levels, exceeding 6% of GDP. This militarization has reshaped Russia's economy into a war-oriented structure, with increased production in defense industries and significant financial...

IN early August 2024, Ukrainian forces launched an unprecedented cross-border offensive into Russia's Kursk region, marking the most significant foreign incursion into Russian territory since the Second World War. The response of Russian President Vladimir Putin to this development was particularly revealing. In the aftermath of the offensive, Putin directed his rhetoric against the United States and Europe, asserting that the West was waging war against Russia through Ukrainian proxies. Despite this assertive rhetoric, Putin refrained from initiating an immediate military counteroffensive, opting instead to maintain the focus of Russian forces on operations in eastern Ukraine. Even three months later, with Ukrainian forces still present in Kursk, Moscow chose to deploy North Korean troops to assist in reclaiming the region, marking the first instance in over a century that Russia permitted foreign troops on its soil. These actions

underscore Putin's unwavering commitment to the war in Ukraine and his broader antagonism towards the West, nearly three years after the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion. While the conflict serves as an imperial endeavor aimed at dismantling Ukrainian sovereignty, Putin's ultimate objectives extend to revising the post-Cold War European order, diminishing U.S. influence, and establishing a new international framework that amplifies Russia's global stature. Although these ambitions are longstanding, the war has intensified Putin's resolve and narrowed his strategic alternatives, propelling Russia into deeper isolation while transforming its society, economy, and foreign policy to sustain confrontation with the West. The evolving dynamics suggest that the conflict is far from resolution, with the prospect of escalation remaining high. The incoming Trump administration's overtures toward normalizing relations with Moscow are unlikely to mitigate these tensions. Limited Western military support to Ukraine has impeded Kyiv's capacity to decisively counter Russian aggression, potentially emboldening Moscow to pursue further destabilization efforts once it has replenished its military capacity. This trajectory raises the specter of continued Russian subversion across Europe and reinforces Moscow's alignment with states antagonistic to Western interests, such as Iran and North Korea. To address this growing challenge, the United States and Europe must prioritize containment measures against Russia. Delaying such efforts could result in greater strategic costs in the future. Washington, despite its focus on competition with China, cannot afford to downplay the Russian threat, which has significant implications for European security and transatlantic stability. Strengthening Ukraine's negotiating position, enhancing NATO's defensive capabilities, and encouraging European states to bolster their own defense frameworks are critical steps in mitigating Russia's destabilizing influence. Domestically, Putin has consolidated power through extensive economic and societal reorganization. Russia's defense budget for 2025 is projected to reach unprecedented levels, exceeding 6% of GDP. This militarization has reshaped Russia's economy into a war-oriented structure, with increased production in defense industries and significant financial incentives for military service. These developments align with Putin's ideological narrative of an existential struggle against the West, which he uses to legitimize his regime and maintain public support. However, the reliance on repression and control over the information environment presents risks, as excessive suppression of dissent may destabilize his rule over time. Internationally, Russia has forged closer ties with China, Iran, and North Korea, driven by strategic necessity and shared opposition to Western dominance. These partnerships provide Moscow with critical economic and military support while amplifying its ability to challenge U.S. interests globally. The Kremlin's recalibrated foreign policy reflects a long-term strategy that extends beyond the current conflict in Ukraine, aiming to sustain Russia's relevance in the multipolar international order. Militarily, Russia is poised for reconstruction and adaptation. Despite

significant losses, its armed forces have demonstrated resilience and an ability to incorporate advanced technologies and tactics into their operations. Challenges persist, particularly in scaling production capacities for modern weaponry and addressing skilled labor shortages. However, Russia's focus on expanding its military infrastructure and replenishing its resources signals a sustained commitment to maintaining a robust defense posture. For NATO and its allies, these developments necessitate heightened vigilance and strategic preparedness. Although NATO's capabilities—particularly air superiority—are expected to shape future engagements, deficiencies in European defense readiness, such as limited munitions stockpiles, remain concerning. The duality of Russia's military, characterized by advancements in some areas and reliance on outdated Soviet-era equipment in others, complicates Western efforts to anticipate and counter Russian aggression effectively. In conclusion, Russia's trajectory under Putin's leadership suggests a persistent and multifaceted challenge to Western security and global stability. The transformation of Russia's domestic, economic, and military structures to support prolonged confrontation underscores the enduring nature of the threat it poses. The United States and its allies must adopt proactive measures to address this challenge, ensuring that future confrontations with Russia remain within manageable bounds. In recent years, Europe and the United States have faced immediate threats from unconventional actions orchestrated by Moscow, which has been actively engaging in measures that destabilize the region. Suspected Russian-backed actors have perpetrated incidents such as arson targeting arms depots in Germany and the United Kingdom, tampering with critical infrastructure in Finland, and fomenting migratory pressure on Poland and Finland through Belarus. Further incidents include targeting rail networks in the Czech Republic and Sweden, assassinating a military defector in Spain, and plotting against key European defense industry figures. These acts are part of the Kremlin's strategy to deter European governments and citizens from supporting Ukraine by demonstrating Russia's capacity for retaliation. However, Moscow's objectives extend beyond the immediate conflict in Ukraine. Its broader aim is to weaken the West, undermine transatlantic unity, and diminish Europe's ability to counter Russian aggression. This strategy is reinforced through nuclear brinkmanship, as evidenced by revisions to Russian nuclear doctrine that lower the threshold for their use. Although Russia currently avoids direct confrontation with NATO due to its military limitations, it seeks to exploit divisions and test the alliance's resolve, particularly if the United States is preoccupied with conflicts in the Indo-Pacific. Should Washington's commitment to NATO appear to wane, Moscow may feel emboldened to challenge NATO's eastern flank, risking further destabilization. Moscow's actions reflect a dangerous propensity for risk-taking and miscalculation, exacerbated by its authoritarian governance structure, where decision-making

is often influenced by sycophants. This tendency has already led to significant strategic errors, including the underestimation of Ukrainian resistance and Western resolve. While NATO is well-positioned to repel Russian aggression, the devastation witnessed in Ukraine underscores the imperative to deter Moscow preemptively. A future conflict, even if it concludes in a NATO victory, could result in catastrophic destruction for the affected nations. Globally, Russia continues to challenge Western influence. Despite sanctions and diplomatic isolation efforts following its invasion of Ukraine, Moscow has maintained and expanded its partnerships, including hosting summits for BRICS nations, which highlight growing global resistance to Western dominance. Russia's defiance has implications beyond Europe, as its actions embolden other states to question the consequences of aggression. While this may not directly precipitate Chinese actions in Taiwan, it provides a testing ground for Western resolve and capability. Moscow also actively supports actors opposed to Western interests. In Africa, Russian backing has facilitated military coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, leading to diminished Western influence in the region. Similarly, its support for the Houthi movement in Yemen exacerbates instability, disrupts international trade, and threatens U.S. allies. These actions amplify the strategic challenges faced by the West, with Russia positioning itself as a critical enabler of anti-Western sentiment. Moreover, Russia's growing collaboration with China, Iran, and North Korea intensifies global instability. Military and technological exchanges between Moscow and Beijing erode U.S. strategic advantages in the Indo-Pacific, while Russia's support for Iran bolsters Tehran's military and nuclear capabilities. Moscow's partnership with Pyongyang, including technology transfers and military cooperation, risks escalating tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Such alliances underscore a broader axis of authoritarian regimes opposing democratic norms and Western interests. Hopes that China might temper Russia's destabilizing actions have proven unfounded. Instead, Beijing appears to benefit from the disorder created by Moscow, leveraging it to pursue its ambitions. The consolidation of ties between Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea reflects deeper strategic interests rather than transactional alignments stemming from the Ukraine war. Concessions to Russia would likely embolden this bloc, further undermining Western influence. The enduring threat posed by Moscow requires sustained vigilance. Although Russia is a declining power, its capacity for disruption remains significant. For the United States and its allies, a comprehensive strategy to deter Russia is essential, encompassing strengthened European defense capabilities and increased transatlantic cooperation. By investing in the resilience of NATO and addressing immediate security challenges, the West can prevent Russia from exploiting vulnerabilities. Failure to act decisively risks higher costs in the future, as Moscow's opportunistic aggression remains a persistent challenge to global stability.

## NATO needs to 'shift to a wartime mindset'

Yossi Mekelberg

NATO has also paid scant attention to Russia's many years of aiding and abetting the Assad family's brutality in Syria – a regime that has only recently collapsed, but which for nearly 14 years has been responsible for more than half a million deaths and immeasurable suffering for the rest of the population. The message is twofold. First, while Russia is spending 7 to 8 percent of its GDP on defense, which also amounts to a third of its budget, and as China is quickly catching up when it comes to its own defense expenditure, the average spend for NATO members...

ON the occasion of his first major speech as NATO chief, Mark Rutte, a former Dutch prime minister, did not mince his words, calling on members to "shift to a wartime mindset and turbo charge our defense production and defense spending." Cynics would probably say that this was a new secretary-general taking a "rather safe than sorry" approach, warning of existential dangers, or even soliciting bigger budgets. But this is no time for cynicism or looking for ulterior motives, but for recognizing that this was a genuine battle cry for Western countries in the face of military threats coming from different directions. For too long, the West, members of whom comprise this international security organization, has been hanging on to the post-Cold War euphoria of its "total victory" over the Soviet bloc, in both military terms, and more significantly from an ideological-perceptual view. A combination of military superiority and value-based triumph has led Western countries to erroneously imagine that they are invincible. From the early days of the post-Cold War era in the 1990s, there have been profound military-security challenges, among them Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the wars in the Balkans, genocide in Rwanda, and many other flashpoints. Moreover, leading powers, mainly Russia and China, have gradually become disgruntled and begun to challenge a unipolar international system dominated by the US. Despite mounting evidence to the contrary, NATO members preferred to believe that they could procrastinate on investing in defense to meet these growing global threats, and simply enjoy the dividends of peace by investing in their economies and improving their living standards and public services. But Rutte's speech presented a strong case for ending the denial of danger, rightly reminding the organization's member states that their paying no heed to Russian aggression against Georgia in 2008 and in the Crimea in 2014, and their refusal to accept the likelihood of Putin launching an all-out war on Ukraine, was signaling their weakness to Moscow, with disastrous consequences. NATO has also paid scant attention to Russia's many years of aiding and abetting the Assad family's brutality in Syria – a regime that has only recently collapsed, but which for nearly 14 years has been responsible for more than half a million deaths and immeasurable suffering for the rest of the population. The message is twofold. First, while Russia

is spending 7 to 8 percent of its GDP on defense, which also amounts to a third of its budget, and as China is quickly catching up when it comes to its own defense expenditure, the average spend for NATO members in Europe and Canada is estimated at just 2 percent of their GDP, which is insufficient to meet future threats. These figures are a significant increase on only a few years ago, mainly due to a moment of epiphany provided by the onset of Putin's current war against Ukraine, but also to more than just a nudge from the US during the first Trump administration, an issue that was one of his articles of faith back then, and one that he is likely to pursue with even more zest in his second term. To be sure, these figures are somewhat deceptive in terms of military preparedness, as a large proportion of countries' defense budgets tends to be allocated to pensions and other items that do not directly contribute to combat power. The second challenge to NATO members is to accept that the world has entered a period of long-term instability, with increasing threats to Western values and ways of life. This situation requires an increase in military capabilities and preparedness that should be complemented with diplomacy in its widest sense, including investment in soft power. Modern wars are increasingly becoming of the hybrid type, and although kinetic wars, as in Ukraine or the wars in Gaza and Lebanon, have proved to be still a large facet of warfare, it is cybersecurity and cyber-disinformation, the introduction of AI, migration, and regular and irregular forces, that all require close attention in terms of new skills and preparation. The cost of military platforms is also soaring exponentially, and with Western economies growing sluggishly, the diverting of resources to defense expenditure, whose benefits are not easy to measure and demonstrate, while public services are yearning for additional resources, has become a polarizing issue in many societies. As NATO's new secretary-general underlined in his remarks, the threat to Europe is no longer theoretical or abstract but now sits on its doorstep: "Hostile actions against Allied countries are real and accelerating. Malignant cyber-attacks on both sides of the Atlantic. Assassination attempts on British and German soil. Explosions at an ammunition warehouse in Czechia. The weaponization of migrants crossing illegally into Poland, Latvia, Lithua-

nia, and Finland. Jamming to disrupt civil aviation in the Baltic region." Any delay in building capabilities to respond to these types of threats will only encourage Putin, and others, to undermine NATO's member states. As a result of the war in Ukraine, since February 2022 much of the focus has understandably been on Putin's threat to Europe, but the challenges originating from China and Iran and this pair's collaboration with Russia are also a major concern. With Donald Trump elected for a second term, tensions with Beijing are almost guaranteed to rise, but at the same time his return to the White House, considering his prickly relations with NATO in his first term, do not necessarily suggest easy relations with NATO. Trump sees the rest of NATO's members as free-riders at the expense of the US, although this has changed considerably and most countries are now meeting the expectation of spending 2 percent of their GDP on defense. Still, after four years of inroad commitment by the Biden administration to its NATO allies, it remains to be seen if a second-term Trump and his hawkish appointees to key foreign and defense posts will be more amenable to playing the leading role in NATO, including in terms of providing a nuclear umbrella. NATO as a collective security instrument has come full circle since its formation in 1949, when the fault lines between the two rival US and Soviet blocs were very clear and demonstrated the need to defend Europe and the rest of the world from Soviet aggression. But in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, NATO became a collective security mechanism in search of a purpose, and its members on more than one occasion disagreed on how to respond to crisis situations, and acted unilaterally instead of collectively. The war in Ukraine and the challenges emanating from China are contributing to the 21st century model of NATO as defender of the West and its values, and the decisions by Finland and Sweden to join the organization after decades of sitting on the fence have demonstrated a general fear of Russia. But this still leaves open the question of whether member states are capable of meeting all of the current challenges by developing a clear collective security vision supported by diplomacy and the allocation of adequate resources, as they were urged to do by the organization's new secretary-general.

## Briefs

## Pakistan's tax gap balloons...

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Meanwhile, speaking on the occasion, Finance czar Aurangzeb said that the government intends to increase the country's tax to gross domestic product (GDP) ratio from 9-10% to 13.5% via the recently tabled Tax Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024. "We have to achieve this tax-related target in three years," he remarked while highlighting the need to curb tax evasion and formalise the informal sector. The federal minister further added that the existing potential for more tax stood at Rs71 billion. Furthermore, shedding light on the need to increase tax resources and control deficits, State Minister Malik revealed that the tax returns increased from three million to five million by the end of October. The presser comes days after Aurangzeb introduced the aforementioned legislation seeking to bar non-filers from purchasing cars above 800cc and opening bank accounts. The bill, tabled in the National Assembly on December 18, proposes that non-filers will not be allowed to buy property beyond a certain limit. It also that non-filers will be banned from purchasing shares above a certain limit and won't be allowed to open a bank account.

## PTI 'sets' deadline for completion..

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Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, PM's Adviser Rana Sanaulah, Senator Irfan Siddiqui, PPP leaders Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, Naveed Qamar, and Muttahida Qami Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) leader Farooq Sattar. Whereas, the PTI was represented by former NA Speaker Asad Qaiser, Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) Chairman Sahibzada Hamid Raza, and Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen Allama Raja Nasir Abbas. The two sides are set to hold the second session on January 2, when the PTI will present its demands before the government panel in written. The government-PTI talks are being held in the wake of the former ruling party's announcement of a civil disobedience movement if their demands of release of all political prisoners - including Khan - and the formation of a judicial commission for investigating the May 9 riots and the November 26 incident, go unmet. The jailed former prime minister had last month called on his supporters to launch the anti-government movement by withholding remittances in the first phase.

## Russian envoy spells out...

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not been successful yet due to the regional and global dynamics. Russia has never given up on a political and diplomatic solution to the Ukrainian crisis, as it has repeatedly stated, he said. Ambassador of Russia to Pakistan, Albert P. Khorev said this while addressing to media briefing on the situation in and around Ukraine here in Russian embassy Islamabad. Russian Ambassador said that in a speech at the Russian Foreign Ministry on June 14, Russian President Vladimir Putin presented concrete proposals for a final settlement of the conflict. Russian envoy said that their key points include the withdrawal of Ukrainian armed formations from the new Russian regions and the Donetsk People's Republic, the Luhansk People's Republic, Zaporozhye and Kherson; the recognition of the new territorial realities; Kiev's refusal to join NATO; the lifting of all Western sanctions against Russia; and the guarantee of full rights for Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine. However, both Kiev and the allies forces continued to think in terms of war and the Russian proposal for a political and diplomatic settlement of the conflict was met with an invasion of the Kursk region by the Ukrainian armed forces.

## Wapda, Army, Faisalabad secure victories in Basketball C`ship

In the second match, Pakistan Army secured an easy win over Hazara with a dominant 95-5 scoreline. Ayesha Dilshad played a stellar game, scoring 22 points to lead the Army to a comprehensive victory

## OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Defending champion Pakistan Wapda, Army, Faisalabad and Lahore dominated their opponents in the opening round of the National Women's Basketball Championship, organized by the Pakistan Basketball Federation at the Wapda Sports Complex, Lahore on Thursday. Eight top teams, including defending champion Wapda, Karachi, Bahawalpur, Islamabad, Pakistan Army, Lahore, Hazara, and Faisalabad, were divided into two pools. In the opening match, WAPDA, the defending champion, began their campaign with a convincing 48-29 victory over Karachi. Kainat Bibi delivered an outstanding performance, scoring 14 points for the winning side, while Anaya Kamran contributed 8 points for Karachi. In the second match, Pakistan Army secured an easy win over Hazara with a dominant 95-5 scoreline. Ayesha Dilshad played a stellar game, scoring 22 points to lead the Army to



a comprehensive victory. The third match saw Faisalabad defeat Bahawalpur 43-10, while in the fourth match, Lahore triumphed over Islamabad with a 49-35 victory. Four more pool round matches are scheduled for Friday, the second day of the championship. The semi-finals will take place on December 29, with the final scheduled for December 30.

This event is part of a series of initiatives by the Pakistan Basketball Federation to revive the sport in the country.

## Konstas dazzles on debut as Australia take early edge

The Australians posted a solid 311/6 at stumps

MELBOURNE: Australia's top order rediscovered its form during the festive season, propelling the hosts to early dominance on Boxing Day in the fourth Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Winning their first loss of the series, the Australians posted a solid 311/6 at stumps, thanks to half-centuries from Sam Konstas, Usman Khawaja, Marcus Labuschagne, and Steve Smith. Although the first three missed out on converting their starts into centuries, their contributions proved critical. For India, Jasprit Bumrah's late double strike and Akash Deep's tireless spells kept the visitors in contention. The highlight of the day was the fearless debut performance of 19-year-old Sam Konstas. Tasked with neutralising Bumrah's dominance over Australia's top three, Konstas dazzled the Melbourne crowd with bold stroke-play. Despite a nervous start—missing four deliveries

in Bumrah's opening over—Konstas found his rhythm, connecting with three audacious reverse scoops in the seventh over, including a six, breaking Bumrah's perfect

set the stage for a strong Australian innings. Khawaja and Labuschagne capitalised on Konstas's foundation, putting together steady partnerships against a disciplined Indian attack.



record since 2021. The young opener reached a scintillating half-century off 52 balls, becoming Australia's second-youngest Test half-centurion. His knock of 60, featuring six boundaries and two sixes, ended when Ravindra Jadeja trapped him LBW, but not before he

Though India initially struggled with softer balls and a lack of pace off the wicket, their persistence paid off as Bumrah removed Khawaja for 51, his fifth dismissal of the left-hander in the series. Australia's two premier batters, Smith and Labuschagne, joined

forces, adding 61 runs in the final session. Smith showcased his intent by stepping out to loft Jadeja, while Labuschagne dealt with deliveries jugging back from Siraj. However, Labuschagne's aggression led to his downfall, holing out to Virat Kohli at mid-off off Washington Sundar. Australia faltered from 237 for 2 to 246 for 5 as Bumrah delivered a vintage spell with the old ball. He bowled Travis Head for a duck and had Mitchell Marsh caught behind for 4, swinging the momentum momentarily back in India's favour. Alex Carey contributed a valuable 31, forming a crucial 53-run partnership with Smith before falling to Deep under the floodlights with the second new ball. Smith remained unbeaten on 68, navigating the challenging final overs alongside Pat Cummins. As Day 1 ended, Australia held the advantage, but India's resilience hinted at an intriguing contest ahead.—Agencies

## Sabalenka 'ready to go' for new season

LONDON: World number one Aryna Sabalenka says she feels "fresh and ready to go" for the new tennis season as she looks to back up her stellar year. The Belarusian defended her Australian Open title in January before winning the US Open in September - her third major singles title. She also replaced Iga Swiatek at the top of the world rankings and finished as the year-end number one. The 26-year-old will open her season at the Brisbane International, which begins on 29 December. "There is so many things to improve," Sabalenka said. "I'm not that good with maybe my game at the net in singles. There is a lot of things to improve in my touch game. "Even my serve is not as good as I want it to be, so there is always [elements] to improve." Sabalenka reached the final in Brisbane last year but lost heavily to Elena Rybakina. She nevertheless went on to defend her Australian Open title without dropping a set - and in 2025 will bid to become the first woman since Martina Hingis in 1999 to win three straight singles titles in Melbourne. "You work hard on lots of things in the pre-season," Sabalenka added. "The first tournament before the major tournament is the one where you can try it out and see what's going to work well for you, and what's not. "I have a lot of great memories from here and just can't wait to start playing."—Agencies

## Paterson-led South Africa book Pakistan on 211

Paterson leads South Africa's bowling charge with a five-wicket haul

## SPORTS DESK

CENTURION: South Africa's Dane Paterson's five-wicket haul, followed by Corbin Bosch's 4/63 booked Pakistan on a modest total on the opening day of the first Test here at SuperSport Park on Thursday. Put into bat first, the green shirts only managed to score 211 before getting bowled out on the just the third delivery after the Tea when Marco Jansen got Khurram Shahzad caught for 11. At the conclusion of an eventful second session, the touring side were 209/9 with tailenders Khurram and returning Mohammad Abbas, unbeaten on nine and 10 respectively. Pakistan, however, had a decent start to the second session as wicketkeeper batter Mohammad Rizwan and Kamran Ghulam put together an 81-run partnership for the fifth wicket. Ghulam was the frontrunner in the stand, scoring a well-crafted half-century before falling victim to Paterson in the 38th over. The right-handed batter remained the top-scorer for Pakistan

with 71-ball 54, comprised of eight fours and a six. Rizwan followed the suit just two overs later when he was caught in slips off Paterson after scoring a cautious 27 off 62 deliveries. The second-biggest partnership for the green shirts came when all-rounders Salman Ali Agha and Aamir Jamal added 47 runs for the sixth wicket. The duo frustrated momentum-filled South Afri-

can bowling attack with their strokes until both perished in quick succession, alongside number nine batter Naseem Shah, resulting in Pakistan slipping to 189/9. Later, Khurram and Abbas displayed remarkable grit and added valuable 20 runs amid their crucial 10th-wicket partnership. After being asked to bat first, Pakistan struggled to build momentum. Openers Shan Masood

and Saim Ayub were unable to withstand the pressure from the aggressive South African pacers. Masood, who had faced 58 balls for just 17 runs, became the first casualty when debutant Corbin Bosch dismissed him in the 15th over, leaving Pakistan at 36/1. Babar Azam, walking in at number three, made an immediate impact with a boundary on the first ball he faced. The 30-year-

old reached a significant milestone, becoming the 12th Pakistan batter to score 4000 runs in Test cricket. In doing so, he joined an elite group, becoming only the third player to score 4000 runs in all three formats of international cricket, alongside India's Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli. However, Pakistan's recovery was short-lived. In the 16th over, Dane Paterson struck,

removing Saim Ayub for 14 runs off 35 balls. This left Pakistan at 40/2. Paterson's dominance continued, sending Babar back to the dressing room for just four runs, reducing Pakistan to 41/3 in 17.2 overs. With the pressure mounting, Saud Shakeel and Kamran Ghulam tried to rebuild the innings, with Saud playing aggressively, hitting three boundaries. However, Bosch made another breakthrough, dismissing Saud for 14 off just six deliveries. At 56/4 in 18.3 overs, Pakistan were in deep trouble. After Saud's dismissal, Mohammad Rizwan and Kamran Ghulam fought hard to stabilize the innings. Rizwan, with a composed 10 runs and Ghulam, on 23, found ways to rotate the strike, keeping the scoreboard ticking. Ghulam even attacked the South African pacers with back-to-back boundaries, offering a glimmer of hope. By lunch on Day 1, Pakistan were 88/4 in 24 overs, with Rizwan and Ghulam at the crease. Corbin Bosch and Dan Paterson each took two wickets, while Kagiso Rabada and Marco Jansen remained wicketless in their respective spells so far.



## Karachi Bar challenges 26th...

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violation of the basic principles of the independence of judiciary and fundamental rights. Federal government, four provincial governments, the election commission and the Speaker have been made respondents in the petition. It is worth noting here that the federal government managed to secure two-third majority for the passage of the 26th constitutional amendment in the National Assembly in the wee hours of October 21, shortly after it sailed through Senate. The constitution amendment envisages introduction of reforms to the appointment process and tenure of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and establishment of constitutional benches at the Supreme Court, with equal representation from all provinces. It also provides to establish constitutional benches at the high courts. The senior-most judge of each constitutional bench will serve as its presiding officer. Under the constitutional amendment, the term for the Chief Justice of Pakistan has been fixed at three years.

## Imran admits govt stabilised...

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"The economy has been stabilised, and it has been saved from bankruptcy, but it has not seen growth yet." Meanwhile, a delegation from PTI's negotiation committee arrived at Adiala Jail to meet with Imran Khan. The committee will brief him on the progress made during the first round of talks, sources confirmed. The delegation includes key PTI leaders such as Omar Ayub, Sahibzada Hamid Raza, Allama Nasir Abbas, and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur. Gandapur's vehicle was allowed entry into the jail premises for the meeting.

## Strikes on Afghan border...

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targeted several suspected terrorists. Pakistan's security officials late on Tuesday night had said that fighter jets bombed four locations, said to be TTP camps, in Afghanistan's eastern Pak-tika province, targeting and neutralising several suspected terrorists. Subsequently, the Afghan Taliban regime lodged a strong protest with Islamabad over an airstrike, warning that Afghanistan's territorial sovereignty was the red line for the ruling Islamic Emirate. In a written statement issued in response to a media query, the FO said: "Our security and law enforcement personnel conduct operations in border areas to protect the people of Pakistan from terrorist groups. These counterterrorism operations are carefully selected and based on accurate intelligence." The official stressed that Pakistan had "always prioritised dialogue in matters relating to ties with Afghanistan".

## KP terms 100 children's...

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Kurram as concocted. In a statement, the KP advisor to chief minister said that all necessary medicines were being delivered to Kurram on a daily basis. He also appealed to the masses not to believe in such "fabricated and baseless reports". He further added that all essential commodities were being provided to Kurram residents on a priority basis. It should be noted that in the recent clashes between two tribes in Parachinar left over 130 people dead, during which reports of more than 100 children deaths emerged. Meanwhile, due to the tense situation, all major and minor roads of the district have been closed. Upper Kurram Tehsil Chairman Agha Muzamil Hussain on Wednesday said that due to the closure of roads, citizens were deprived of food and medical treatment. He had claimed that over 100 children had died in hospitals because of lack of treatment, while an equal number of people had succumbed to cancer and other diseases.

## Briefs

Gold rates up  
by Rs.1,400  
per tola

ISLAMABAD: The price of 24 karat per tola gold increased by Rs.1,400 and was sold at Rs.274,000 on Thursday against its sale at Rs.272,600 the previous day. The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs.1,200 to Rs.234,911 from Rs. 233,711 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat gold went up to Rs.215,335 from Rs.214,235. All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported. The prices of per tola and ten gram silver remained constant at Rs.3,350 and Rs. 2,872.08 respectively. The price of gold in the international market increased by \$14 to \$2,628 from \$2,614, the Association reported.—APP

PSX stays  
bearish, loses  
1,991 more  
points

ISLAMABAD : The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bearish trend on Thursday, losing 1,991.49 points, a negative change of 1.77 percent, closing at 110,423.32 points as compared to 112,414.81 points on the last trading day. A total of 628,026,201 shares were traded during the day as compared to 880,598,305 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs.33,582 billion against Rs.54,455 billion on the last trading day. As many as 450 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 113 of them recorded gains and 284 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 53 companies remained unchanged. The three top trading companies were Fauji Foods Limited with 93,341,113 shares at Rs.16.39 per share, WorldCall Telecom with 49,879,145 shares at Rs.17.27 per share and TRG Pak Limited with 46,907,628 shares at Rs.70.45 per share. Nestle Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.198.81 per share price, closing at Rs.7,430.81, whereas the runner-up was Mitchells Fruit Farms Limited with Rs.17.44 rise in its per share price to Rs.266.05. Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.232.60 per share closing at Rs.20,767.41 followed by Nestle Pakistan Limited with Rs.198.10 decline to close at Rs.9,001.90.

Sesame  
output grew  
by 455% in  
five years:  
Tanveer

ISLAMABAD: Minister for National Food Security and Research, Rana Tanveer Hussain on Wednesday said that sesame production has increased by 455 percent during last five years, reaching 1.119 million tons annually. While addressing the International Investment Conference on Sesame, the minister said that sesame exports have grown by 327%, amounting to 0.760 million tons per year. The minister highlighted sesame as a high-value cash crop with significant export potential and praised the achievements of Pakistan in the sesame sector over the past five years. He further noted that the total value of sesame exports has surged by 366%, reaching \$1.073 billion annually, making Pakistan the third-largest sesame exporter globally. Rana Tanveer emphasized that the inclusion of sesame in the National Oilseeds Enhancement Program (NOEP) has transformed it from a neglected crop to a major contributor to Pakistan's economy. He pointed out that sesame's success is a result of collaboration between the Ministry of National Food Security and Research and provincial agriculture departments. The minister urged all stakeholders to focus on value addition, improved processing technologies, and the exploration of new global markets for sesame products, including refined sesame oil. He called upon the Ministry of Commerce to play a vital role in promoting Pakistan's sesame products in international markets.—APP

Azerbaijan mourns 38 killed  
in plane crash in Kazakhstan

It said an investigative team led by the deputy prosecutor general of Azerbaijan has been dispatched to Kazakhstan and is working at the crash site

ASTANA, KAZAKHSTAN: Azerbaijan began a national day of mourning Thursday after a passenger jet from the flag carrier crashed in western Kazakhstan on Christmas Day, killing 38 of the 67 people onboard. The Embraer 190 aircraft was supposed to fly northwest from the Azerbaijani capital Baku to the city of Grozny in Chechnya in southern Russia, but instead diverted far off course across the Caspian Sea. It crashed Wednesday near the city of Aktau in Kazakhstan. Azerbaijan Airlines reported that 67 people were on board the jet — 62 pas-

sengers and five crew members. Kazakh Deputy Prime Minister Kanat Bozumbayev told Russia's Interfax news agency that 38 people had been killed, while the Kazakh emergency situations ministry reported "29 survivors, including three children, have been hospitalised". Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev declared Thursday a day of mourning and cancelled a planned visit to Russia for an informal summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), a grouping of former Soviet nations. Aliyev's office said the president "ordered the prompt initiation of urgent

measures to investigate the causes of the disaster". "I extend my condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in the crash... and wish a speedy recovery to the injured," Aliyev said in a social media post. The Flight Radar website showed the plane deviating from its normal route, crossing the Caspian Sea and then circling over the area where it eventually crashed near Aktau, an oil and gas hub on the eastern shore of the sea. Azerbaijan state news agency AZERTAC reported the aircraft's black box, which records the flight data, has been recovered.

The Kazakh transport ministry said the plane was carrying 37 nationals from Azerbaijan, six from Kazakhstan, three from Kyrgyzstan and 16 from Russia. Azerbaijan Airlines, the country's flag carrier, said the plane "made an emergency landing" around three kilometres (1.9 miles) from Aktau. The Kazakh emergency situations ministry said its staff put out a fire which broke out when the plane crashed. It said 150 emergency workers were at the scene. Kazakhstan said it had opened an investigation into the cause of the crash, which was not

immediately clear. Azerbaijan Airlines initially said the plane flew through a flock of birds before withdrawing the statement. "We cannot disclose any investigation results at this time," the office of Azerbaijan's prosecutor general said in a statement. "All possible scenarios are being examined, and the necessary expert analyses are underway," it added. It said an investigative team led by the deputy prosecutor general of Azerbaijan has been dispatched to Kazakhstan and is working at the crash site.—Agencies

China urges  
Philippines  
to return to  
'peaceful  
development'

BEIJING: China's foreign ministry on Thursday urged the Philippines to return to "peaceful development," saying Manila's decision to deploy a US medium-range missile system in military exercises would only bring the risks of an arms race in the region. The US Typhon system, which can be equipped with cruise missiles capable of striking Chinese targets, was brought in for joint exercises earlier this year. On Tuesday, Philippine Defense Minister Gilberto Teodoro said the Typhon's deployment for joint exercises was "legitimate, legal and beyond reproach." Army chief Roy Galido said on Monday that the Philippines was also planning to acquire its own mid-range missile system. Rivalry between China and the Philippines has grown in recent years over their competing claims in the South China Sea. Long-time treaty allies Manila and Washington have also deepened military ties, further ratcheting up tensions. "By cooperating with the United States in the introduction of Typhon, the Philippine side has surrendered its own security and national defense to others and introduced the risk of geopolitical confrontation and an arms race in the region, posing a substantial threat to regional peace and security," said Mao Ning, a spokesperson at China's foreign ministry. "We once again advise the Philippine side that the only correct choice for safeguarding its security is to adhere to strategic autonomy, good neighborliness and peaceful development," Mao told reporters at a regular press conference. China will never sit idly by if its security interests were threatened, she added. The Philippine embassy in Beijing did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.—APP

Rivalry between China and the Philippines has grown in recent years over their competing claims in the South China Sea. Long-time treaty allies Manila and Washington have also deepened military ties, further ratcheting up tensions. "By cooperating with the United States in the introduction of Typhon, the Philippine side has surrendered its own security and national defense to others and introduced the risk of geopolitical confrontation and an arms race in the region, posing a substantial threat to regional peace and security," said Mao Ning, a spokesperson at China's foreign ministry. "We once again advise the Philippine side that the only correct choice for safeguarding its security is to adhere to strategic autonomy, good neighborliness and peaceful development," Mao told reporters at a regular press conference. China will never sit idly by if its security interests were threatened, she added. The Philippine embassy in Beijing did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.—APP

ISSI inaugurates  
'China Corner'  
to further promote  
China studies

ISLAMABAD: China Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organised the inaugural ceremony of 'China Corner' at the ISSI Library. The event was graced by Ambassador Syed Tariq Fatemi, Special Assistant to Prime Minister/Minister of State (Foreign Affairs), as Chief Guest. Ambassador Khalil Hashmi, Ambassador of Pakistan to China, and Mr. Shi Yuanqiang, Deputy Head of Mission at Embassy of China in Pakistan, attended as Guests of Honour. The event was attended by prominent members of diplomatic community, bureaucracy, civil society and the media. This is the first ever 'China Corner' to be established in a think-tank in Pakistan. In his welcome address, Ambassador Sohai Mahmood highlighted that ISSI has been serving as an important hub for research on China in Pakistan with multiple institutional collaborations with Chinese think tanks and universities. ISSI is also a dialogue partner for the Pakistan-China Think Tank Forum with the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) as part of the Joint Working Group of CPEC on International Cooperation. He further added that the 'China Corner' has a collection of more than 600 physical and 5000 electronic books, journals, newspapers, and monographs related to China studies that are available for scholars to benefit from. He also emphasized that since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Pakistan-China relationship has followed a steady progression and has now evolved into an All-weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership, and is now an indispensable factor of stability in the region and beyond. It encompasses diplomatic, political, economic, security, defence, technological, educational, cultural, and people-to-people domains. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), powerfully manifests the commitment of the leadership on both sides to foster transformational economic development.—APP

## 'Heinous attack'

Israel kills five Palestinian  
journalists in Gaza strike

GAZA CITY: Israel has targeted a broadcast van close to a hospital in central Gaza, killing at least five journalists, according to Palestinian authorities and media reports. The journalists from the al-Quds Today channel were covering events near al-Awda Hospital, located in the Nu-seirat refugee camp, when their broadcasting van was hit by an Israeli air strike, Al Jazeera's Anas al-Sharif reported early on Thursday morning. A screenshot taken from a video of the white-coloured van shows the word "press" in large red lettering across the back of the vehicle. The deceased journalists have been named as Fadi Hassouna, Ibrahim al-Sheikh Ali, Mohammed al-Ladah, Faisal Abu al-Qumsan and Ayman al-Jadi. Al Jazeera's al-Sharif said that Ayman al-Jadi had been waiting for his wife in front of the hospital while she was in labour to give birth to their first child. Civil defence teams retrieved the bodies of the victims and extinguished a fire at the scene, the Quds News Network said. Israel's military said it had carried out a "targeted" attack against a vehicle carrying members of Islamic Jihad and that it would con-



tinue to take action against "terrorist organisations" in Gaza. "Prior to the attack, many steps were taken to reduce the chance of harming civilians, including the use of precision weapons, aerial observations, and additional intelligence information," the military said in a post on X. Israel, which has not allowed foreign journalists to enter the Gaza Strip except on military embeds, has been condemned by several press freedom organisations, which now rate the Strip

as the most dangerous part of the world for reporting. Earlier this month, Paris-based Reporters Without Borders said more than 145 journalists had been killed by the Israeli army in Gaza since the start of the war in October 2023, condemning the high death toll as an "unprecedented massacre". The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said this month that at least 141 journalists have been killed in Gaza, calling on the international community to hold Israel accountable for its

attacks against the media. CPJ said on Thursday that it was "devastated" by reports of the five journalists killed inside their broadcasting vehicle. "Journalists are civilians and must always be protected," it said on X. The Palestinian Journalists Syndicate last week reported a higher death toll, stating that more than 190 journalists had been killed and at least 400 injured since the start of Israel's war on Gaza. The syndicate condemned the "heinous attack" and

called for "international protection" for journalists in Gaza. Israel also banned Al Jazeera from its territory and accused six of its Gaza reporters of being members of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. The network vehemently condemned the "unfounded allegations" and said Israel had used "fabricated accusations... to silence the few remaining journalists in the region, thereby obscuring the harsh realities of the war from audiences worldwide".—Agencies

S Korea MPs  
file motion  
to impeach  
acting  
president

SEOUL: South Korea's opposition lawmakers have filed a motion to impeach the country's prime minister and acting leader Han Duck-soo, less than two weeks after parliament voted to impeach President Yoon Suk Yeol. This comes after Han refused to appoint constitutional court judges nominated by the main opposition Democratic Party (DP). "Han revealed himself to be an acting insurrectionist, not an acting president", DP's floor leader Park Chan-dae said on Thursday. The opposition has also accused Han of aiding Yoon's martial law attempt on 3 Dec. Han earlier apologised for failing to block it. Han also vetoed several opposition-led bills, including one that proposed a special investigation into Yoon's short-lived martial law declaration. The impeachment motion is expected to be put to a vote in the next 24 to 72 hours. For it to succeed, 151 out of 300 MPs must vote for it. The DP currently holds 170 of the 300 seats in parliament. The opposition bloc together holds 192 seats. Opposition parties had been hoping Han would not stand in their way while acting as the country's caretaker president, and that he would allow bills to pass. But instead he has held firm, deepening the political strife.—APP

Iraqi intelligence  
chief discusses  
border security with  
Syrian admin

BAGHDAD: An Iraqi delegation met with Syria's new rulers in Damascus on Thursday, an Iraqi government spokesman said, the latest diplomatic outreach more than two weeks after the fall of Bashar Assad's rule. The delegation, led by Iraqi intelligence chief Hamid Al-Shatri, "met with the new Syrian administration," government spokesman Bassem Al-Awadi told state media, adding that the parties discussed "the developments in the Syrian arena, and security and stability needs on the two countries' shared border." Meanwhile, Lebanon said on Thursday it was looking forward to having the best neighborly relations with Syria, in its first official message to the new administration in Damascus. Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib passed the message to his Syrian counterpart, Asaad Hassan Al-Shibani, in a phone call, the Lebanese Foreign Ministry said on X. Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah played a major part propping up Syria's ousted President Bashar Assad through years of war, before bringing its fighters back to Lebanon over the last year to fight in a bruising war with Israel — a redeployment which weakened Syrian government lines. Under Assad, Hezbollah used Syria to bring in weapons and other military equipment from Iran, through Iraq and Syria into Lebanon. But on Dec. 6, anti-Assad fighters seized the border with Iraq and cut off that route, and two days later, Islamist militants captured the capital Damascus.—APP

Pakistan, Rwanda discuss  
collaboration in climate change

ISLAMABAD: Rwandan ambassador Fatou Harerimana on Wednesday highlighted the potential of bilateral cooperation between Pakistan and Rwanda in climate change, water conservation, smart agriculture, and disaster management, emphasising the need for enhanced collaboration. During her courtesy call on meeting with Prime Minister's Coordinator for Climate Change, Romina Khurshid Alam held here in the climate change and environmental coordination ministry, she said there is a need to expand bilateral collaboration and cooperation in environment, climate change and disaster management, adding that the two nations enjoy friendly relations supported by mutual respect, growing economic ties and cooperation in various sectors. Pakistan, Rwanda discuss collaboration in climate change, environmental conservation. During the meeting, both sides also highlighted the growing urgency for bilateral cooperation as a part of the international collaboration to tackle the common challenges of climate change, environmental degradation, heatwaves, droughts and water scarcity, with both leaders reaffirming their commitment to national and global sustainability. "Rwanda and Pakistan, with a longstanding relationship spanning sixty-two years, actively collaborate in various fields, including trade, health, and investment. But, now environment, climate resilience building, water conservation, disaster risk management, heatwave, drought and desertification are the areas which offer a huge potential for both the countries to collaborate," the Rwandan ambassador Fatou Harerimana said. Ambassador Harerimana and the PM's climate aide explored and discussed several possible areas of cooperation, including the sharing of expertise, joint research initiatives and the implementation of green technologies to promote sustainable development. "Rwanda is committed to playing a significant role in the global effort to combat climate change. Our partnership with Pakistan will not only strengthen our climate resilience but also pave the way for practical, actionable solutions that can be applied across the developing world," Ambassador Harerimana stated during the meeting. Highlighting Rwanda's commitment to climate action, the ambassador informed the PM's climate aide Romina Khurshid Alam that Rwanda is recognised as a global leader in environmental sustainability, with a track record of progressive policies aimed at reducing emissions and promoting renewable energy. The country's efforts, particularly in reforestation and conservation, have earned international recognition, the envoy added. The two leaders also discussed the impact of climate change on agriculture, water resources, and biodiversity in both countries, emphasizing the importance of innovative solutions to mitigate the environmental challenges faced by their populations. Both nations acknowledged the importance of sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, and ecosystem restoration in their efforts to reduce carbon footprints. The coordinator to PM Romina Khurshid Alam expressed gratitude for Rwanda's willingness to collaborate and noted that the partnership would provide valuable insights into climate adaptation strategies that can be tailored to Pakistan's unique challenges.—DNA

## Asian countries mark 20 years since the world's deadliest tsunami

JAKARTA: Herman Wiharta began that Sunday morning like many 11-year-olds would on a weekend: watching cartoon shows on TV. But at around 8 a.m., he felt the powerful tremors from a 9.1-magnitude earthquake that struck off the coast of Indonesia's Sumatra island, which then triggered the tsunami that inundated the coastline of more than a dozen countries and killed some 230,000 people. Wiharta, now 31, recalled his brother calling out to him to leave their house in Banda Aceh minutes after the quake and how they had attempted to run to safety. He remembered hearing people scream about the rising sea water before he himself was swept away by a giant wave. "I lost consciousness when the wave hit me and I woke up on a roof, confused. Thankfully, my brother and sister were also on that roof," he told Arab News. "We were able to see just how black the water was from that

spot, how strong the currents were. The water was about 4 to 5 meters high; cars and motorbikes were floating, and I could see bodies being swept away by the currents, too. It was terrifying." The tsunami on Dec. 26, 2004 quickly escalated into a global disaster, with some 1.7 million displaced. The brunt of the tsunami was felt in Indonesia, where almost 170,000 people perished. The country's westernmost province of Aceh was the hardest-hit of all, while Sri Lanka, India and Thailand were among the worst-affected countries. "It was impossible to sleep that night. We could still hear people screaming for help and the dogs were howling. Everything was just so eerie. The disasters happened so quickly, but they were deeply traumatizing," Wiharta said. "It was even worse the day after. We could see bloated human and animal corpses, and the smell was just terrible. I can still picture that

scene in my mind to this day." Across Asia on Thursday, people attended ceremonies and memorials held to mark 20 years since the deadliest tsunami in recorded history. Coastal communities were united in grief as they also commemorated how far they had come after two decades of rebuilding and regrouping. In Sri Lanka, where more than 35,000 people were killed, survivors and relatives gathered in the coastal village of Peraliya to remember the 1,000 victims who died when waves derailed a passenger train. In Thailand, where half of the death toll of 5,000 were foreign tourists, commemorations were held in Ban Nam Khem, the country's worst-hit village. People laid flowers and wreaths at a wall curved in the shape of a tsunami, which also bears plaques with the names of the victims. In India, where around 20,000 people perished, women led the rituals held at Pattinappakkam beach in Chen-

nai, where they lit candles and offered flowers for the victims. In Banda Aceh city, an official ceremony held at the Baiturrahman Grand Mosque began with a three-minute-long siren at the exact time the major earthquake caused giant waves. People also gathered for prayers at the city's mass graves — Ulee Lheue and Siron — where thousands of unidentified and unclaimed tsunami victims are buried. In the years since, infrastructure across Aceh has been rebuilt and is now stronger to withstand major disasters. Early warning systems have also been set up in areas closer to shores, to warn residents of a potential tsunami. Indonesia's early tsunami warning system was launched only in 2008 in the aftermath of the disasters, said Daryono, the head of the earthquake and tsunami center at Indonesia's meteorology, climatology and geophysical agency. "Before the 2004 Aceh earthquake and tsunami... there

were too many people who did not understand the threat, or the danger and risks of a tsunami," Daryono told Arab News. "But what happened in 2004 became a starting point to raise awareness on earthquake and tsunami mitigation and also to develop high-tech monitoring for earthquakes and early tsunami warning systems." Yet Aceh resident Wiharta was concerned with the direction of development in the province, particularly on the beaches of Aceh Besar district where many new cafes have been popping up in recent years. "It's important not to cut down the trees for the sake of building these cafes. It's better to plant more trees, especially mangroves, so that they can help defend against potential tsunamis," he said. "I think the early warning systems also need to be fixed or reset to make sure that they are properly working for early evacuations, since many are either broken or stolen.—Agencies

## Briefs

### OGDCL discovers gas reserves in KP: Report

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Under the natural resources exploration projects of Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), the Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) has discovered significant gas reserves in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The discovered reserves are capable of producing up to 2.14 million cubic feet of gas per day. The discovery will significantly enhance the country's energy self-sufficiency. It will also open up new ways for further exploration in the mining sector. On December 13, Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) announced the discovery of oil and gas reservoir in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

According to the Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL), the new reserves were found in the Bettani-2 well located in LakkiMarwat district. The discovery is expected to increase Pakistan's gas and oil reserves, with the well currently producing 2.14 million standard cubic feet of gas and 74 barrels of condensate per day. This is the first hydrocarbon discovery in the Wali Block's SamaNasak Formation, highlighting the potential of the area for further exploration.

OGDCL plans to conduct further drilling activities in the region to explore additional reserves. The company holds 100% shares of the well, and the discovery is a major breakthrough for Pakistan's energy sector. Earlier, in July, Mari Petroleum Company successfully found new gas reserves from five wells in Sindh. The company completed the testing, production, and transmission of an additional 3 million metric standard cubic feet per day (MMSCFD) of gas.

### Bushra Bibi secures interim bail

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Bushra Bibi, the wife of PTI founder-chairman Imran Khan, has been granted interim bail in three cases linked to the party's November 26 protest in the federal capital. Duty Judge Shabbir Bhatti approved the former first lady's bails until January 13 next year, each against the surety bonds worth Rs50,000 during a hearing held at a District and Sessions Court in Islamabad on Thursday. Bushra, accompanied by her legal team, appeared before the court during the hearing of cases registered against her at Tarnol Police Station and Ramna Police Station, involving a total of four first information reports. Last week, on Saturday, an ATC in Rawalpindi granted interim bail to the former first lady in 32 cases related to the November 26 protest. These cases were filed across various police stations in Rawalpindi, Attock, and Chakwal. The couple, along with other central party leaders, also face a "triple murder case" involving the deaths of three Rangers personnel allegedly run over by a vehicle during the protest.

## QUAID DAY EVENT AT TURKISH EMBASSY



ISLAMABAD: The event at the Turkish embassy in Islamabad, commemorating the 148th birth anniversary of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, was attended by several prominent figures, including Ambassador of Türkiye to Pakistan, Dr. Irfan Neziroglu. The event, held at the Turkish embassy auditorium, featured speeches that paid glowing tribute to the remarkable leadership and struggle of Quaid-e-Azam. The speakers highlighted his pivotal role in the creation of Pakistan in 1947, recognizing his efforts to establish the nation as a sovereign state for Muslims in South Asia. The occasion was a heartfelt reminder of Jinnah's enduring legacy in Pakistan's history. — DNA

## Turkish envoy pays tribute to Quaid-e-Azam

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: The Ambassador of Türkiye to Pakistan, Dr. Irfan Neziroglu on Thursday paid glowing tribute to Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, lauding his visionary leadership and timeless legacy that continues to inspire generations.

Speaking at an event commemorating the 148th birth anniversary of Pakistan's founding father, Dr. Neziroglu expressed profound gratitude to the participants for joining in to honor Jinnah's remarkable contributions. "Quaid-e-Azam's unwavering dedication and noble character won the hearts of millions, guiding them in the historic struggle for Pakistan's creation," he remarked. Dr. Neziroglu highlighted Jinnah's enduring values of Unity, Faith, and Discipline, which not only galvanized a movement but also laid the foundation for a modern, sovereign state. He drew parallels between Jinnah and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of Türkiye, emphasizing their shared vision of progress and modernization.

"Jinnah admired Atatürk deeply. Following Atatürk's passing in 1938, he referred to him as 'one of the greatest men that ever lived,'" the envoy noted. He also celebrated the symbolic connection between the two nations, citing prominent streets in Ankara and Islamabad named after Jinnah and Atatürk, reflecting the deep-rooted brotherly ties.

The ambassador underscored the unique and enduring bond between Pakistan and Türkiye, forged through shared values, sacrifices, and historical solidarity. "This is a genuine bond of fraternity, admired by the world, and built on a foundation of mutual respect and eternal brotherhood," he said.

Quoting Quaid-e-Azam, Dr. Neziroglu reminded the audience of the urgency to strengthen bilateral relations. "As Quaid-e-Azam said, 'time is running out.' We must work tirelessly to institutionalize our relationship, combining our knowledge, experience, and power to achieve a brighter future for Türkiye, Pakistan, and a more peaceful world."

# Pak-China strategic ties touching new horizons

He was addressing a ceremony to unveil statues of Jinnah and Mao Zedong

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday underscored the importance of the all weather strategic partnership between Pakistan and China, describing it as "an anchor of regional stability" and "a beacon of hope for a global peace and prosperity". "We are proud of our collaboration in various fields from CPEC to cultural exchanges, education, defence production," the prime minister said while addressing an event of unveiling of sculptures of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Chinese leader Mao Zedong at the PM House. Niece of Chairman Mao Zedong Mao Xiaoping also graced the event. He said the historic bonds between Pakistan and China spanned over decades was a testament to our shared values, of mutual respect, trust and cooperation. The prime minister highlighted that both leaders recognized the immense Pakistan-China relations and "today our all weather strategic partnership is an anchor of regional stability under these challenging global circumstances". He said Quaid-e-Azam was

the founder of Pakistan and his great leadership played a decisive role to carve out Pakistan from sub-continent through outstanding leadership and great sacrifices by the Muslims. Appreciating the great work done by Chinese renowned artist and sculptor Yaun Xikun who made the sculptures of the great leaders, the prime minister said he had had wonderfully, captured the essence of these two iconic leaders.

The prime minister recalled that during his recent visit to China in June this year, on the recommendation of the President Xi, he went to Xian and had the opportunity to visit the Terra Cotta museum, a symbol of past glorious and heritage. Similarly, he said Pakistan proudly traced its history to the Indus valley civilization, whose relics were preserved in Mohenjo Daro and Harappa. "So by these accounts, today's ceremony is very special and unique as we honour the vision and legacies of our founding fathers who held a common vision of independence, justice, equity, emancipation and self respect for the two nations," he added. The prime minister said that hundreds of Pakistani young students were visiting the Chinese universities and was a bridge between the two countries.



## Assad loyalists kill 14 in clash with Syria's HTS

FOREIGN DESK

DAMASCUS: Syria's new rebel-led authorities say supporters of ousted President Bashar al-Assad have killed 14 interior ministry troops in an "ambush" in the west of the country. They say 10 other troops were wounded in the fighting on Tuesday near the Mediterranean port of Tartous, a stronghold of Assad's minority Alawite Muslim sect. The clashes with pro-Assad loyalists are the first direct challenge to the authority of Syria's de facto leader Ahmad al-Sharaa. Assad's presidency fell to rebel forces led by al-Sharaa's Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) faction just over two weeks ago. Security forces launched an operation in Tartous province on Thursday, according to state news agency Sana, in a bid to "restore security, stability and civil peace". Sana reported that the forces had "neutralised... a number of remnants of As-

ad's militias" in the Tartous countryside, and that it was pursuing others. Reports say the security forces had earlier been ambushed as they tried to arrest a former officer in connection to his role at the notorious Saydnaya prison, close to the capital, Damascus. The UK-based monitoring group Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said three "armed men", which it did not identify, were also killed in the clashes. The SOHR added that the security forces later brought in reinforcements. In a separate development, the Syrian authorities imposed an overnight curfew in the central city of Homs, state media reported. Reports say this followed unrest over a video purportedly showing an attack on an Alawite shrine. The interior ministry said the footage was old, dating back to a rebel offensive on Aleppo in late November, and the violence was carried out by unknown groups. The SOHR said one demonstrator was killed and five wounded in Homs.

## China criticizes latest US NDAA

BEIJING: The US National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) played up the alleged "China military threat" as an excuse to increase US military spending and maintain its hegemony. This grossly interferes with China's internal affairs and undermines world peace and stability. We are strongly dissatisfied with it and firmly oppose it, Zhang Xiaogang, a spokesperson for China's Ministry of National Defense, said on Thursday. Zhang made the remarks in response to questions on US National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for fiscal year 2025, which announced a defense budget of up to \$895 billion for the next fiscal year and identified China as one of the major challenges to the US national security. Some analysts suggest that the introduction of this Act reflects the deep anxiety of the US about its own strengths. Zhang said that China has no intention to challenge any country. In fact, the worst enemy of the US is the US itself. US military expenditure has already topped the world for long, which is still increasing rapidly year by year. This fully exposes the belligerent nature of the US and its obsession with hegemony and expansion. It's clear to all that many current wars and conflicts are a result of US policy failures. The wars and military operations launched by the US since 2001 have caused more than hundreds of thousands of deaths and millions of injuries, and displaced tens of millions of people. The US's abuse of force not only brings harm to the world, but also accelerates its own decline, said Zhang. Our planet is big enough for both China and the US to develop individually and collectively. China remains committed to the path

of peaceful development and a defense policy that is defensive in nature, Zhang said. We do not engage in any arms race with any other country, and always serve as a defender for world peace. We urge the US side to abandon Cold-war mentality and zero-sum mindset, and get rid of its obsessive delusion of containing and outcompeting China, so as not to undermine the bilateral and mil-to-mil relations between China and the US, said Zhang. With stronger capacities and more reliable methods, the Chinese military will take resolute countermeasures against any infringements and provocations to safeguard national sovereignty, security and development interests, Zhang said. At the press conference, Zhang also commented on reports that the US Space Force (USSF) has activated a unit in Japan and in the inaugural ceremony, the first commander stated that the unit in Japan aims to strengthen space surveillance and response capabilities in the region, in response to the growing military use of space by China and Russia, as well as North Korea's advancements in nuclear and missile development. Zhang said that the US continues to expand its space military power, strengthen space military alliances, and provoke a space arms race, endangering global strategic stability. China consistently advocates for the peaceful use of space and opposes the weaponization and militarization of space. We urge the US to seriously reconsider its dangerous actions in space, stop provocations that lead to space confrontation, and stop spreading false narratives, so that it can contribute to maintaining lasting peace and security in space, said Zhang.

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