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Pakistan's red-ball coach Gillespie decides to resign

Detailed News On Page-06

Pakistan urges stricter climate obligations

Detailed News On Page-08

Dialogue only solution to problems

Detailed News On Page-08



Bench raises critical questions

How civilians can be tried in military courts, asks SC

If President's House is attacked, trial will take place in ATC, remarks Justice Mandokhail

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Supreme Court Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail on Thursday questioned the legitimacy of trying civilians under the armed forces' disciplinary framework, during the hearing of intra-court appeals against military courts' decisions. The seven-member constitutional bench, led by Justice Aminuddin Khan, heard the appeals. The bench also included Justice Mandokhail, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Justice Syed Hasan Azhar Rizvi, Justice Naeem Akhtar Afghan, Justice Musarrat Hilali and Justice Shahid Bilal Hassan. Representing the federal government, senior lawyer Khawaja Haris argued that the cases revolve around Article 8 of the Constitution. However, Justice Mandokhail raised critical questions, including: "How can an individual not a part of the armed forces fall under its disciplinary code?" He elaborated by comparing it to departmental codes, saying: "If someone works in agriculture, they are subject to its discipline, but how does armed forces' discipline apply to a civilian?" In response, Haris said if the law permits, the discipline will apply. Justice Hilali pointed out the lack of access to FIR copies for individuals held in military custody, while Justice Mazhar probed the grounds on which the Army Act was deemed incompatible with Article 8 by a prior bench. Then, Advocate Haris said that under specific circumstances, civilians can also fall under the jurisdiction of the Army Act. He further asserted that the court does not have the authority to nullify provisions of the Army Act. Justice Mandokhail raised a question, asking whether the Army Act renders Section 1 of Article 8 of the Constitution ineffective. He further inquired if merely contemplating incitement could bring a civilian under the Army Act. He questioned whether civilians could be

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10 candidates nominated for IHC judges

IHC CJ nominates D&SJ Azam Khan and Shahrukh Arjumand. Humayun Dilawar also gets nod

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The names of 10 candidates nominated for judicial appointments in the Islamabad High Court (IHC) have been disclosed ahead of the Judicial Commission meeting scheduled for December 21. The panel will deliberate on the proposed appointments. Two nominees have been suggested by the Islamabad High Court Chief Justice including District and Sessions Judges Azam Khan and Shahrukh Arjumand. Other nominees include Advocate Kashif Ali Malik, recommended by PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan; Advocate Syed Qamar Hussain Shah Sabzwari, proposed by Islamabad Bar Council representative Zulfiqar Ali; and Advocate Sultan Mazhar Sher Khan, nominated by senior most judge Justice Mansoor Ali Shah.

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Briefs

Faiz's trial is good omen: Arif Alvi

Says he was ready to play his role to bring stability to the country

NAZIR SYAL

KARACHI: Former president and PTI stalwart Dr Arif Alvi said on Thursday that it was good if former spymaster General (r) Faiz Hameed was undergoing a military trial for allegedly participating in political activities. Speaking to media men in Karachi, he said he had always believed that dialogue was the only way out of a deadlock. "And now if there has been progress on this front, it is a good development," he added. The former president said he was ready to play his role to bring stability to the country. "I can even sacrifice my life for the purpose." Earlier, SHC, during the hearing of the case related to seeking details of the FIRs lodged against the former president, ordered that Alvi be not arrested in any case until December 19.

Mohsin Naqvi meets Khattak

Both pledged to strongly confront elements that are hindering Pakistan's progress

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and the founder of Pakistan PTI-P, Pervez Khattak, have reiterated their commitment to dealing sternly with those trying to obstruct the country progress. During a meeting between Minister Naqvi and Khattak, they discussed matters of mutual interest, the overall situation of the country, and political affairs. They also talked about measures to ensure peace and security in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Both pledged to strongly confront elements that are hindering Pakistan's progress.

Imran not happy with leadership

Imran, Bushra indicted in new Toshakhana case

Former prime minister, ex-first lady accused of misuse of powers, retaining state gifts illegally

COURT REPORTER

RAWALPINDI: A special court in Islamabad on Thursday indicted Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder-chairman Imran Khan and his wife, Bushra Bibi, in the new Toshakhana case — also known as the jewellery set case. Special Court Central-I Judge Central Shahrukh Arjumand, who presided over the hearing at Rawalpindi's Adiala jail, framed the charges on Khan and Bushra. The case was initially filed by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB). However, in light of NAB Amendments, the Federal Investigation Agency took over the case and filed its challan in September this year. The couple have received bail in the case. But while the former first lady remains out of prison, her husband is still behind bars in other cases lodged against him. The duo, who is accused of causing loss to the national exchequer via illegal sale and retention of state gifts, was arrested in the said case on July 13 — the same day they were acquitted in the idat case. In October, the former first lady,

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PTI wants NRO which will not be granted: Kundi

Kundi stated that PTI members abandoned Imran Khan for power

BUREAU REPORT

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor, Faisal Karim Kundi, has said that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) members were seeking an NRO (National Reconciliation Ordinance), but they would not be granted one. In an exclusive conversation with Dunya News, Governor Kundi stated that PTI members abandoned Imran Khan for power. He added that Imran Khan must now face the consequences of

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Fazlur Rehman claims madrassa registration bill 'has become law'

JUI-F chief tells religious scholars that those who "incited you are ones responsible for the madrassa bill issue"

SHAMIM SHAHID

DI KHAN: JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman has urged the incumbent government to notify the Societies Registration (Amendment) Bill 2024, which deals with the registration of seminaries, as the "bill has become an Act of parliament after the president returned it twice". "If a bill is not given assent within 10 days, doesn't it automatically become an act," the religio-political leader asked while addressing a press conference on Thursday. The disputed madrassa bill, which has already been passed by both houses of parliament, has become a bone of contention between the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-F (JUI-F) and the government. Its enactment was part of an agreement between the government and the religio-political party for supporting the 26th Amendment, said Fazl. Following its approval from parliament, the bill now requires the president's assent to become law but President Asif Ali Zardari had returned the bill earlier this month, citing legal objections. According to the Constitution, the bill must be tabled before a joint sitting after the president refuses to sign. Article 75 (2) of the Constitution of Pakistan states:

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PTI can't get 'Faizyab' anymore

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The opposition and the treasury benches have traded barbs in the Senate over the late-night crackdown on the PTI supporters during their "do-or-die" protest in Islamabad, with PPP Senator Sherry Rehman saying that the former ruling party took a back seat "because they know they can no longer be Faizyab" — a tacit reference to the alleged support of detained former spy chief Lt Gen (retd) Faiz Hamid to previous Imran Khan-led regime. "You [PTI] have launched an attack against the state [...] you will get freedom once you accept the responsibility," the senator said during the session of the upper house of parliament on Thursday. Rehman asked the Imran Khan-founded party to tender an apology over the violence took place during the November 26 and May 9, 2023, protests.

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INDEPENDENCE DAY OF KENYA



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Industries Rana Tanveer Hussain, Dean of the African Group Mohamad Karmoune Ambassador of Morocco, High Commissioner of Kenya and others cutting cake to celebrate the Independence Day of Kenya. — DNA/Online

341 terrorists killed in 12801 IBOs, NA told

The forces recovered a total of Rs. 581 million from terrorists

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Interior has submitted a report to the National Assembly, revealing that 12,801 intelligence-based operations (IBOs) were conducted across Pakistan in the first 10 months of 2024. According to the report, 341 terrorists were killed in these operations whereas the total number of banned organizations in the country has increased to 82. The report further stated that 800 individuals were arrested on terrorism charges until October 2024.

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Syria's new govt suspends constitution

A judicial and human rights committee will be established

NEWS DESK

DAMASCUS: Syria's new government spokesman said on Thursday the country's constitution and parliament would be suspended for the duration of the three-month transition period following president Bashar Assad's ouster. "A judicial and human rights committee will be established to examine the constitution and then introduce amendments," Obaida Arnaout said.

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Sans foreign interference

'Syrian people have right to decide future'

FO spokesperson expresses concerns over Israeli aggression, widespread destruction in Syria

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has said that it is the right of the Syrian people to determine their own future and make decisions about their destiny which any foreign interference or external imposition should not determine. Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch made these comments in light of the current situation in Syria after rebels ousted Syrian president Bashar al-Assad in a lightning offensive spearheaded by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group and its allies, which brought a spectacular end to the five-decade-rule.

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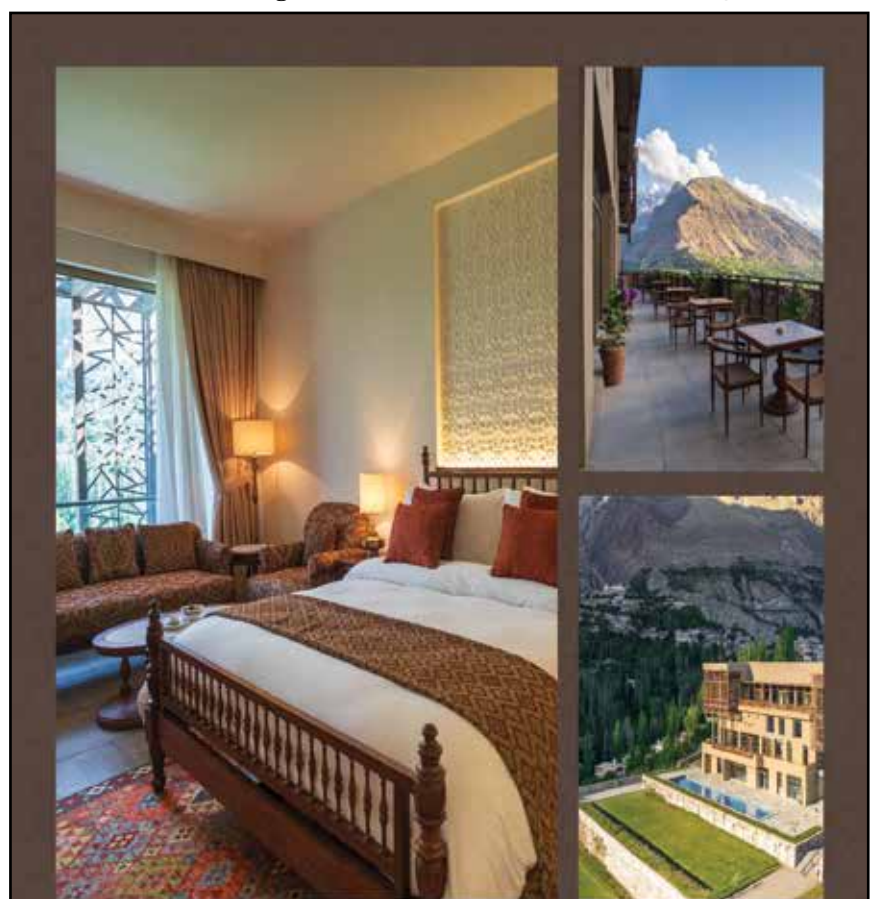
Senate condemns Israeli bombings in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria

The Upper House reaffirmed Pakistan's unwavering support for the Palestinian cause

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Senate passed a unanimous resolution condemning the Israeli bombing in Gaza and other countries. The resolution, moved by

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Plan to provide free textbooks to KP students

Four youth skill development, employment programs launched

DNA

PESHAWAR :The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government on Thursday completed all arrangements to provide free textbooks to students across the province for the upcoming 2025-26 academic session. The announcement was made during a review meeting chaired by the Provincial Minister for Education, Faisal Khan. According to official statement, 33.96 million textbooks would be distributed at the start of the academic year, with an estimated cost of Rs 4.9 billion. In a significant cost-saving measure, 50 percent of the books would be reused, reducing financial pressure on the government, it said adding that this initiative aligned with the government's commitment to ensuring education for all. Speaking on the occasion, the Education Minister said that reforms in textbook printing and distribution had resulted in a savings of Rs 2.2 billion this year. He commended the Textbook Board for their effective planning and timely execution. He said that KP government was determined to provide uninterrupted education facilities to every child in the province, adding that the reuse of textbooks and timely distribution had reduced the dropout rate in schools, with more children now enrolling in government schools. Earlier the meeting discussed the demand for books across various regions. It was informed during the meeting that 5.2 million books were required for merged districts, 3.4 million for settled districts and over 2.3 million for the Elementary and Secondary

Education Foundation. Chairman of the Textbook Board, Fara Saqlain, requested the minister for payment of outstanding dues of over two billion rupees with the Finance Department. The education minister assured to take up the issue with the finance for really release of funds. He reiterated the government's resolve to make education accessible for all and remove all hurdles in this connection. Moreover, in a significant step to empower the province's youth, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government has launched four major programs aimed at providing modern technical training and employment opportunities. According to a statement issued here by the Chief Minister Secretariat, the initiatives were inaugurated during a ceremony held under the management of KP Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA). The CM Ali Amin Khan Gandapur attended the event as the chief guest. During the program it was informed that Rs 04 billion Ehsaas Hunar Program would be implemented through Akhuwat Microfinance, adding that Rs 02 billion has been allocated for the current fiscal year. Under the program skilled youth would be provided interest-free loans of up to Rs 500,000 to start their businesses. Over 35,000 skilled individuals were expected to benefit from this initiative. Similarly, under the another Rural Economic Transformation Project (RETP), has been launched, funded by IFAD and the European Union, with an estimated cost of Rs 11.4 billion. The project would offer free technical and vocational training to 60,000 men and women from rural areas. Additionally, 42,000 skilled individuals would receive an average of \$300 in financial assistance for self-em-

ployment. The program also included internships and job placement support for 25,000 graduates. The third program of the government was Upgradation of Technical Institutes, it was told and added that with financial support from GIZ and the European Union, key technical colleges like the Government College of Technology in Nowshera and Abbottabad would be upgraded into Centers of Excellence. Twenty-two technical institutes across various districts would be transformed into model institutions, while nine others would be elevated to DAE Level-5. The fourth initiative of the government was On-Job Training Program costing Rs 177 million. It aimed to place over 3,000 youth in industries through phased training. In the first phase, 168 trainees would receive a monthly stipend of Rs 15,000 for three months, with a budget of PKR 7.56 million for this phase. Speaking on the occasion, the CM emphasized the importance of empowering the youth, calling them the "asset of the nation." He criticized the past provincial governments for not paying attention to vocational education, stating that many degrees previously obtained lacked international recognition, however, he said that now efforts were underway to provide globally recognized certifications. The CM said that the government could not provide job to everyone therefore the youth should seize opportunities in private sectors. He urged youth to explore new opportunities, and work hard and contribute to national progress. He also mentioned that a 44 percent increase in provincial revenue had enabled the KP government to invest in youth programs.



ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi met founder of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Parliamentarians Pervez Khattak to discuss pressing national issues.

Quran, Prophet (PBUH) real guidance for all of us: Governor

LAHORE: Punjab Governor Sardar Saleem Haider Khan said that the Holy Quran and the life of our last beloved Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) is beacon of light and real guidance for all of us to overcome problems facing the country. He said this while addressing the certificate distribution ceremony among the participants of 121st National Management Course held at National School of Public Policy on Thursday. He said, "No doubt all officers are fully capable and reached here following a proper system." He said that different training and courses help officers to polish their abilities and executing their responsibilities more efficiently. He further said that these courses also provide guidance to the officers which help them in playing positive role for development of the country. Saleem Haider Khan underlined the need of self accountability, adding that it was very unfortunate that country was far behind in terms of progress. He said that, "If we want development and prosperity in the country then self accountability is must at all levels." Punjab Governor said that there was a lot of scope for bringing improvement at all levels. He further said, "Pakistan is full of potential and opportunities and only there is a need to work on our weaknesses." Sardar Saleem Haider said that country was facing different challenges and conspiracies and it was a high time to correct ourselves to steer the country out of existing challenges.—APP

ICCI delegation visits Iraq embassy

Envoy for strengthening Pak-Iraq bilateral trade

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Iraq and Pakistan share strong historical ties and numerous commonalities, which present significant opportunities for enhancing bilateral relations. This was highlighted by the Ambassador of Iraq to Pakistan, Hamid Abbas Lafta, during his meeting with a delegation from the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), led by President Nasir Mansoor Qureshi, at the Iraqi Embassy. In his address, Ambassador Lafta emphasized the potential for furthering economic and trade relations between the two nations, noting that despite various challenges, both countries must work together to overcome these obstacles for the benefit of their peoples. He highlighted that Iraq offers a stable and secure environment for foreign investment, encouraging Pakistani investors

to explore opportunities in various sectors. The Ambassador also underlined the strong defense ties between Iraq and Pakistan, with recent procurements such as the Super Mushahk aircraft from Pakistan. He reiterated the importance of fostering joint ventures and exchanges of delegations to bolster trade. Key areas for cooperation include improving financial transactions and transportation links, particularly between the two countries, which will soon be addressed. Ambassador Lafta invited the Pakistani business community to participate in Iraqi expos to showcase their products and enhance trade relations. He emphasized that economic collaboration would benefit both countries, with great potential in areas such as pharmaceuticals, textiles, food, and energy. On his part, Nasir Mansoor Qureshi expressed gratitude for the opportunity to explore business opportunities and stressed the need to strengthen existing trade relations. He pointed out that approximately 200,000 Pakistanis visit Iraq annually for pilgrimage, and there is untapped potential to expand beyond this sector. Qureshi emphasized the role of Chambers of Commerce in both countries in facilitating trade and promoting economic cooperation. ICCI President also discussed the challenges posed by limited direct connectivity and urged the initiation of trade through the strategic Gwadar port. He also highlighted Pakistan's tourism potential, particularly in the northern regions, as a key area for further collaboration. "We are confident that both governments, through high-level bilateral visits and continuous cooperation, will pave the way for a prosperous future for both countries," said Qureshi, inviting the Ambassador to visit the ICCI and meet with business leaders to explore additional avenues for collaboration.

Lost and found

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Work on all projects under Lahore development plan starts

LAHORE :Work on all projects under the Lahore development plan had been started under the supervision of Lahore Administrator Musa Raza here. The Punjab government had already issued Rs1.37 trillion for Lahore development plan. The chief minister office sources told APP on Wednesday that the mega Lahore revamping plan was aimed at overhauling the city's infrastructure, focusing on renovating streets, alleys, and neighborhoods. They said the development plan included upgrading drainage systems, paving roads, installing street-lights, and restoring parks and cemeteries. Meanwhile, more than 416 schemes are included in the Lahore development plan. Of total funds, Rs. 78 billion had been earmarked for 867 specific schemes.—APP

Concrete legislative reforms stressed to empower women led businesses

PESHAWAR :The Centre for Governance and Public Accountability (CGPA), in collaboration with the Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (WCCI) Dir Lower hosted a public-private discussion to address strategies designed to support women entrepreneurs and their businesses across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). According to a press release issued on Thursday, Special Assistant to Chief Minister for Population Welfare, Liaqat Ali Khan was chief guest on the occasion. The initiative, held under the CIPE-funded project, brought together a diverse group of industry experts, government officials, women entrepreneurs, business community representatives, the Economic De-

velopment Unit members, media, TEVTA officials, elected council members of the local government and civil society organizations. Project Manager, Khalfan Khattak underscored CGPA's unwavering commitment to empowering women's chambers of commerce by fostering an enabling environment that promotes participatory democracy and opens reliable opportunities for women-led businesses at the provincial level. Special Assistant to CM, Liaqat Ali Khan, highlighted the importance of creating a more inclusive and supportive legislative environment for women entrepreneurs. He advocated for enhanced collaboration between key government departments, including

Population, Commerce and Industries, and Technical Education, to amend existing trade-related acts and policies for more progressive economic growth. Liaqat also emphasized the effective implementation of the inclusive provisions of the KP Urban Policy 2030, ensuring tangible benefits for women entrepreneurs, youth, and marginalized groups. Speaking during the meeting, Additional Deputy Commissioner Bashir Khan emphasized the vital role of district administration in strengthening local business ecosystems. He discussed the district's initiatives under the CM reforms agenda and KP Urban Policy 2030, outlining steps to streamline regulatory processes.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Visitors take keen interest in a painting during painting exhibition by Nazia Ejaz, tile "Ghosts of Place" at Tanzara Art Gallery, in the Federal Capital.

Transforming IT industry development in Pakistan via agile practices

HASSAN NAWAZ

ISLAMABAD: Agile practices are rapidly transforming the IT landscape in Pakistan. It offers a modern approach to software development that emphasizes flexibility, collaboration, and customer satisfaction. You will be surprised to know that over the past decade, Pakistan's IT sector has experienced exponential growth, with exports surpassing \$2.6 billion in FY2023, as per Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB). This growth has been partly fueled by adopting agile methodologies across startups and established companies, making Pakistan a promising hub for software development. Tech giants like Systems Limited and NetSol Technologies have embraced agile

frameworks to deliver complex projects efficiently while responding to rapidly changing client requirements. Meanwhile, startups in technology incubators such as Plan9 and NIC (National Incubation Center) increasingly utilize agile principles to accelerate product development cycles and gain a competitive edge. Local events like the Agile Karachi Conference and the Lahore Tech Meetup are an important venture that shows the importance of agile practices. These events also provide platforms for IT professionals to see what other professionals are doing & also help them create a network with other professionals. Fintech sector is the forerunner, where agile methodologies have created customer-centric solutions. Companies like SadaPay and

Easypaisa have revolutionized the financial landscape, adapting quickly to user feedback and regulatory changes to stay ahead in the market. Similarly, e-commerce platforms like Daraz have integrated agile frameworks to enhance user experiences and optimize operations. It is critical factor in maintaining market dominance for them, even though other e-commerce websites have come up locally. Agile practices have also gained traction in government-backed IT initiatives. For instance, the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB) has adopted agile principles in projects to digitise public services. This shift has enabled faster rollouts and continuous improvements based on user feedback, enhancing accessibility and efficiency for citizens. Over the past few years,

Pakistan's Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication (MoITT) has experienced several leadership changes due to the political turmoil in the country. It is really impacting the continuity of IT policies. Syed Amin-ul-Haque served as the Federal Minister for IT and Telecommunication until March 2024. Subsequently, in March 2024, Shaza Fatima Khawaja assumed the role of Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication. Each minister introduced distinct initiatives and priorities, which, while aiming to advance the sector, led to shifts in strategic focus. For instance, Syed Amin-ul-Haque emphasized increas-

ing IT exports, aiming to boost them to \$15 billion. Dr Umar Saif, during his tenure, announced plans for the National Space Policy and the establishment of the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency. Shaza Fatima Khawaja has focused on digital skills development and enhancing internet connectivity, including discussions on bringing Starlink services to Pakistan. These frequent leadership changes have posed challenges to policy stability, as each transition necessitates adjustments in ongoing projects and strategic directions. To ensure sustainable growth and global competitiveness, the IT sector requires consistent leadership and a robust, bipartisan commitment to long-term strategies, regardless of political transitions.

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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

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Bomb Disposal.....15
Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad.....1122 & 16
Emergency Ambulance.1122 & Rescue Services.4451122
Motorway Police.....9266044
Motorway Police.9270601-20
Women Police Stations Islamabad.....9222596
Rawalpindi.....9270601-20



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



Hospitals

CMH.....5611111
MH.....5611116
Cantt Hospital.....9270907-11
DHQ.....5556311-4
RGH.....9290301-7
Holy Family.....9290322-7
PIMS.....9261170-79
Polyclinic.....9218300-09
Shifa International 4603666



Departments

CDA.....9221334-43
CDA.....9208301-04
Met Office.....9250360-6
RDA.....5555864
TMA.....5770886
Cantonment Board 9270151-3

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Romania, Pakistan relations excellent, says Dan Stoenescu

Says thirty-five years after the fall of the Iron Curtain in Europe, replacing totalitarianism with democracy, we were living in a complex international context, marked by the illegal, unjustified, and unprovoked aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, instability and radicalism. Determination and solidarity remain essential values

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador-designate of Romania to Pakistan Dan Stoenescu has said Romania and Pakistan enjoy very good bilateral relations and Pakistan represents an important partner for Romania in the South Asian region. Moreover, this year, Romania and Pakistan celebrate 60 years of diplomatic relations, and this link has been constantly developed throughout the years. The ambassador expressed these views while speaking on the occasion of the National Day of Romania. State Minister Tariq Fatemi was the chief guest while a large number of guests hailing from various walks of life attended the reception. The ambassador further said this mutual motivation has rendered a fruitful political dialogue, reflecting the clear desire of both states to develop a pragmatic relationship in fields of common interests. 'Our two countries are bound to take forward the bilateral agenda and the cooperation within the EU-Pakistan framework and in multilateral formats, especially within the UN'. While dilating upon the significance of the national day the ambassador said, 'on December 1st, 2024, we celebrate one hundred and six years since the realization of our Great Union, a historical landmark for the vision and fundamental objectives of our nation, national consciousness, and unity. By recalling the historic act of December 1, 1918, Romanians, at home and abroad, symbolically reaffirm our society's maturity, strength, and determination to overcome even the most difficult crises, with confidence in the features that define us and, in the future, we can build together'. He added, thirty-five years after the fall of the Iron Curtain in Europe,



replacing totalitarianism with democracy, we were living in a complex international context, marked by the illegal, unjustified, and unprovoked aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, instability and radicalism. Determination and solidarity remain essential values. 'With a predictable foreign policy, anchored in European

and transatlantic democratic values, Romania is currently an essential contributor to Europe's security, continuing, as long as necessary, the firm and multidimensional support for Ukraine and its citizens and its constructive engagement in strengthening security in the Black Sea region and NATO's Eastern Flank'. He said, Ro-

mania does not address these difficulties and challenges in isolation. Today, Romania is part of the strongest collective security alliance, NATO, which brings a billion people under its protective umbrella. 'Moreover, we are part of the most visionary and dynamic union of sovereign states, the European Union, a common

space of democratic values and rights, prosperity, and culture'. Ambassador Dan said, the commencement of EU accession negotiations with the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine and the provision of the necessary support for the successful completion of these processes remain essential benchmarks for

diplomatic action to strengthen societal resilience and for long-term democratic and economic development. At the same time, Romania remains a firm supporter of the European course of our partners in the Western Balkans, a strategic area for strengthening the security, stability and prosperity of Europe, he concluded.

Slow internet severely affecting economy

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, the President of the Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, the President of All Karachi Industrial Alliance, the Chairman of the FPCCI Advisory Board, and the President and former provincial minister, Mian Zahid Hussain, said on Thursday that the slow internet is badly affecting the economy. Businesses are bearing the brunt of the slow internet, with the employment of a large number of people hanging in the balance, underscoring the urgent need for a solution, he said. Mian Zahid Hussain's call for government intervention to resolve the slow internet issue is not just a suggestion, it's a necessity. The impact on businesses and foreign exchange earnings demands

immediate action. Talking to the business community, the veteran business leader said that Pakistan has become one of the countries with the slowest internet. According to a report by a global organization, Pakistan's internet speed ranks dimly at 100th out of 111 countries for mobile internet speed and 141st out of 155 countries for broadband speed, highlighting the gravity of the situation. Mian Zahid Hussain said it is a matter of great concern that the country's internet speed is slower than Palestine, Lebanon, Libya, Iraq, Ghana, and Bhutan. This slowness is putting billions of rupees of investment and millions of jobs at stake. The business leader noted that while the government is making announcements to increase IT exports to five billion dollars, the internet is constantly slowing down and shutting down frequently, which is affecting millions of users and

those working and earning online. He noted that this sector would only disappear if the slow internet speed and disruption does not end. Mian Zahid Hussain said that many Pakistani companies are winding up their businesses and moving to the United Arab Emirates, where they can easily access the world's fastest internet. Many foreign companies are avoiding doing business with Pakistani companies, hitting the expected growth in this promising sector. The average mobile internet speed in the UAE is 542 megabits per second (Mbps), and the average broadband speed is more than 358 Mbps. In comparison, the average mobile internet speed in Pakistan is 20 Mbps, and the average broadband speed is less than 16 Mbps, which is regrettable. Mian Zahid Hussain said that according to relevant experts, an hour of internet shutdown causes a loss of one million dol-

lars to the export industry. Companies must take other measures to deal with these problems, such as increasing business costs while reducing competitiveness. On the other hand, he said freelancers are also very worried, and e-commerce has been devastated because they face difficulties accessing social media apps and sending messages on WhatsApp. Mian Zahid Hussain added that every few days, these internet problems cause significant harm to Pakistan's IT industry and freelancers. Now, the whole world has learned about the internet problems in Pakistan, which has affected their confidence. Hence, many foreign companies do not want to work with any Pakistani company. Mian Zahid Hussain further said that strict action should be taken against those who misuse the internet to propagate hatred of the country and its institutions.

Affordable housing big problem in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Business leader and former President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Dr. Shahid Rasheed Butt, said on Wednesday that affordable housing has become a big problem in Pakistan. He added that the absence of sustainable financing mechanisms, regulatory reforms, and other pressing issues have worsened housing shortages in the country, which should be tackled immediately. Shahid Rasheed Butt said in a statement issued here today that apart from other problems, the rapid population growth rate is also playing its role in augmenting the problem. He noted that unsustainable population growth threatens economic stability, resource allocation, essential service delivery, worsening housing shortages, and environmental degradation. He added that housing is necessary because it offers shelter, builds socioeconomic stability, and promotes health, security, and family success. Poverty, bad health, and declining education are linked to population expansion and the absence of affordable housing. Shahid Rasheed Butt said that without cheap, high-quality housing, low-income families often live in overcrowded, unsanitary, and unclean settings with limited access to clean water.—APP

SCBAP lauds momentum of clearing backlog at SCP

ISLAMABAD: Mian Muhammad Rauf Atta, President Supreme Court Bar Association of Pakistan (SCBAP) has appreciated the momentum at the Supreme Court in reducing the backlog of pending cases terming it a significant step towards dispensation of justice. In a written statement issued here Thursday, the President SCBAP said that during the month of November 2024, the total number of cases instituted in the Supreme Court was 1,487, while 2,901 cases were disposed of, thus reducing the total pending of cases to 58,487, according to the statistics available on its website. 'We appreciate this development as an encouraging step toward the expeditious dispensation of justice to the public at large, which is a primary duty of the Supreme Court. We believe that if the momentum continues with the same thrust, thousands of cases will be disposed of in the coming months, enhancing the overall efficiency and productivity'. 'We would like to express our highest recognition for the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Mr. Justice Yahya Afridi, who precisely anticipated the growing burden on the Supreme Court over the years and took decisive and effective measures to reduce the massive backlog. These measures have also facilitated in restoring public confidence on the institution. It goes without saying that the formation of the constitutional bench in the Supreme Court, now responsible for addressing all constitutional and political matters, has also paved the way for reducing this backlog, which previously consumed the efficiency of the Court in fulfilling its primary task of providing swift and effective justice to the public. However, much still needs to be done, as the task ahead is gigantic. Nevertheless, we are fully confident that the Supreme Court, under the leadership of its paterfamilias, will leave no stone unturned in resolving the issue of backlog as well as other bottlenecks, to provide expeditious, inexpensive, and timely justice. On behalf of the legal fraternity, the Executive Committee of SCBAP and most importantly, the litigant public.—DNA

Naqvi, Khattak discuss national issues

ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi visited the residence of Pervez Khattak, founder of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Parliamentarians, to discuss pressing national issues, including the country's political climate and the establishment of law and order in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. During the meeting, both leaders deliberated on measures to ensure peace and security in the region and pledged to resolutely counter forces hindering Pakistan's progress. They emphasized the importance of national unity and collective efforts for the country's development. Pervez Khattak expressed deep sorrow over the martyrdom of police and Rangers personnel during recent protests in Islamabad, condemning the attacks by miscreants. 'Pakistan belongs to all of us, and we must work together to move it forward,' said Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi.—APP

Tanveer directs CDA to install EV-charging stations

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Industries and Production Rana Tanveer Hussain on Thursday directed the Capital Development Authority (CDA) to install electric vehicles' charging stations at all petrol pumps operating in Islamabad. Chairing the fourth meeting of the Electric Vehicles (EV) Policy, he praised the CDA's performance in promoting the use of environmentally friendly vehicles in the capital. The minister affirmed that Islamabad would be developed into a model city, in line with the Prime Minister's vision, a news release said. He also announced that a new Electric Vehicles Policy would be unveiled very soon.—APP

OPF set up 24 educational institutions in country

ISLAMABAD: Overseas Pakistanis Foundation (OPF) has established a high-quality education system comprising 24 educational institutions throughout the country including Azad Jammu & Kashmir, and two state-of-the-art colleges, OPF Girls College, F-8/2 Islamabad, and OPF Boys College, F-8/4, Islamabad and 22 secondary and higher secondary level educational institutions. An official source told APP here on Thursday, that at present more than 17,000 students are studying at OPF institutions out of which more than 2500 students are children of overseas Pakistanis. 1282 teaching and non-teaching staff are employed in these institutions. He said that OPF works under the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (OP&HRD) and had been established under the Emigration Rules made under Emigration Ordinance 1979, Articles of Association, and Memorandum of Overseas Pakistanis Foundation, OPF Education

Division is vested with the following responsibilities including giving of scholarships, stipends or grants to the children of the emigrants for studies in the field of science, technology, art and management in Pakistan and abroad. The education system provides quality education for the children of Overseas Pakistanis from Pre-Nursery to Graduation Level. Educational institutions in Islamabad also provide education in O & A Level streams. OPF provides the structures, human resources, budget, and administrative & management support to ensure that the quality of service delivery is maintained at a high level, he added. OPF was constantly drawing up strategies, policies, and plans for educational reforms and development at OPF Educational institutions. The Education Division drafts relevant rules and regulations for schools in the OPF Education System and supervises their implementation. The source revealed that OPF Girls College was established,

in 1985, in the heart of the Capital city, Sector F-8/2 Islamabad, on an area of 100 kanals. The college has been providing quality education from Pre-nursery to Graduation level to the children of Overseas Pakistanis and the general public for the last 29 years. Presently 4,800 students are enrolled in the college out of which 702 are children of Overseas Pakistanis. The institution has a hostel facility for the children of OPFs. It can provide boarding/ lodging facilities to more than 100 students from the Primary to Graduation Level. Transport facility for pick and drop of students was also available at the College. 450 highly qualified teaching/non-teaching staff put their hearts and heads for the excellence of the institution. Due to their untiring efforts and dedication, OPF Girls College has now become a symbol of prestige and its academic and financial performance over the years has remained outstanding.—APP

Briefs

OICCI survey reaffirms Pakistan as promising investment destination

ISLAMABAD: Advisor to Finance Minister on Economic and Financial Reforms, Khurram Schehzad said here on Thursday that OICCI's Business Confidence Survey reaffirmed Pakistan as a promising and reliable destination for investment. "The latest OICCI's Business Confidence Survey results send a strong signal to potential investors globally, reaffirmed by the renewed optimism by existing foreign investors, reaffirming Pakistan as a promising and reliable destination for investment," he said while commenting on the survey. According to the report, Business Confidence was at 2-Year High as foreign investor confidence improved to +6% (from -4%), highest since November 2022 while business situation improved to 20% from 8% earlier, showing improving cost of doing business. Likewise, the report says, investors anticipate 30% sales growth with industry recovery, demand & production activities adding that 39% of investors plan business expansion, up from 14%, signaling improved growth outlook.

It says, New Order Index up significantly improved to 20% from 4%, reflecting renewed sense of optimism among businesses while employment prospects improved, with manufacturing sector leading with a rise to 6% from 2%, followed by services sector's robust growth, rising from 7% to 30%. Optimism about Pakistan's global business situation jumped to +31% (from -10%), reflecting improved foreign perception while 43% of respondent expressed optimism for next 6 months, up from 34%. According to report, there has been improvement all across the country as metro cities (Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Faisalabad) improved by 9%, as well as non-metro cities by 13%.—APP

RSA releases 83,000 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Thursday released 83,000 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 40,300 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1479.42 feet and was 81.42 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 17,800 cusecs and 41,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1144.70 feet, which was 94.70 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 5,500 cusecs and 25,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 60,200, 42,600, 37,300 and 7,200 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 11,700 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 1,800 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.—APP

Director Excise and Taxation fined for withholding information

The Pakistan Information Commission reaffirmed its commitment to upholding the principles of transparency and accountability enshrined in the Right of Access to Information Act, 2017

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Information Commission (PIC) has imposed a fine equivalent to ten days' salary on the Director of Excise and Taxation, Islamabad, for failing to disclose information requested under the Right of Access to Information Act, 2017. According to details, in August 2024, a citizen, Sadiq Mazhar, submitted an information request to the Excise and Taxation Department, seeking details regarding alcohol permits and sales in

Islamabad. The requested information included the total number of alcohol permit holders, beer purchases by these license holders since January 2023, a list of establishments licensed to sell alcohol, excise duties collected from these establishments, and the total supply made to these license holders. Despite the request, the Excise and Taxation Department failed to respond. Following this non-compliance, Sadiq Mazhar filed an appeal with the Pakistan Information Commission. The Commission issued multiple notices to the Director, Excise and Taxation, but no representative appeared, nor was the requested information provided. On November 14, 2024, a final show-cause notice was issued under Section 20(1)(f) of the Right of Access to Information Act, 2017. A copy of the notice was also sent to the Secretary, Ministry of Interior, but no action was taken. In its order issued on November 26, 2024, the Commission expressed concern over the deliberate obstruction of the Act's implementation. The Commission noted that the officer had been given sufficient opportuni-

ties to respond, including notices sent through registered post, but failed to comply or appear. The Commission emphasized that such conduct undermines the purpose of law ensuring transparency and accountability in public offices. It also comes in the way of the Act passed by the legislature. The Commission has restraint to enable the public official to provide the information but in vain. Consequently, the Commission imposed a fine equivalent to the salary of ten days on the Director of Excise and Taxation for willfully delaying or obstructing

the disclosure of information. Pakistan Information Commission directed the Chief Commissioner, Islamabad Capital Territory, Secretary, Ministry of Interior, and Accountant General Pakistan Revenues to ensure compliance with the order. Notices have also been issued to these authorities to report compliance at the next hearing. The Pakistan Information Commission reaffirmed its commitment to upholding the principles of transparency and accountability enshrined in the Right of Access to Information Act, 2017.

SECP launches WEFP, sets target of 70% of all new clients

ISLAMABAD: The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has unveiled the Women Equality in Finance Policy Framework (WEFP) for Non-Bank Micro Finance Companies (NBMFCs), setting a transformative agenda to enhance women's financial inclusion and strengthen their role in the economic ecosystem. The policy framework mandates that in next five years 70% of all new clients on board by the NBMFCs shall be women, said a press release issued here on Thursday. To achieve this NBMFCs will be encouraged to develop tailored financial products for women entrepreneurs. To foster Inclusive Governance the policy requires a minimum of 25% female representation on Boards and also sets incremental workforce inclusivity targets. The policy overall encourages digitization and innovation in the microfinance sector. With measures such as integrating gender-disaggregated data, training programs for workforce inclusivity, and the modernization of financial services through digital platforms, WEFP aspires to create a resilient and diverse financial sector that uplifts Pakistan's economy.—APP

Govt urged to ease OPD burden on doctors

ISLAMABAD: Health experts have urged the government to reduce the burden on public doctors, which will enhance patient care and outcomes. Talking to APP on Thursday, Head of the Dermatology Unit at the District Headquarters Hospital in Haripur, Dr Niaz Akbar Afridi said that government doctors are currently handling an average of 100 patients per day in the Outpatient Departments (OPDs) and this number exceeds the international standard of 25 patients per consultant. Dr Niaz urged the policymakers to limit the number of patients in government OPDs to 40. This, he said, would enhance the quality of diagnosis, leading to better treatment outcomes. He highlighted that government hospitals often struggle with dissatisfied patients who frequently visit specialists without adhering to advised follow-up schedules. "If a consultant recommends a follow-up after 20 days, patients often return after just three days, complaining of no improvement," he explained.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Azerbaijan Khazar Farhadov, Ambassador of Kazakhstan Yerzhan Kistafin, Ambassador of Uzbekistan Alisher Tukhtaev & Ambassador of the Kyrgyz Republic Aybek Atakhanov offering fateha for the departed soul of sister of Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq at Parliament House.

NUML, ANF host anti-drug awareness campaign

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The National University of Modern Languages hosted a significant Anti-Drug Awareness Campaign today, which is part of the collaborative effort of ANF and HEC to launch Anti-Drug Awareness in academic institutes. The event, aimed at raising awareness about the alarming rise of drug abuse among youth, included an insightful lecture delivered by Director General ANF Major General Abdul Moeed HI(M), a proud NUML alumnus, and an awareness walk. DG ANF was the chief guest at the event and spoke passionately on the theme, "Drugs: A Menace; How to Counter It." Addressing a large gathering of students and faculty, he expressed deep concern over the increasing prevalence of drug

use among the youth, who constitute 65% of Pakistan's population. "Pakistan's youth are the torchbearers of our nation's future, and it is our collective responsibility to protect them from the scourge of drugs," said DG ANF. He highlighted the severe challenges posed by the use of synthetic and chemical drugs, which not only devastate individuals but also impact families and society. He emphasized the national and religious obligation to reject drugs and foster a drug-free lifestyle. The DG revealed alarming statistics, including 75,000 arrests and the seizure of 300 tons of drugs worth Rs. 7 billion in this year alone, despite ANF's limited resources. He discussed the growing trend of indoor drug cultivation, in-house processing, and the use of synthetic drugs like ecstasy tablets, stressing the

need for collective action from government institutions, educators, parents, and peers to combat this menace. He also shed light on how drug trafficking impacts Pakistan's reputation internationally, including declining student visa acceptance rates due to incidents involving drug trafficking. "Drugs not only harm individuals but also tarnish the dignity and future of our nation," he said, urging students to become ambassadors of Pakistan and play an active role in spreading awareness. Rector NUML, Major General (R) Shahid Mehmood Kayani HI(M), in his closing remarks, reinforced the importance of awareness campaigns as a key strategy to tackle drug abuse. He announced plans to integrate anti-drug campaigns into NUML's academic calendar, launch collabora-

tive research projects with ANF, and propose providing internships to NUML students to contribute actively to this cause. He also expressed NUML's intent to start anti-drug programs on NUML TV and organize rallies to reinforce the message of a drug-free society. "Healthy youth are the backbone of any nation, and through collective efforts, we can ensure our academic institutions remain drug-free," said the Rector. He assured DG ANF of NUML's full support in addressing this critical issue. The event concluded with an awareness walk led by DG ANF and Rector NUML, accompanied by distinguished guests, faculty members, and students, symbolizing solidarity and commitment to a drug-free Pakistan.

IIUI, Karwan-e-Ilm Foundation collaborate to offer scholarships to students

ISLAMABAD: A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI) and Karwan-e-Ilm Foundation on Thursday, aimed at providing scholarships to academically able and deserving students of the university, as well as creating opportunities for their professional growth. The MoU signing ceremony was held at IIUI's new campus, where Prof. Dr. Ahmed Shuja Syed, President IIUI and Khalid Irshad Sufi, Executive Director of Karwan-e-Ilm Foundation, signed the document. The agreement underscores to support five financially needy students who demonstrate exceptional academic performance. Additionally, the MoU includes provisions for financial and logistical assistance to differently-abled students, covering hostel and other associated requirements. Both parties also agreed to organize career counseling seminars through collaborative efforts. During the ceremony, Prof. Dr. Ahmed Shuja Syed expressed gratitude on behalf of the IIUI community. He highlighted the transparent scholarship scrutiny system in place at the university and emphasized the importance of such initiatives in building the society. He remarked that IIUI serves both national and international students, and collaborations like this are pivotal for societal development. He reaffirmed the university's commitment to supporting deserving and able students through a merit-based approach, considering both academic excellence and financial need. Speaking on the occasion, Khalid Irshad Sufi shared that Karwan-e-Ilm Foundation was among the pioneers in initiating scholarships in collaboration with the Higher Education Commission. He reiterated the foundation's dedication to providing merit-based scholarships as a guardian of students' educational journeys.—DNA

Potential of 26th amendment depends on transparency and institutional unity

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The 26th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan has the potential to address longstanding challenges, provided that transparency, inclusivity, and institutional harmony are prioritized. While debate is inevitable in constitutional developments, and there is a critical balance between judicial independence and parliamentary oversight, it is essential that the amendment be critically evaluated to ensure the development of law, constitutional principles, and effective justice delivery. Legal practitioners and scholars noted this during a roundtable titled "The 26th Amendment of the Constitution of Pakistan: Significance and Impact," held at the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Islamabad. The session, chaired by Ahmer Bilal Soofi, advocate Supreme Court of Pakistan, was addressed by Khalid Rahman, chairman IPS, Jam Muhammad Aslam, Ministry

of Law and Justice, Syed Ahmad Hassan Shah, advocate Supreme Court of Pakistan, Hafiz Ahmed Waqas, Shariah Academy, International Islamic University, Islamabad, and Dr Shahzad Iqbal Sham, research fellow, IPS. Presenting an overview of the 26th Amendment, Jam Aslam emphasized that due deliberations preceded the passing of the 26th Amendment to introduce changes in the legislative scheme.

Key provisions included the establishment of special constitutional benches in the Supreme Court and high courts and restructuring of the chief justice's appointment process. Furthermore, the amendment introduced performance evaluations for high court judges, reduced the age limit for high court judges' appointments to 40 years, and allowed Federal Shariat Court judges to ascend to the Supreme

Court. Ahmad Hassan highlighted the ongoing debate surrounding the amendment and emphasized that the formation of constitutional benches remains a contentious and evolving phenomenon in Pakistan's judicial landscape. He noted that a "like-minded" judiciary can risk its reputation, compromising the quality of justice. He stressed the need for fixed constitutional benches at the Supreme Court level, with clear representation from all provinces and Islamabad. He suggested assigning cases based on their nature - criminal, corporate, or constitutional - to ensure judicial clarity and uniformity. He cautioned against amendments driven by personal or political motives, urging the necessity to focus on unified case management and institutional transparency. He also warned that the growing perception of a power struggle between the judiciary and Parliament risks pushing the country toward institutional breakdown, an outcome that must be avoided through careful reform.

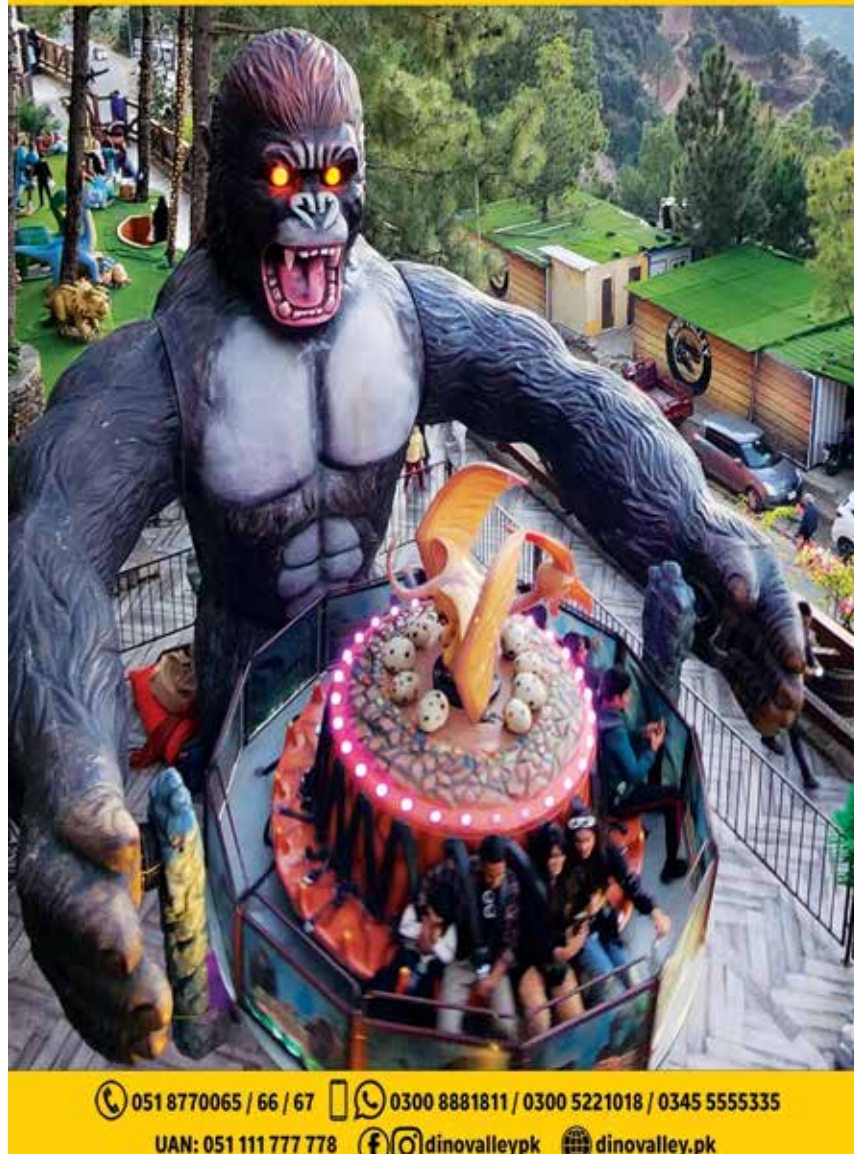


Demand for dry fruits soars in capital

ISLAMABAD: The demand for dry fruits has surged in the capital as the winter season is at its peak and people are considering taking them as tasty, healthy, and useful items during this season. Some people use dry fruits in dishes specially prepared in the winter season, like Gajar ka halwa (a sweet dish made of carrots), sohn halwa (a sweet made with maida, milk and dry fruits) etc. Bakeries and sweet shops also incorporate dry fruits in sweets to make them more tasteful and healthy. Regardless of price, the demand for dry fruits was at its peak as the rush of customers spotted at several dry fruit shops. A dry fruit seller, Pervaiz Khan told APP, "The demand for dry fruit is at its peak" because people love to eat them in winter, and it also reduces the effect of cold air on the body. He also said that as compared to last year, the prices of most items have increased due to an increase in the prices of services used for the cultivation of dry fruit and also to reach the end users, like transport, labour, etc. On inquiry of prices, the shopkeeper said that prices of dry fruits vary depending on quality and origin. As almonds range from Rs 4,800 to Rs 5,600 per kg, while walnuts cost Rs 1400-1,800 per kg, Khan said adding that Cashews, figs, and pine nuts are priced at roundabout Rs 3,600, Rs 4,000, and Rs 14,000 per kg, respectively. He specifically called peanuts the most affordable and best-selling product whose prices depend on the type of area where they were produced; he said that peanuts were produced in mainly three regions of the country: Parachinar, Chakwal, and Gujjar Khan, with prices of 1200, 720, and 640 per kg, respectively. A customer, Muhammad Ahmed, said that winter was the best season to consume these dry fruits as they gave enough energy and also reduced the effect of the cold air in this weather, he also called dry fruits a healthy diet in this season. A female customer said, "I want to purchase these dry fruits so that I can use them in the Gajar ka halwa for garnishing, taste and health perspective. The sale of sweets in which these dry fruits were used was also enhanced due to the effect of the season. The online sale of dry fruits has also seen a boost, with e-commerce platforms offering competitive prices. However, some online sellers face challenges with cancelled orders and increased costs. An online store owner said, "Online selling of dry fruits is very appealing during winter." Adding, "We offer very affordable and competitive prices." "Most customers order online but when goods reach the addresses people usually cancel the order which raises the cost of the goods," the owner added. The supply of dry fruits involves sourcing from various regions, including Gilgit-Baltistan, Balochistan, and Punjab. Suppliers have reported increased costs due to transportation and farming expenses reason behind the rise in the prices of dry fruit. Supplier of dry fruit from Gilgit Baltistan, Wazir Hashmat told APP that he supplied dry fruit items from all parts of the country and sent them to Lahore, where the main market of dry fruits exists, adding that "We obtain pine nuts from Balochistan province, walnuts from Gilgit Baltistan & Balochistan, and peanuts from most of the parts of Punjab, and so on.—DNA



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Health hazards in Gaza strip

THE hardships endured by Gaza's displaced residents extend beyond homelessness, makeshift tents, and shortages of water, food, and medical care. They now face additional dangers from the accumulation of waste in their temporary shelters. Since the start of the genocidal war in Gaza on October 7, 2023, Israel has forcibly displaced nearly two million Palestinians from their homes to areas such as Deir al-Balah and Mawasi Khan Yunis, under the guise of providing humanitarian safety zones. However, these areas were later subjected to Israeli bombardments and siege, leaving their residents deprived of food and water. Mahmoud al-Haddad, a citizen whose home in Khan Yunis was destroyed by Israeli forces, now lives in a displacement camp near Al-Aqsa University. Speaking to the PIC reporter, he said, "We can't sleep at night due to the foul odors emanating from piles of waste surrounding us and stagnant sewage water." He added, "The occupation employs various methods to kill Palestinians – bombs, missiles, starvation, siege, and now, health hazards." Haddad explained that the sewage overflow near his tent emits a stench that poses a health threat, particularly given his weakened immune system. The lack of a nutritious diet since the beginning of the war, coupled with the spread of diseases and contaminated drinking water, exacerbates the crisis. Reports from Gaza's government authorities reveal that Israel has deliberately targeted infrastructure, including sewage and water systems, creating severe crises for displaced individuals. These challenges compound the daily struggles of the displaced, whose suffering has become a grim routine. The situation is widespread across Gaza, where many displaced residents, particularly children, are forced to walk barefoot due to a lack of footwear or the deterioration of available shoes caused by the ongoing blockade and war. Ahmed Abu Sha'ira, another displaced citizen now residing in the Mawasi Rafah area, faces similar health hazards. He endures sewage overflows, massive garbage accumulation, and the presence of stray dogs, which restrict children's movement and cause fear at night. Speaking to our reporter, Abu Sha'ira said he left his home in Tel al-Sultan seven months ago, later learning it had been destroyed by Israeli forces. He described how rodents and insects plague their displacement tents, making their lives unbearable. He also highlighted the extensive spread of diseases caused by contaminated water and the alarming proliferation of rodents moving between tents. Abu Sha'ira, a father of three, said his children walk barefoot due to a lack of shoes. "Even if they are available, the prices are exorbitant and beyond our reach," he said. Eng. Atef Jaber, Deputy General Director of Environmental Protection at the Environmental Quality Authority and head of the Palestinian Friends of the Environment Association, confirmed that the accumulation of waste and sewage in the streets poses a significant threat to both human and environmental health. In a press statement, Jaber explained that the ongoing war prevents municipalities from transferring waste to main disposal sites, worsening the health crisis and spreading diseases.



The trap of diplomacy

DIPLOMACY traps can be more dangerous than the threats of war, as Iranian politician Saeed Jalili has recently expressed. War traps, however, can sometimes yield remarkable outcomes. In fact, the major achievements accomplished at the national level have often been due to war traps. War demands great leaders who possess the resolve matching the cause they represent. The first NATO war on Syria was intended to sever the Axis of Resistance and its extensions. Avoiding the chaos of a second Syrian war became crucial after the Al-Aqsa Flood battle set the course towards Jerusalem (Al-Quds). The distinction between those triumphing Resistance and the conspirators for the occupation entity has become clear. Iran has extensive experience dealing with Western deceit and barriers. However, those who are likely to be deceived by the West's blatant tricks are not capable of implementing its Leader's directives. Late President Raisi exemplifies a leader of this caliber. "A believer is not stung from the same hole twice." If figures like Soleimani and others were still active, the outcome would have likely been different. Regarding the turning point in Syria, Iran did not abandon Assad. It appears that an understanding was reached between Trump and Putin to trade Ukraine for Syria. The Syrian government relied on two pillars. Firstly Russia, for international political cover at the UN and aerial support in battles against terrorism. Secondly Iran, for on-ground presence, Resistance Axis support, and logistical preparations. Russia's withdrawal leaves Iran at the forefront, facing sectarian wars and the resurgence of sedition. After the Al-Aqsa Flood battle and reaffirming the direction towards Jerusalem, toxic sectarianism must not return. Over the past decade, Syria has failed to rebuild a functioning state, a failure that has drained its combat readiness. Rampant corruption complicates the mission. Strategically, avoiding a sectarian war that aligns with the West's agenda became paramount. Assad has given all he can within his limits of endurance, understanding, and direction. The complexities of the situation have surpassed his and his alliances' capacity. Syria remains a negotiable and exploitable arena for Moscow. The Iranian leadership prioritizes strategic interests, chief among them maintaining the focus on Jerusalem. The Axis of Resistance has not entirely ended, although it is no longer in its previous form. However, new forms of activity may arise. The goals of the Resistance Axis have not been abandoned; however new strategies will need to be pursued. Crises can transform into genuine opportunities. The nation's awareness has advanced and is better prepared than before. The blood of martyrs fuels the nation's resolve. New prospects include an active front emerging from Syria through cooperation with covert forces. In addition, coordination with operational groups in Syria is feasible. The Iraqi front could also play a more central role alongside Yemen. Lebanon may witness forms of action, benefiting from over a year of warfare experience. The strategy is likely hinged on leveraging strengths within the Resistance Axis while avoiding "Israel's" excessive destructive capabilities. New forces may also arise from Syria and Lebanon, utilizing rapid, striking operations. The Resistance Axis shortfall was reaching this point without fully understanding the enemy's schemes. Protecting Syria without allowing room for sectarian war should have been the priority.

Unpacking the ISPR's press release on Faiz

Qamar Bashir



The wiretapping of prime ministers, presidents, judges, and businessmen, along with the use of these recordings for blackmail to achieve political objectives, is another well-known phenomenon. If political activities are to be considered a chargeable offense, then it would be difficult to find a general who has not been involved in similar actions. The next charge was that he violated the Official Secrets Act in a manner detrimental to the safety and interests of the state. This is an intriguing accusation. Any Director General of ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) operates a parallel framework to the government

IN a brief but fully loaded press release issued on 10th December 2024, the ISPR announced that the process of a Field General Court Martial (FGCM) had been initiated against Lt. Gen. Faiz Hamid (Retd) under the provisions of the Pakistan Army Act on several notable charges. Among these, the most intriguing was the allegation that Lt. Gen. Faiz Hamid (Retd) was engaged in political activities. Perhaps ISPR should revisit the press conferences it has conducted over the years. None of these press conferences were strictly confined to professional matters or the operational readiness of the armed forces. Instead, they often revolved around political issues, with the Army visibly siding with one political party or another. These conferences frequently involved either defending the Army's political maneuvering or criticizing the government, parliament, or judiciary for their perceived lack of performance. Moreover, political maneuvering, whether overt or covert, has long been a pivotal part of the ISI's activities. The institution has been involved in the creation and dissolution of political parties, pressuring political leaders deemed adversarial by the Army to abandon their parties and join others. Instances have also surfaced of Army chiefs dictating decisions to elected prime ministers, including what actions to take and which to avoid. The wiretapping of prime ministers, presidents, judges, and businessmen, along with the use of these recordings for blackmail to achieve political objectives, is another well-known phenomenon. If political activities are to be considered a chargeable offense, then it would be difficult to find a general who has not been involved in similar actions. The next charge was that he violated the Official Secrets Act in a manner detrimental to the safety and interests of the state. This is an intriguing accusation. Any Director General of ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) operates a parallel framework to the government. His assignments typically include clandestine operations against adversaries, as well as actions targeting political elements within the country. General Faiz was no exception. The acts of commissions and omissions of the Director General ISI are always mandated by the Army Chief. In fact, not a single action is carried out by the DG ISI without the explicit written or verbal orders of the

Army Chief. By any stretch of the imagination, it cannot be assumed that the DG ISI divulged classified information to any foreign agent or country. At most, he might have shared information with the Prime Minister, as per his duty, or with civilian leadership as part of his covert role. This, in any case, cannot be termed as an act detrimental to the safety and security of the state if the information was shared within the power corridors of Pakistan and among Pakistani nationals. No matter what the information was, it is implausible to argue that sharing it internally could compromise the safety and security of the state, provided it stayed within trusted circles. He was also charged with misuse of authority. This is another interesting charge. In fact, the ISI and its operatives allegedly do not adhere to the laws of the land. Over the years, they have been accused of abducting Pakistani citizens—Baloch, Pathans, Sindhis, journalists, politicians, judges, and businessmen—and allegedly torturing, threatening, and harassing their targets without following any judicial process. If misuse of authority were removed from the ISI's modus operandi, the agency might lose much of its feared and hated reputation. If this charge is being levied against Lt. Gen. Faiz, it raises the question of whether the entire ISI should also be charged with the same crime, as such actions are often systemic rather than individual. Another charge concerns the use of government resources and causing wrongful losses to individuals during the process. This charge is equally intriguing. Stories have long circulated about generals and brigadiers cultivating relationships with businessmen, industrialists, and real estate developers to acquire plots and constructed houses for themselves and their relatives. Consider the example of General Bajwa, whose declared wealth reportedly amounted to billions, or General Asim Bajwa, who was revealed to own 15 companies. The list goes on. We have also seen the public confession of a General Aslam Baig admitting to distributing millions of government funds to political parties. If this charge is to be applied, then no Army Chief or general may be free from scrutiny. Like Lt. Gen. Faiz, they too should be investigated, tried, indicted, and punished if found guilty. Additionally, the ISI was accused of being involved in the Mehran

bank scandal, in which high-ranking ISI and Army officers were allegedly given large sums of money by Yunus Habib, owner of the Mehran Bank, to deposit the ISI's foreign exchange reserves in his bank. The next charge against Lt. Gen. Faiz Hamid (Retd) that he was involved in events related to creating agitation and unrest, culminating in multiple incidents, including but not limited to the 9th May 2023 incident, allegedly fomenting instability at the behest of and in collusion with vested political interests. This is perhaps the most absurd charge. Since the inception of Pakistan, the Army leadership and ISI have collaboratively fomented unrest against governments they deemed adversarial, often using their assets. These assets have included religious parties like PAT and TLP, regional and ethnic parties such as MQM, and mainstream political entities like PML(Q), Istekam-e-Pakistan Party, and Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI). The 1990 elections are widely believed to have been rigged by the ISI in favor of the IJI, a coalition of nine predominantly right-wing parties, orchestrated under Lieutenant General Hameed Gul. This maneuver was aimed at ensuring the defeat of Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) at the polls. More recently, during the 2024 elections, allegations surfaced of the ISI and the Army manipulating the electoral process. This reportedly involved discarding Form 45s, announcing fabricated results based on Form 47—a derivative of Form 45—and tampering with the electoral outcome to install their selected individuals in the assemblies by manipulating and engineering the election results. Interestingly, in all civilized countries, a retired general alleged to be involved in political activities is tried in civilian courts, whereas in authoritarian regimes, such cases are often handled by military courts. The court martial proceedings against Lt. Gen. (Retd) Faiz Hameed appear to have been initiated with a larger purpose in mind. His court martial may serve as a precursor to bringing high-profile political figures under the jurisdiction of military courts, potentially paving the way for a repetition of the military-cum-judicial actions that led to the controversial execution of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

— *Press Secretary to the President (Rtd)*
Former Press Minister at Embassy of Pakistan to France
Former MD, SRBC

International community must engage Syria's new rulers

Dr. Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg

Israel is also testing the new rulers and trying to provoke them. According to its statements, it has this week launched hundreds of air raids to destroy Syria's weapons and military equipment. With little experience in governing, the militias that chased Assad out may not be able to fix all that is broken in Syria on their own. They have said a lot of the right things, but implementing them is another matter and so is bringing about discipline in their ranks. The international community needs to help

IT is probably too early to announce the end of the Syrian conflict, although the departure of Bashar Assad is an important inflection point. It is nearly impossible to speak with any finality about the demise of a regime that has ruled Syria for 61 years and engaged in violence and gross human rights violations almost from Day 1, leaving an embittered population thirsty for revenge. In 1963, a coup by Baathist military officers toppled Syria's democratically elected government. It ruled the country with an iron fist. In 1970, one of those officers, Hafez Assad, forced out his colleagues and ruled Syria single-handedly until his death in 2000. During those years, tens of thousands of Syrians, Lebanese, Palestinians and others were killed by his security forces, disappeared or went missing. During his reign, I took part in a project to document those violations, the enormity of which was beyond belief in terms of depravity and cruelty. It is difficult to describe the deep revulsion that many Syrians and Lebanese felt toward Hafez Assad because of those crimes, especially as they were forced to declare their undying loyalty to him and sing his praises. However, the father's sins paled when compared to those of his son, Bashar, who succeeded him in 2000 and ruled Syria until early this week. He surpassed his father, committing unspeakable crimes against humanity. Hundreds of thousands are believed to have been killed, disappeared or tortured and ruined for life. During his reign of terror, about half of Syria's population became homeless in their own country or were forced to seek refuge abroad. Syria's economy is in ruins, as the regime's officials divided the country's dwindling spoils among themselves, supplemented by income from smuggling, Captagon sales and selling their influence. Large swaths of its territory have long been outside of central government control, including oil-producing

areas. State institutions were engineered to primarily serve Bashar Assad, his family and his close associates. The new rulers have inherited a country torn apart, geographically, politically, economically, ethnically and by religious affiliation. Assad is out, but most of his followers are probably still in Syria. Russia, Turkey and the US all have forces there and they support different factions. Many ethnic and religious groups have their own territorial claims, challenging the central government's prerogative of control and territorial integrity. In addition, the triumphant groups are a coalition composed of different factions, some of which have waged war against each other. Israel is also testing the new rulers and trying to provoke them. According to its statements, it has this week launched hundreds of air raids to destroy Syria's weapons and military equipment. With little experience in governing, the militias that chased Assad out may not be able to fix all that is broken in Syria on their own. They have said a lot of the right things, but implementing them is another matter and so is bringing about discipline in their ranks. The international community needs to help. In the past, many countries have shown tremendous support for the Syrian people, giving generously at donor conferences, the last of which — the Brussels Conference on "Supporting the future of Syria and the region," the eighth of its kind held since the start of the crisis in 2011 — was held in May. The ninth conference could be held in the near future to accelerate aid to Syria, now that the restrictions that Assad put on aid delivery have been removed. This time, it could also include pledges for stabilization and early recovery, both of which are urgently needed to help refugees and internally displaced persons return to their homes. An additional framework to mobilize support for the Syrian people is the Friends of Syria group, which was

active in the early days of the crisis. It met several times and formed a number of working groups. Membership fluctuated but it always included countries such as Egypt, France, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, the UAE, the UK and the US. Organizations such as the UN, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the EU, the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation also took part. Not all these former members of the group need to join at the start; some may have reconsidered. When reconvened in whatever formulation, the Friends of Syria could form working groups, as in the first version, focusing on politics, economic assistance, security and the rule of law. Without international engagement, Damascus' new rulers may fall back on their old revolutionary ways, which are not the best way to govern a fractured place such as Syria or to navigate the complicated international relations the country has to deal with. If left to their own devices, the revolutionaries may follow other recent examples. As we know, toppling Saddam Hussein in 2003 did not end Iraq's problems, nor did getting rid of Omar Bashir end Sudan's troubles. Without international engagement, the Syrian people may discover that they have traded Assad's regime for a similar one. As George Bernard Shaw wrote in "Man and Superman," "Revolutions have never lightened the burden of tyranny; they have only shifted it to another shoulder." Or infighting may ensue, as happens too frequently after revolutions triumph and competition intensifies. The French revolutionary Georges Danton famously said in 1794: "The revolution, like Saturn, devours its own children," when he started opposing the excessive use of violence and was sentenced to death for doing so.

— *Dr. Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg is the Gulf Cooperation Council assistant secretary-general for political affairs and negotiation.*

Briefs

PSX stays bullish, gains more 3,370 points

ISLAMABAD: The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bullish trend on Thursday, gaining 3,370.29 points, a positive change of 3.04 percent, closing at 114,180.51 points as compared to 110,810.22 points on the last trading day. Pakistan's cuisine A total of 1,469,558,531 shares were traded during the day as compared to 1,080,023,483 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs 67.278 billion against Rs.47.139 billion on the last trading day. As many as 464 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 299 of them recorded gains and 132 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 33 companies remained unchanged. The three top trading companies were WorldCall Telecom 232,925,553 shares at Rs 1.79 per share, Nergycio PK with 80,186,381 shares at Rs 7.21 per share and Pak International Bulk with 70,681,266 shares at Rs.9.07 per share. Nestle Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.199.92 per share price, closing at Rs.7,355.19, whereas the runner-up was Rafhan Maize Products Company Limited with Rs 149.12 rise in its per share price to Rs 8,750.00 Pakistan's cuisine Macter International Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs 30.16 per share closing at Rs 424.69 followed by Hallmark Company Limited with Rs 24.24 decline to close at Rs.800.53.—APP

Rupee sheds 07 paise against dollar

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani rupee on Thursday depreciated by 07 paise against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs 278.23 against the previous day's closing of Rs 278.16. Pakistan's cuisine However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs 277.75 and Rs 279.25 respectively. The price of Euro increased by 49 paise to close at Rs 292.60 against the last day's closing of Rs 292.11, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese yen remained unchanged and closed at Rs1.82, whereas an increase of 63 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which traded at Rs355.11 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs354.48. Pakistan's cuisine The exchange rates of the Emiratis Dirham and the Saudi Riyal increased by 02 and 03 paise to close at Rs75.75 and Rs74.04, respectively.—APP

UK announces new funding for UNRWA

LONDON: UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer has pledged an additional £13 million (\$16.56 million) to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees. The announcement followed a meeting between him and UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini in London on Wednesday. Starmer gave his condolences to the agency for the deaths of staff members killed in Gaza. The pair agreed that more needs to be done to protect aid workers in the Palestinian enclave, and reiterated their calls for an immediate ceasefire and the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The money will come on top of the £21 million per year already given to UNRWA by the UK, which was temporarily suspended by the former government after Israel accused 12 agency members of taking part in the Oct. 7 Hamas attack in 2023. Foreign Secretary David Lammy said he was "reassured" that UNRWA met UK government standards for vetting employees following an independent review of the situation. UNRWA was established in 1949 to help Palestinian refugees. In October, Israel banned it from operating in its territory, hampering its ability to operate in the Occupied Territories.—APP

Scientific collaboration vital for agri uplift: Asozoda

Tajikistan's Deputy Minister commended PARC cutting-edge research and hoped for enhanced cooperation between the two countries in the field of agriculture to ensure food and nutritional security

DNA

ISLAMABAD : Asozoda Nurali Mahmudullo, First Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Tajikistan, visited the National Agricultural Research Center (NARC), Islamabad. During the visit, Chairman PARC, Dr. Ghulam Muhammad Ali highlighted the cutting-edge research being undertaken at PARC, including genome-based varietal development of various crops including rice, wheat, banana etc, virus-free seed potato production through Aeroponic technology, breed improvement and vaccine development for livestock, and speed breeding to accelerate the development of various crops. Dr. Ali also highlighted other significant research initiatives aimed at enhancing agricultural productivity and ensuring food and nutritional security. He further said that agricultural ties between Pakistan and Tajikistan will help ensure food and nutritional security for both the countries. Tajikistan's Deputy Minister commended PARC cutting-edge research and hoped for enhanced cooperation between the two countries in the field of agriculture to ensure food and nutritional security. He emphasized that we look forward to benefiting from Pakistan's expertise in agricultural research and mutual technology transfer. He reiterated that scientific collaboration is vi-



ISLAMABAD: Chairman PARC, Dr. Ghulam Muhammad Ali briefing the First Deputy Minister of Tajikistan on modern agricultural technologies and facilities during his visit to NARC .

tal for agricultural development in both the countries. He visited NIGAB, Aeroponic facility, Livestock Research Station and Speed

Breeding facility. The visit aims to build on the earlier MoUs signed between Pakistan and Tajikistan for enhanced cooperation and mutual

development in agriculture and other sectors. The two countries have identified areas of collaboration, including research and development,

capacity building, and technology transfer, to promote sustainable agriculture practices and improve agricultural productivity.

SM Tanveer discusses business community's plans with lawmakers

DNA

ISLAMABAD : UBG Patron-in-Chief SM Tanveer met with the four Members of the National Assembly (MNAs) from Islamabad, Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry, Anjum Aqeel Khan, Raja Khurram Nawaz, and Farah Naz at the residence of UBG Secretary General Zafar Bakhtawari. During the meeting, SM Tanveer briefed the MNAs about the initiatives undertaken by the business community and took them into confidence regarding future plans. SM Tanveer informed the MNAs that

the way the business community has addressed issues related to IPPs (Independent Power Producers) will yield positive results in the next couple of months. He assured that electricity prices will, Insha'Allah, decrease, which will boost exports, promote industry, increase investment, and reduce unemployment. He added that, as a result of their practical efforts, the interest rate is also expected to soon drop to 9%, which will further accelerate industrial activity. He emphasized that agriculture is the backbone of any country and highlighted the need for special measures to increase cotton production, which is crucial for boosting

textile exports. He noted that this year, Pakistan achieved a wheat production of 31 million metric tons. By increasing per-acre productivity, the additional land can be used for cotton cultivation, potentially adding at least \$5 billion in revenue. The MNAs assured SM Tanveer that they would raise the business community's voice in the assembly and discuss issues of national interest in parliament. Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry suggested inviting SM Tanveer to the parliamentary standing committees on commerce and agriculture so that he could share his insights and ideas with the

members of parliament, contributing to the country's development and prosperity. Anjum Aqeel Khan emphasized focusing on agriculture and utilizing professionals' expertise to address national challenges. Raja Khurram Nawaz noted the various reasons for low cotton production and stressed the need to address these issues to enhance output. Farah Naz also assured her support in conveying these concerns to higher authorities. Zafar Bakhtawari thanked the MNAs and SM Tanveer for their presence, stating that the business community plays a vital role in strengthening the national economy.

Year 2025 pivotal for Kashmir –key stakeholders unite for global action

ISLAMABAD: The upcoming year holds great significance for the Kashmir issue, as expressed by Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed during a webinar titled "Human Rights for All: Amplify Kashmir's Voice to the World", organized by Friends of Kashmir International on the occasion of International Human Rights Day. In his keynote address, Senator Sayed emphasized the importance of 2025, when Pakistan will gain observer status at the United Nations Security Council. He urged the Pakistani government, along with overseas Kashmiris and Pakistanis, to leverage this opportunity to highlight the Kashmir issue and gain international support. Chairperson of the Peace and Culture Organization, Mashal Hussain Malik, drew attention to the ongoing human rights violations in Kashmir and appealed for cooperation regarding her husband, Yasin Malik, who is currently imprisoned in India and allegedly facing severe mistreatment. During the webinar, other speakers, including President of the World Freedom Movement Mazamil Ayub Thakur, media person Yasir Rehman, researcher Taiba Khurshid.—APP

Deadly attacks in Sudan's Darfur 'shocking': WHO chief

GENEVA: The World Health Organization voiced alarm Thursday at recent attacks in Sudan's war-ravaged Darfur region, which it said had killed dozens of people and injured many more. "The most recent attacks in Kakabiyia, North Darfur, that claimed at least 80 lives and injured hundreds of people are shocking," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on X, adding "our sympathies go out to the affected communities in Sudan." The pro-democracy Emergency Lawyers group had given an even higher toll from Monday's strike on Kakabiyia, a town about 180 kilometers (112 miles) west of El-Fasher, the state capital that has been under siege by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) since May. The lawyers group, which has been documenting human rights abuses during the conflict, said an air strike "took place on the town's weekly market day, where residents from various nearby villages had gathered to shop, resulting in the death of more than 100 people and injury of hundreds, including women and children." They were among at least 176 people killed in two days of army and paramilitary strikes across Sudan this week, according to an AFP tally of tolls provided by officials, activists and lawyers. Both the army and the RSF, who have been at war since April 2023, have been accused of indiscriminately targeting civilians and deliberately bombing residential areas. Sudan's civil war has killed tens of thousands of people and uprooted 12 million. Nearly nine million of those are displaced within Sudan, most in areas with devastated infrastructure and facing the threat of mass starvation. Across the country, nearly 26 million people – around half the population – are facing acute hunger, according to the United Nations. Darfur, a region the size of France, is home to around a quarter of Sudan's population but more than half its displaced people. Nearly all of it is now controlled by the RSF, which has also taken over swathes of the southern Kordofan region and central Sudan, while the army holds the country's north and east. Tedros warned Thursday that "health facilities in Darfur are barely managing to meet health needs with non-functional equipment and limitations of medical supplies." The UN health agency, he said, had "managed to deliver trauma and surgery supplies earlier this month, which can help to treat the injured and prevent further loss of life.—APP

NEPRA concludes hearing for KE's Rs 461m relief request for October FCA

ISLAMABAD : The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) concluded a public hearing on December 12, 2024, regarding K-Electric's petition for a provisional monthly fuel charge adjustment (FCA) for October 2024. The expected relief of PKR 461 million will translate to a reduction of PKR 0.27 per unit in customer bills. NEPRA will issue its decision clarifying the FCA amount to be passed on and the month in which it will be charged in customers' bills. Fuel charge adjustments reflect variations in global fuel prices and changes in the generation mix. These adjustments are applied to customer bills only after NEPRA's detailed scrutiny and approval. Customers benefit from negative FCAs in their bills during periods of declining global fuel prices. The rates applied are determined by NEPRA and notified by the Federal Government. The primary driver of this FCA relief stems from the decline in international fuel prices and better use of generation mix. K-Electric utilized its electricity resources based on economic merit order wherein KE ensured efficient power generation plants were utilized during October 2024. During October 2024, the generation on expensive Furnace Oil was reduced, RLNG was utilized on efficient power plants and the power purchased from CPPA-G was increased (as compared to reference month) to ensure lower cost of generation. This FCA adjustment underscores KE's commitment to optimizing its fuel mix and ensuring transparency in energy costs operating in a regulated environment.—APP

Govt committed to reviving cotton sector, facilitating farmers: Rana

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Government is committed to undertaking all necessary measures for the restructuring of the Pakistan Central Cotton Committee (PCCC), the revival of the cotton sector, and providing essential support to farmers. Pakistan's cuisine Minister for National Food Security & Research, Rana Tanveer Hussain expressed these views while presiding over the 90th Governing Body meeting of the PCCC at the Ministry of National Food Security & Research on Wednesday, said a press release. The minister highlighted the critical role of cotton in Pakistan's economy and reiterated the government's resolve to bolster this vital sector. He emphasized the importance of improving cotton production, quality, and exports, stating that these efforts are integral to the country's economic growth. Rana Tanveer acknowledged the pivotal role of the textile industry in the national economy and expressed optimism that the cotton cess dispute would soon be resolved through consensus. He also expressed interest in reviewing the FAO's report on the restructuring of PCCC. Dr. Yusuf Zafar provided a detailed overview of progress on the restructuring efforts, sharing insights from four comprehensive reports. He also briefed the forum on the BCI project collaboration between CCRI Multan and Mahmood Textiles Group and called for greater engagement from the private sector to support the revival and growth of cotton through public-private partnerships. The meeting facilitated an in-depth discussion on several key issues, including the longstanding cotton cess dispute between the PCCC and the textile industry, as well as the overall restructuring of the PCCC. To address the cotton cess issue, the minister proposed the formation of a special committee comprising representatives from PCCC, APTMA, and the Ministry of National Food Security & Research. The committee is tasked with formulating a practical and mutually agreeable resolution within two weeks for presentation at the next meeting. Pakistan's cuisine Dr. Yusuf Zafar, Vice President of PCCC, urged APTMA Chairman Kamran Arshad to ensure the textile industry resumes regular payment of the cotton cess from January 2025 onwards. Chairman Kamran Arshad assured compliance, a commitment that was welcomed by the forum. Representatives from the Pakistan Kissan Ittehad, Khalid Khokhar and the Vice President, Sindh Abadgar Board, Syed Nadeem Shah emphasized the urgent need to resolve the cotton cess dispute and called for the immediate disbursement of salaries and pensions to PCCC scientists, alongside increased funding for cotton research and development initiatives. The Board further recommended the swift announcement of a support price for cotton to aid in the sector's revival. A representative from the Textile Commissioner's Office provided updates on a collaborative initiative with the Ministry of Commerce and FBR to enhance cotton traceability, which will help accurately assess domestic cotton production and address data discrepancies. Vice President of PCCC and President of the Pakistan Kissan Ittehad, Khalid Khokhar, identified the non-payment of the cotton cess as a key contributor to declining cotton production. Vice President, PCCC also highlighted the adverse impact of 66 legal cases filed by the textile industry against the PCCC, which have severely hindered research activities. He urged for the resolution of the remaining cases through dialogue to enable full focus on research and development.—DNA

Pope meets Palestinian leader Abbas at the Vatican

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis, who has recently intensified criticism of the Israeli offensive in Gaza, on Thursday received Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas, with whom he discussed the "serious" humanitarian situation. The pair, who have previously met several times, discussed peace efforts during a private half-hour audience according to the Vatican, which released images of them smiling together. Abbas then met the Holy See's Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin and the Vatican's equivalent of a foreign minister, Paul Richard Gallagher. The discussions focused on the Church's assistance in "the very serious humanitarian situation in Gaza," the hoped-for ceasefire, release of all hostages, and "achieving the two-state solution only through dialogue and diplomacy," a Vatican statement said. The meeting comes a few days after the release of a photo showing Pope Francis praying in front of a nativity scene at the Vatican, where the baby Jesus's manger is covered with a black and white

keffiyeh scarf, the symbol of Palestinian resistance. The photo prompted a protest from the Israeli embassy to the Holy See, which asked for the keffiyeh to be removed, diplomatic and Vatican sources told AFP. Francis has called for peace since Hamas's unprecedented attack against Israel on October 7, 2023, and the Israeli retaliatory campaign in Gaza. In recent weeks he has

hardened his remarks against the Israeli offensive. At the end of November, he said that "the invader's arrogance... prevails over dialogue" in "Palestine," a rare position that contrasts with the tradition of neutrality of the Holy See. In extracts from a forthcoming book published in November, he called for a "careful" study as to whether the situation in Gaza "corresponds to the technical

definition" of genocide, an accusation firmly rejected by Israel. Francis denounced an "immoral" use of force in Lebanon and Gaza at the end of September. The Holy See has recognized the State of Palestine since 2013, with which it maintains diplomatic relations, and it supports the two-state solution. Abbas is also due to meet Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and President Sergio Mattarella in Rome. Meanwhile, President Mahmoud Abbas officially inaugurated the new building of the Embassy of the State of Palestine to the Vatican on Thursday, marking a significant milestone in Palestine's diplomatic efforts. Following the raising of the Palestinian flag above the new embassy, President Abbas delivered a brief statement, reiterating his call to countries that have not yet recognized the State of Palestine to do so. He emphasized the need for the international community to take responsibility and affirm the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, culminating in the establishment of an independ-

ent state with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the two-state solution and relevant international resolutions. The President urged global support for Palestine's bid for full membership in the United Nations and further international recognition of the Palestinian state. The inauguration ceremony was attended by several prominent figures, including Ziad Abu Amr, a member of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO); Ramzi Khoury, head of the Palestinian Presidential Committee for Church Affairs; Mahmoud Al-Habbash, the Palestinian Supreme Judge and presidential advisor for religious affairs and Islamic relations; Majdi Khalidi, the President's diplomatic advisor; and Issa Kassissieh, Palestine's Ambassador to the Holy See. It is worth noting that the Vatican officially recognized the State of Palestine on May 13, 2015. On June 26, 2015, a comprehensive agreement on mutual recognition was signed between the Holy See and the State of Palestine.—Agencies



Briefs

Dialogue only solution to problems: Siddiqui

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Senator Irfan Siddiqui of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz said on Thursday dialogue and reconciliation were the solution to the problems. Speaking on the floor of the Senate, Siddiqui said the history of Pakistan was full of ups and downs, but "we have probably learnt no lesson from our history". He said that people who came to protest in Islamabad were Pakistanis and those who were deployed in the capital were also Pakistanis. He said that there were 195 countries in the world, but no country gives its people an unconditional right to protest. He said that people could not raise jihad related slogans at any protest anywhere in the world. He said that no country in the world will allow the protesters to bring with them sticks, nails and slingshots.

Qureshi, Dr Yasmin indicted in May 9 case

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: The Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) Lahore has formally indicted PTI leaders Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Dr Yasmin Rashid, Ejaz Chaudhry, and Mian Mehmoodur Rashid in the Shadman police station arson and rioting case. The hearing was conducted by ATC judge Manzoor Ali Gul at the Kot Lakhpat Jail, where the charges were read out to the accused. The court framed charges in the Shadman arson case and summoned witnesses for the next hearing, which has been scheduled for Dec 19. Additionally, the court has postponed proceedings in cases related to the burning of Askari Tower and other incidents until Dec 23.

Israel kills 35 Palestinians in Gaza

GAZA CITY: Israeli airstrikes have killed at least 35 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, including aid workers, just hours after the UN General Assembly urged for an immediate ceasefire amid Israel's genocide. The Israeli military launched multiple airstrikes on Thursday morning, in various locations, including the central Gaza Strip, Nuseirat, Rafah and the Gaza city, as reported by the Palestinian Wafa news agency. Local sources reported that seven civilians, including women and children, lost their lives when Israeli forces bombed a residential building near the Abd al-Aal intersection in Gaza city. Additionally, 15 Palestinians were killed in an airstrike targeting the al-Louh family home, which was sheltering displaced persons, in the western part of the al-Nuseirat camp in central Gaza. - Agencies

China keen to invest \$1bn in medical city, economic sectors

President Zardari says Pakistan will welcome Chinese investors and prefer doing business with them



NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: A Chinese business delegation met with President Asif Ali Zardari in Karachi on Thursday and expressed interest in investing \$1 billion in a medical city, as well as in diverse sectors of the economy. Pakistan has held strong bilateral relations with China which has supported it through many investments and development projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project which was termed as a "lifeline" for the country's economy.

Earlier, China was revealed to be Pakistan's largest creditor with almost \$29 billion in loans, according to a World Bank report. China had the single largest share of debt to Pakistan with a 22 per cent share. Today, President Zardari met with a delegation led by the Chinese Consul General Yang Yundong at Bilawal House in Karachi, where he called for greater Chinese investment in Pakistan's various sectors to strengthen bilateral trade. "The delegation expressed interest to invest \$1bn to establish a medical city in Pakistan to advance the country's healthcare sector," a press release from the PPP said.

"The delegation also expressed interest to invest in diverse sectors of Pakistan's economy, especially agriculture, livestock, energy, transport, and manufacturing," it added. President Zardari highlighted the need for increased cooperation between Islamabad and Beijing, particularly between investors and businesses in Karachi. "We have been close friends for decades, and it was my vision to develop Gawadar Port into a regional trade and economic hub that would not only improve regional connectivity but would also boost regional trade and economic cooperation," he was

quoted as saying. President Zardari also highlighted Chinese language courses introduced in Sindh, an important step towards strengthening people-to-people and cultural linkages between both countries. The meeting was also attended by Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, provincial ministers Sharjeel Inam Memon and Nasir Hussain Shah, and Special Assistant to CM on Public-Private Partnership Qasim Naveed Qamar. The president welcomed Chinese investments stating that Pakistan is committed to facilitating and supporting investors in every possible way.

As president pledges to fight S. Korea's ruling party backs impeachment

The main opposition Democratic Party is preparing a new impeachment motion against Yoon, with a vote expected as soon as Saturday

FOREIGN DESK

SEOUL: South Korea's ruling party has thrown its support behind attempts to impeach embattled President Yoon Suk Yeol over his ill-fated decision to declare martial law that sparked a political crisis and widespread public anger in the country. The announcement came moments before Yoon delivered a defiant speech Thursday in which he attempted to justify his hugely controversial martial law decision and rejected growing calls from across the political spectrum for him to stand down. The People Power Party (PPP) had initially refused to back impeachment, hoping instead Yoon would resign from office. But its leadership said attempts to persuade him had made no progress. "We tried to find a better way than impeachment, but that other way is invalid," party leader Han Dong-hoon said. "Suspending the president from his duties through impeachment is the only way for now, to defend democracy and the republic." The main opposition Democratic Party is preparing a new impeachment motion against Yoon, with a vote expected as soon as Saturday. The president survived an impeachment bid last weekend when PPP members boycotted the vote. But after his party threw its weight behind impeachment, Han said PPP lawmakers were now free to vote according to their "belief and conscience." "I believe our party members will vote for the country and the people," he said. The PPP's reversal Thursday dramatically increases the pressure on Yoon and the likelihood that the next impeachment attempt will be successful. Yoon has faced mounting calls to stand down since he declared a military emergency on December 3, accusing the main opposition party of "anti-state activities," sympathizing with North Korea and blocking legislation and budgets. The surprise late night announcement, blocked by lawmakers within hours, was met with shock and anger across the country, which remains deeply scarred by the brutality of martial law imposed during decades of military dictatorship before it won a long, bloody fight for democracy in 1980s.

Govt determined to make system Sharia-compliant

Finance Minister describes Islamic finance, Islamic capital markets as road to market

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb has said that Islamic finance and Islamic capital markets can play a pivotal role in helping Pakistan remain steadfast on the road to macroeconomic stability and sustainable growth. He said that Pakistan had faced significant economic challenges in recent years. However, those issues were now being effectively addressed, and the country was on the right trajectory towards microeconomic stability and sustainable growth. He said Islamic finance, specifically Islamic capital markets, could play a pivotal role in this road to market as instruments such as sukuk, equity funds, and Sharia-compliant investment vehicles not only attracted investment but also reduced reliance on interest-based borrowing. This was stated by the Minister while addressing virtually the inaugural session of the Second International Islamic Capital Markets Conference & Expo that opened in Karachi. Shaikh Ebrahim Bin Khalifa Al-Khalifa, Chairman, AAOIFI Board of Trustees, Dr. Sami Al-Suwailem, Acting Director General, Islamic Development Bank Institute, Mr. Akif Saeed, Chairman SECP, Mr. Saleemullah, Deputy Governor SBP, and other senior delegates attended the session. In his keynote address to the session, the Finance Minister

described the conference as reflective of Pakistan's growing commitment to fostering a robust Islamic capital market, highlighting the country's dedication to transforming its financial ecosystem in line with Shariah principles. He said the Government of Pakistan remains firm in its commitment to transforming the financial system in line with Shariah principles, adding that as of June 30, 2024, 56% of market capitalization at the Pakistan Stock Exchange comprises Shariah-compliant securities. "In the collective investment segment, 48% of assets under management of mutual funds, 66% of assets under management of voluntary pension funds, and 95% of assets under management of REITs are already Shariah-compliant. These statistics deflect the progress that we have made over year." Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb underlined the need for "an economic system that is not only in line with our faith but also capable of inclusive and sustainable economic growth." "Only then, we will be able to extend the benefits of all our efforts to the citizens of Pakistan," he added. He said that Islamic finance and instruments such as sukuk, equity funds, and Shariah-compliant investment vehicles were vital tools for mobilizing resources for critical sectors, including infrastructure development and poverty alleviation through Islamic social finance, while maintaining adherence to ethical and transparent principles.

IHC threatens to revoke Bushra's bail over absence

Bushra Bibi appeared in court, addressing concerns over her frequent absences from trial

COURT REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday dismissed a plea by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) seeking to revoke the bail of Bushra Bibi, the wife of former Prime Minister Imran Khan, after she appeared in court for the hearing of jewellery set case. Justice Mian Gul

Hassan Aurangzeb, while delivering his remarks, stated that if a defendant fails to appear in court after being granted bail, the trial court could revoke the bail. Express News reported. However, he clarified that such an action would not be considered contempt of court by the high court. The FIA had approached the court, alleging that Bushra Bibi was misusing her bail privileges. The agency argued that she had failed to appear in court multiple times, which, they claimed, amounted to abuse of the court's trust. During the hearing, Bushra Bibi's lawyer, Barrister Salman Safdar, informed the court that his client was present and had not absented herself from previous hearings without valid reasons. He explained that on several occasions, including October 23, court proceedings were not held due to security concerns, and on other occasions, the judge was unavailable due to holidays. Justice Aurangzeb inquired whether the trial court had granted Bushra Bibi exemptions for her absences. Safdar confirmed that multiple exemptions had been granted, citing dates such as October 29, November 12, and November 14. He also noted that Bushra Bibi had appeared in court on November 2 and November 8, while the proceedings for November 12 had been cancelled.

JIT summons PTI workers

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A joint investigation team (JIT) led by the Islamabad police chief has issued notices to several Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) workers for their alleged involvement in a malicious social media campaign aimed at inciting unrest in the country. The JIT has summoned PTI figures, including Muhammad Arshad, Atta-ur-Rehman, Azhar Mashwani, Komal Afridi, Arusa Nadeem Shah, and M. Ali Malik, to appear for questioning on December 13, 2024. The accused are accused of using social media platforms to spread disinformation and instigate chaos within Pakistan. According to the JIT, the investigation is focused on determining the underlying motives of these individuals and their associates in orchestrating such campaigns. "The investigation aims to identify the individuals behind this disinformation campaign and understand their objectives," said a JIT spokesperson. The federal government has set up a special team under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016 to curb social media-related crimes. According to PECA's Section 30, the team operates under the supervision of the Islamabad IG Police. The JIT has gathered substantial evidence suggesting that the accused were involved in spreading propaganda on social media, contributing to national instability. Further investigations are underway to identify additional suspects and take appropriate legal action in line with Pakistan's laws.

Pak urges stricter climate obligations

DNA

THE HAGUE: Represented by Attorney General Mansoor Awan, Pakistan presented a compelling case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), outlining the "apocalyptic" impacts of climate change on its population and economy. The country highlighted the catastrophic 2022 floods that submerged one-third of the nation, affected 33 million people, and led to reconstruction costs estimated at over USD 16 billion. Quoting the UN Secretary-General's address to the UN General Assembly in 2022, Pakistan noted, "Pakistan contributed less than 1% of global GHG emissions, but its people are 15 times more likely to face death from climate-related impacts than other States." Pakistan emphasized three key points: The Paris Agreement under the UNFCCC is the primary framework for addressing climate obligations; climate obligations must align with equity and the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC), including provisions for climate finance.

Biden aides in ME in push for Syria, Gaza

Two-pronged diplomatic push sees Blinken covering Jordan, Turkiye, while Sullivan holds talks in Israel, Qatar and Egypt

CAIRO: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has arrived in Jordan, launching a crisis tour of the Middle East following the removal of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The outgoing US diplomat, who is calling for an "inclusive" process to form Syria's next government that protects minorities, touched down in the Red Sea city of Aqaba on Thursday, heading straight to a meeting with King Abdullah II before a trip to Turkey later in the day. Blinken's trip comes days after opposition forces launched a lightning offensive spearheaded by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a group formerly affiliated with al-Qaeda, ending five decades of brutal rule by the al-Assad family. Announcing the trip, the State Department said Blinken would call for a Syria that is not "a base of terrorism or posing a threat to its neighbours" - a nod to the concerns of Israel and Turkiye. Since al-Assad's flight to Russia on Sunday, Israel has attacked Syria hundreds of times, hitting airports, air defence facilities and other infrastructure, and deploying its military to the buff-

er zone along the occupied Golan Heights separating Syria and Israel since 1974. Turkiye, for its part, has funded Syrian rebel fighters - known as the Syrian National Army (SNA) - to battle the Kurdish-led, US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), pushing the group out of the northeastern city of Manbij. Ankara views the SDF, which has carved out self-ruled territory in the country's east, as a "terrorist" group and wants to reduce its presence near its borders. Blinken's diplomatic push on Syria comes as leaders of the Group of Seven (G7) major democracies issued a statement emphasising that al-Assad should be held accountable for his crimes. In parallel with Blinken's tour, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan will meet Israeli leaders in Jerusalem on Thursday and then travel to Qatar and Egypt. Both Blinken and Sullivan will be trying to make progress towards a deal to end the 14-month war in Gaza and win the release of the remaining captives held there by Palestinian armed group Hamas. - Agencies

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