



Islamabad POST

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UN rights chief slams Taliban ban

Detailed News On Page-08



After days-long negotiations

Peace accord signed to resolve Kurram dispute

Jirga member Malik Sawab Khan confirms that 14-point deal has been signed

SHAMIM SHAHID

KOHAT: After days-long negotiations, the two warring tribes in Kurram have signed a peace agreement containing 14 points aimed at establishing peace in the area as violence plagued the restive territory for several weeks, Jirga member Malik Sawab Khan said on Wednesday. Speaking to a private news channel, Sawab Khan – who is part of the grand jirga – said that 45 people from each warring side have signed the 14-point peace agreement. "Both sides have agreed to hand over their weapons to the government," he said, warning of the government's action if either side fails to do so. Furthermore, he said, it was decided in the agreement that all bunkers will be dismantled. The jirga member added that a committee will be constituted within 15 days to start implementing the agreement, hoping that the situation in restive Kurram would return to normal within a month. In response to a question, Khan said that the government would decide on the opening of the roads. "Members of Anjuman-e-Hussainia Association and members belonging to Anjuman-e-Farooqia, gave assent to the accord." A grand peace jirga was convened at Kohat Fort to mediate talks between the warring tribes of the violence-hit district. The peace talks, held under the supervision of GOC 9 Division Major General Zulfiqar Bhatti, aimed at establish lasting peace between the warring tribes whose clashes have claimed over 130 lives since November. Despite multiple truces announced over the past year, the issue remained unresolved, with tribal elders continuing efforts to negotiate a permanent peace agreement. Adviser to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister on Information, Barrister Mohammad Ali Saif, announced last week that a general consensus had been reached between the rival tribes during the Kurram peace jirga.

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CM KP welcomes Kurram peace agreement in Jirga

Ali Amin Gandapur expressed hope that the agreement would provide a strong foundation for resolving the Kurram issue permanently

DNA

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur, issued an important statement regarding the signing of a peace agreement between the parties in Kurram District. According to reports, the Chief Minister praised the provincial government's efforts in achieving a peaceful resolution to the Kurram issue, stating, "Today's signing of the agreement is a significant step toward a sustainable solution to the issue. I welcome this development and congratulate all stakeholders." Ali Amin Gandapur expressed hope that the agreement would provide a strong foundation for resolving the Kurram issue permanently. He extended his gratitude to tribal elders, parties, Jirga members, cabinet officials, and civil and military authorities involved in the process. "It is encouraging to see the parties reach an agreement," he said. The Chief Minister highlighted that the agreement would pave the way for reopening Kurram's land routes, adding that the parties have played a constructive role in ensuring peace in the region.

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting of the Federal Cabinet. – DNA

Shafqat Khan appointed new FO spox

He previously held ambassadorial posts in Russia and Poland

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Senior diplomat Shafqat Ali Khan has been appointed spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, replacing Murtaza Zahra-Baloch. Sources reported that Shafqat Ali Khan currently serves as Additional Secretary for Europe at the Foreign Office. He had previously held ambassadorial posts in Russia and Poland, showcasing extensive diplomatic experience. Murtaza Zahra-Baloch, the outgoing spokesperson, is reportedly being considered for the position of Pakistan's

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Yemen shoot down another US drone

American aircraft was downed with a homegrown Yemeni surface-to-air missile

AGENCIES

SANAA: Yemeni air defense units have successfully intercepted and shot down another American MQ-9 Reaper drone while it was conducting hostile activities in the airspace over the country's west-central province of Ma'rib. The spokesman for the Yemeni Armed Forces (YAF), Brigadier General Yahya Saree, made the announcement in a televised statement on Wednesday. He stated that the American aircraft was

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PM hopeful of achieving targets 'Uraan Pakistan' to take country to new heights in 2025: PM

PM said protests tried to derail the economy, but we succeeded in improving the financial landscape

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD, Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday expressed the hope that due to untiring efforts of the economic team, the government would achieve the economic targets in next six months. Speaking at the cabinet meeting, the prime minister noted that during first five months of current fiscal year, the remittances posted record \$15 billion that he hoped would expand to \$35 billion by the end of the fiscal year. He said that the government managed to achieve the macro economic stability despite the fact that the opponents made no stone unturned to sabotage the efforts of the government. Wishing the participants of the meeting happy new year, the prime minister said that the sun of 2025 will rise with the promise of progress and prosperity for Pakistan. He prayed that the economic, political and law and order crises that the world faced in 2024 would be

Continued on Page 06

PM convenes SIFC Apex Committee, NAP meetings

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has called a meeting of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) Apex Committee today at the PM House, with top military and civilian leaders expected to participate, sources revealed. The meeting will ratify key decisions made by the SIFC Executive Committee and review the council's performance report, sources added. Participants will also receive a briefing on development projects, investment opportunities, and newly discovered oil and gas reserves under the SIFC framework. Updates on

Continued on Page 06

Ukraine halts transit of Russian gas to Europe

Until now, Russian natural gas kept flowing through Ukraine's pipeline network after the 2022 invasion

FOREIGN DESK

KYIV, Ukraine: Ukraine on Wednesday halted Russian gas supplies to European customers through its pipeline network after a prewar transit deal expired at the end of last year. Ukraine's energy minister, Herman Halushchenko, confirmed on Wednesday morning that Kyiv had stopped the transit "in the interest of national security." "This is a historic event. Russia is losing markets and will incur financial losses. Europe has already decided to phase out Russian gas, and (this) aligns with what Ukraine has done today," Halushchenko said in an update on the Telegram messaging app. At a summit in Brussels last month, Ukrain-

ian President Volodymyr Zelensky vowed that Kyiv would not allow Moscow to use the transits to earn "additional billions ... on our blood, on the lives of our citizens." But he had briefly held open the possibility of the gas flows continuing if payments to Russia were withheld until the war ends. Russia's Gazprom said in a statement on Wednesday morning that it "has no technical and legal possibility" of sending gas through Ukraine, due to Kyiv's refusal to extend the deal. Even as Russian troops and tanks moved into Ukraine in 2022, Russian natural gas kept flowing through the country's pipeline network – set up when Ukraine and Russia were both part of

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Briefs

Over 500 lawmakers' seats at stake

The ECP has stated that members can submit their returns late, with a final deadline of Jan 15

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: A total of 517 lawmakers have failed to submit their tax returns to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) by the December 31 deadline. The ECP has stated that members can submit their returns late, with a final deadline of January 15. Twenty-three members of the Senate, 116 of the National Assembly, 208 of the Punjab Assembly, 55 of the Sindh Assembly, 91 the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, 24 of the Balochistan Assembly have not submitted the returns so far. The commission has warned that lawmakers who fail to submit their tax returns by January 15 will have their memberships suspended.

Inflation eases in Pakistan

On a month-on-month basis, inflation creeps up slightly by 0.1%

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Inflation trajectory showed signs of easing in December 2024, although persistent underlying pressures remain. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation for the general category fell to 4.1% year-on-year (YoY), down from 4.9% in November and a staggering 29.7% in December 2023. However, on a month-on-month (MoM) basis, it crept up slightly by 0.1%. While the drop from last year's highs is notable, inflation still hovers above what would be considered comfortable for most economies. Urban areas saw a similar trend, with CPI inflation decreasing to 4.4% YoY from 5.2% the previous month, compared with 30.9% in December 2023.

Startling revelations

Indian agency involved in targeted killing inside Pak

Killings planned by RAW had similarities with operations targeting Khalistan separatists: report

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: A methodical assassination programme was allegedly executed by India's external intelligence agency to kill about half a dozen individuals in Pakistan from 2021 onwards, a report by an American newspaper disclosed on Tuesday. Allegedly planned by the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), six such killings were said to have similarities to alleged operations carried out to assassinate Khalistan separatists in the United States and Canada. The US-based newspaper quoted an identified official as saying the killings in Pakistan were carried out not by Indian citizens but by Pakistani petty criminals or hired shooters from Afghanistan. Dubai-based businessmen were allegedly hired by the RAW as intermediaries. The businessmen were then put in separate teams to carry out surveillance, organise killings, and arrange for payments through hawala, or informal transnational financial networks, said the report. In 2022, one such alleged killing was that of Zahoor Mistry, who was said to

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Pakistan, India swap lists of nuclear sites

Pakistan handed over list of nuclear installations to Indian representative in Islamabad, says FO

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and India exchanged the lists of their respective nuclear installations and facilities, the Foreign Office said on Wednesday. This annual exchange was carried out under the Agreement on Prohibition of Attacks against Nuclear Installations and Facilities between Pakistan and India, the FO statement added. The list of nuclear installations and facilities in Pakistan was officially handed over to a representative of the Indian High Commission in Islamabad at

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Greece boat tragedy: 36 FIA officers sacked

The development came after an investigation committee probing the recent Greece boat tragedy revealed the involvement of 31 officials of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA)

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: At least 36 Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) officers have been sacked from their services due to their alleged involvement in the Greece boat tragedy. As per details, 13 FIA officials were found guilty of involvement in human smuggling, and cases have been registered against them. The FIA Director-General, Ahmad Ishaq Jahangir, oversaw the inquiry and ordered the dismissal of the 36 officers, including four inspectors, 10 sub-inspectors, two ASIs, five head constables, and 14 constables. The FIA Director-General stated that officials found guilty of negligence and involvement in illegal activities have no place in the organization. He assured that disciplinary action would be taken against those responsible for the boat tragedy. The development came after an investigation committee probing the recent Greece boat tragedy revealed the involvement of 31 officials of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). The committee decided to place the names of FIA officers, including inspectors, sub-inspectors, and constables in the Passport Control List (PCL). According to sources, 19 FIA officers from Faisalabad Airport, three from Sialkot Airport, two from Lahore Airport, two from Islamabad Airport, and

4 more Pakistani bodies found, toll rises to nine

Arrangements are being made by the Pakistani Embassy to send the bodies back to Pakistan

GUJRANWALA: The death toll of Pakistani citizens from the recent Greece boat tragedy has risen to 9 as the authorities found four more bodies of Pakistani nationals. On December 14, last year, the foreign media reported that a wooden boat carrying migrants capsized off the island of Gavdos in southern Greece. According to the FIA, the latest victims, identified as Shabbir, Zain Ali, and Zeeshan from Narawal, along with Owais Ali from Sialkot, were found near the site of the incident. The bodies have been transferred from Greece's Giavados Island to a hospital in Athens for processing. The FIA confirmed that arrangements are being made by the Pakistani Embassy to send the bodies back to Pakistan. The process is expected to take approximately one week before the remains can be returned to their families in Pakistan. Authorities are continuing to investigate the cause of the tragedy and provide support to the families of the victims. On December 22, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) arrested two individuals, including a human smuggler in Gujranwala, in connection with Greece boat tragedy. According to FIA authorities, the arrested suspects, Mohammad Aslam and Saeed Ahmed, played a role in the human smuggling operation. According to the FIA, Mohammad Aslam is directly involved in the Greece boat tragedy and is a member of an international human smuggling gang. He exploited victims by promising to send them to Europe, collecting millions of rupees from them.

five from Quetta Airport have been implicated in the scandal. The FIA decided to put the names of all 31 officers on the passport control list, effectively banning them from traveling abroad. The investigation, which is still ongoing, has revealed that the 31 officers were involved in smuggling people onto the ship that sank off the coast of Greece, resulting in significant loss of life. At least five Pakistanis who were being smuggled died in the Greece boat tragedy which later climbed to nine as the authorities found four more bodies of Pakistani nationals. Previously, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif directed strict action against officials of the FIA involved in facilitating human traffickers following the tragic Greek boat incident in which at least five Pakistani nationals are dead. The PM issued these directives during a meeting in Islamabad, aimed at addressing the growing issue of human trafficking. PM Shehbaz instructed the relevant authorities to expedite the ongoing investigation into human trafficking and present concrete recommendations as soon as possible. He stressed that such incidents tarnish Pakistan's global image and must be dealt with swiftly and effectively. "The delay in taking action against those responsible for last year's boat capsizing incident is concerning," he remarked, adding, "We cannot allow this to continue, as these tragedies only harm our country's reputation."

Peshawar declared smoke-free district

DNA

PESHAWAR: A landmark ceremony held in Peshawar marked the official declaration of the city as a Smoke-Free District. Organized by the District Administration of Peshawar, in collaboration with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Tobacco Control Cell of the Health Department and civil society organization Blue Veins, this initiative is a significant milestone in the journey toward improved public health and tobacco control in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The event brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including government departments, academia, police, the Directorate General of Health, the Health Sector Reform Unit, Right to Services Commission, the Right to Information Commission, Transport Department, Education Department, trade, hotel, and transport associations, bar associations, youth groups, and civil society organizations. Their collective commitment reflected the critical importance of multi-sectoral collaboration in achieving a smoke-free environment in Peshawar. District Administration, under the leadership of Rao Hashim, Additional Deputy Commissioner General and accompanied by the other Assistant Commissioners, emphasized the transformative potential of

this initiative. In his remarks, Rao Hashim said, "Tobacco smoke-free environments are crucial for protecting the health of non-smokers, reducing tobacco consumption, and creating a culture of compliance with public health laws. District Administration remains steadfast in its resolve to effectively implement tobacco control measures and ensure that Peshawar promotes a healthier, smoke-free environment." The declaration of Peshawar as a Smoke-Free District comes as a direct response to the growing evidence of the harmful effects of tobacco use and second-hand smoke on public health. The initiative aligns with the country's tobacco control laws and international commitments, including the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). Ajmal Shah, Coordinator of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Tobacco Control Cell, highlighted the critical need for collective action. He remarked, "The declaration of Peshawar as a Smoke-Free District is a testament to the power of partnerships between government bodies, civil society, and community organizations. Together, we can protect public health and pave the way for a healthier future." The ceremony also highlighted the integral role of civil society in supporting tobacco control measures and health policy reform. Qamar Naseem of Blue

Veins elaborated on the contributions of civil society organizations, stating, "Civil society organizations are key partners in this journey. By mobilizing communities, creating awareness, and advocating for strong enforcement, we can complement the government's efforts to curb tobacco use and its harmful effects. This declaration is a collective achievement, and it highlights the potential of collaborative action." The involvement of diverse stakeholders, such as the transport and education departments, hotel and trade associations, and bar associations, signifies a comprehensive approach to creating smoke-free environments in all public spaces. Youth groups and academic institutions also pledged to continue their awareness campaigns and support enforcement measures to sustain this achievement. This initiative represents the District Administration's strong commitment to the health and well-being of its residents. By declaring Peshawar a Smoke-Free District, the administration not only aims to enforce existing tobacco control laws but also to foster a cultural shift toward a healthier, smoke-free lifestyle. The ceremony concluded with a unanimous pledge from all participants to maintain their efforts in ensuring the successful implementation of this initiative and to continue advocating for similar measures in other districts.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Irfan Neziroglu paid a courtesy visit to the Chairman of HEC Mukhtar Ahmed and discuss cooperation opportunities in the field of education.

Khyber Teaching Hospital treated 1.77m patients in 2024

PESHAWAR: Khyber Teaching Hospital (KTH), one of the 2nd largest public sector healthcare facilities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, treated an impressive 1,775,532 patients in 2024. Of these, 1,156,848 were attended to in the Accident and Emergency Department, while 618,684 received care in the Outpatient Department. Additionally, 201,370 patients visited the hospital's Institution-Based Practice (IBP) during evening hours, where 5,591 specialized procedures were performed. According to KTH spokesperson, Sajjad Khan, the hospital conducted 39,651 surgeries and carried out 1,592,923 laboratory tests, 279,059 X-rays, 123,250 ultrasounds, 15,911 CT scans, and 8,925 MRIs in 2024. KTH serves not only Peshawar and its surrounding districts but also the entire province and even patients from Afghanistan. With a 1,600-bed capacity, it continues to play a critical role in providing advanced healthcare services to thousands daily. In addition to its clinical achievements, KTH undertook significant developmental initiatives in 2024. These include, Installation of a high-end incinerator machine, donation of 80 motorized beds by UNHCR to enhance patient comfort, Installation of a 180 kW solar system for the Accident and Emergency Department and approval of a 1.5 MW Longi solarization project for the hospital.

Action plan finalized for Huqooq-e-Pakistan Project-II

PESHAWAR: A meeting held here with Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur in the chair on Wednesday discussed and finalized an action plan for the effective implementation of the Huqooq-e-Pakistan Project-II, and achieving its desired objectives. Besides, Federal Secretary for Human Rights Allah Dino Khawaja and Advocate General Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Shah Faisal Utman Khel, the representatives of the relevant federal and provincial departments and the UNDP, attended the meeting. The meeting decided to have a coordinated mechanism between the relevant federal and provincial departments for the implementation of the project. A briefing was provided about the project's key features, objectives, proposed activities, areas of coordination challenges, and other related matters. It was informed that this 3.5-year long project is being launched with the cooperation of the European Union and the UNDP, aimed at strengthening relevant institutions and improving the human rights situation in the province. It was apprised that under the project, human rights institutions will be established to enhance the delivery of services in the province, and all data related to human rights will be digitized and added that the digitization/Integration of data will also help streamline the people-centered complaint management system. Furthermore, the project will introduce human rights-related programs in the higher education sector of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the provincial government will identify two universities for this purpose. Additionally, various measures have been proposed under the program for implementing the Human Rights National Action Plan in the province. The Chief Minister assured the provincial government's full cooperation for the proper implementation of the project and directed all relevant departments to ensure their support in this regard. He stated that the government aims to centralize the database of marginalized and underprivileged segments of society, and has already instructed the concerned authorities in this regard. He expressed hope that this project would contribute to the ongoing efforts of the provincial government. The Chief Minister emphasized the importance of a comprehensive and integrated database of deserving and underprivileged groups, stating that the establishment of a centralized database and centers would enable the provision of uniform and quality facilities to all. He added that the provincial government is working to provide necessary equipment and facilities to individuals with disabilities across the province, and the establishment of the database will accelerate progress in this regard. He directed the appointment of focal persons for effective coordination with relevant institutions for project implementation. He also instructed the formation of a steering committee at the provincial level to ensure the project runs on sustainable bases.—APP

AGP achieves timely certification of financial statements

ISLAMABAD: The Department of the Auditor-General (DAGP) has achieved a significant milestone by successfully completing the certification of 245 Appropriation Accounts and Financial Statements across federal, provincial, and local governments, as well as self-accounting entities and authorities, well ahead of the constitutional deadline of December 31, 2024. This accomplishment, made under the provisions of Articles 168-171 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and Sections 7-15 of the AGP's Ordinance 2001, underscores the DAGP's commitment to fulfilling its constitutional mandate. In a statement issued on Wednesday, the Auditor-General highlighted the importance of this achievement in ensuring the reliability and accuracy of financial statements for public scrutiny and policy making. He emphasized that the timely certification of financial accounts strengthens public trust in financial governance and fosters a culture of accountability within the country's fiscal framework. "This timely completion reflects our dedication to upholding the highest standards of auditing and our commitment to fostering transparency and governance. It is a collective victory for the entire DAGP team and the executives whose cooperation was pivotal," said the Auditor-General. While congratulating his team, the Auditor-General commended the hard work and professionalism demonstrated by the audit and accounts offices. He also extended heartfelt gratitude to the executive authorities for their cooperation, without which this uphill task would not have been possible.—APP

KP govt urged to enact child marriage restraint bill

PESHAWAR: A provincial stakeholders seminar on child marriages has called on the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government to urgently enact the Child Marriage Restraint Bill to address the deep-rooted social and traditional practice that adversely impacts millions of young lives. Participants stressed that such legislation is essential to safeguard the potential and future of children. The seminar was jointly organized by Blue Veins, the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), and the Directorate General of Human Rights. The event featured prominent speakers, including Allama Muhammad Raghob Hussain Naemi, Chairman of the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII); Maulana Tayyab Qureshi, Chief Khatib of Peshawar District; Ghulam Ali, Director of the Directorate General of Human Rights; Said Rehman, Director of Local Government KP; Imran Takkar, child rights activist; and Muhammad Rizwan, Coor-

dinators of NCHR, among others. Speakers highlighted that marriages below the age of 18 constitute a grave violation of fundamental human rights. They urged the provincial government to make 18 years the mandatory minimum age for marriage for both boys and girls. Participants expressed concern over delays in enacting legislation and emphasized that existing laws, such as the Pakistan Majority Act 1975 and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Act 2010, define individuals under 18 as children. Therefore, any marriage below this age should be considered illegal. Qamar Naseem, Program Manager of Blue Veins, shared said according to data collected by international organizations around 21 percent of girls in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa became married before the age of 18 years. While three percent of girls in the province tie the marriage bond before the tender age of 15 years, Qamar added. Quoting figures of

Health and Demographic Survey Report of KP, Qamar Naseem said 15 percent girls become mother before the age of 18. Similarly, he continued, 23 percent girls in the province cannot study till 10th grade because of getting married. He said the colonial era Child Marriage Restraint Act (CMRA) 1929 is still in vogue in the province which defines a child as a person, if a male, is under 18 years of age, and if a female, is under 16 years of age. The CMRA 1929 provides punishment of simple imprisonment up to one month or fine of Rs. 1000 or both, for contracting a child marriage by a male above 18 years of age; for performing or conducting a child marriage; and for parent or guardian involved in child marriage. He said a new law titled Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Marriage Restraint Bill 2021, proposing the marriage age for both male and female as 18, was submitted in KP assembly as private member bill but is not made an Act yet.—APP

CDA-DWP approves key development initiatives

ISLAMABAD: The Capital Development Authority (CDA) Development Working Party (DWP) held its 71st meeting on Wednesday, chaired by Chairman CDA/CDA-DWP Muhammad Ali Randhawa at CDA Headquarters. The meeting was attended by CDA Board Members, representatives from the Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Interior and the relevant senior officers. The forum deliberated on and approved four significant development schemes to uplift the city's infrastructure and services. The meeting of CDA-DWP approved PC-I for the upgradation, illumination, and beautification of Constitution Avenue in Sector F-5/G-5, Islamabad, at a cost of Rs. 490.082 million. This project aims to enhance the aesthetics and functionality of key government buildings, including Aiwan-e-Saddar, the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Library, Parliament House, the Supreme Court, the Federal Shariat Court, Cabinet Blocks, and the Office of the Auditor General of Pakistan. The project will develop CDA's assets on a permanent basis and is expected to be completed within four months. Recognizing the challenges posed by rapid urbanization, the meeting of CDA-DWP approved PC-II for hiring a consultancy firm to provide advisory services for developing a state-of-the-art municipal solid waste management system in line with the directions of Government of Pakistan. This initiative aims to reduce pollution, mitigate health risks, and promote a cleaner urban environment. The consultancy phase will take 4 months, during which a mechanism will be devised for implementing international standards in solid waste management. To boost Islamabad's hospitality sector and enhance its global reputation, PC-II was approved for hiring a consultancy firm to conduct a feasibility study and provide transaction advisory services for the development of 5-star hotels in the city. This initiative will foster economic growth, promote tourism, and elevate Islamabad's stature as a hub for political, diplomatic, and business activities. The consultancy phase will span 12 months, focusing on proposing modern operational models on a joint venture and profit-sharing basis.—DNA

PODA advocates for amendment in child marriage restraint act Punjab

DNA

KALLAR SYEDAN: During an engaging awareness-raising session organized by PODA in the hall of Tehsil Municipal Corporation, participants unanimously agreed to support an amendment in the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2015. The proposed amendment seeks to raise the minimum age of marriage for girls from 16 to 18 years, ensuring a safer and more empowering future for young girls in Punjab. This resolution aims to safeguard adolescent girls' fundamental rights, including access to education, reproductive health, and employment opportunities. By doing so, it will ultimately contribute to the country's development and progress. The session was part of PO-



DA's 3-year project, "Reduce Early Marriages to Enhance Gender Equality," supported by the Norwegian Embassy in Islamabad. The session drew a diverse range of participants, includ-

ing academicians, members of the Tehsil Bar Association, health professionals, and government officials from various departments such as education, health, population welfare, and local govern-

ment. Representatives from the union council, media persons, youth representatives, nikah registrars, religious scholars, and members of the Municipal Committee also participated.

Advocate Khawaja Zahid Nasim cited the Constitution of Pakistan and presented an overview of the prevailing laws concerning child marriages. He highlighted the landmark Lahore High Court verdict in which the definition of 'child' in Section 2(a) of the Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 termed unconstitutional. Mentioning that the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act sets the marriageable age for both girls and boys at 18 years, Khawaja Zahid also informed that around 40 other Muslim countries have set the minimum marriageable age for girls at 18 years to combat child marriages. Nabeela Aslam, Project Manager at PODA, emphasized that child marriages constitute a gross violation of human and child rights.

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

JANUARY

Jan 01 / CUBA	Revolution Day
Jan 01 / Palestine	Palestine Revolution Day
Jan 01 / Sudan	National Day
Jan 04 / Myanmar	Independence Day
Jan 06 / Iraq	Armed Forces Day
Jan 12 / Tanzania	Armed Forces Day
Jan 14 / Uzbekistan	Armed Forces Day
Jan 15 / Nigeria	Armed Forces Day
Jan 20 / Mali	Armed Forces Day
Jan 20 / Laos	Armed Forces Day
Jan 25 / Thailand	Armed Forces Day
Jan 26 / Australia	National Day

Hotels & Restaurants



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



Turkish Airlines.....8494949



Emergency

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



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WASA Rawalpindi..5555489
CAA.....9281092



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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



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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

ICCI fully endorses PM's 'Uraan Pakistan' initiative

Siddiqui called for the active involvement of business leadership, particularly Chambers of Commerce, in formulating economic policies to ensure that these policies are practical and viable

ISLAMABAD: Abdul Rehman Siddiqui, the Acting President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), has acknowledged the potential of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's ambitious "Uraan Pakistan" initiative—a five-year national economic plan focusing on the 5Es (exports, e-Pakistan, environment, energy, equity, and empowerment)—to guide the country toward sustainable growth. He further supported

the Prime Minister's emphasis on privatizing and outsourcing loss-making State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) as essential measures to curb financial losses and improve efficiency in the public sector. In a statement issued on Wednesday, Siddiqui also highlighted the urgent need to address a range of economic challenges, including rising public debt, unemployment, the closure of industries and businesses, unrealistic tax pol-

icies, and the insufficient infrastructure and facilities for Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and Industrial Zones. He emphasized the importance of eliminating bureaucratic red tape, which hinders business growth and creates barriers to ease of doing business in the country. Siddiqui called for the active involvement of business leadership, particularly Chambers of Commerce, in formulating economic pol-

icies to ensure that these policies are practical and viable. He also suggested assigning export tasks to foreign missions, particularly trade counselors, to effectively support Pakistan's export goals. Reaffirming the ICCI's commitment to supporting the business community, Siddiqui emphasized that the Chamber has always played a proactive role in bridging the gap between the govern-

ment and businesses. He assured that the ICCI would continue to fulfill this critical role in the future. Acting Senior Vice President Nasir Mehmood Chaudhry expressed optimism that all stakeholders, including government institutions and the private sector, would work together in earnest to achieve the objectives of the Uraan Pakistan initiative, contributing to the economic stability and prosperity of the country.

Senate IT Committee expresses concerns over internet shutdowns

ISLAMABAD: Senate Standing Committee on Information Technology and Telecommunication on Wednesday voiced serious concerns over persistent connectivity issues and expressed concerns about the arbitrary shutdown of internet services without justification. Presided over by Senator Palwasha Mohammad Zai Khan, the meeting scrutinized the deficiencies in monitoring mechanisms. It criticized the lack of transparency surrounding internet disruptions, even after a detailed briefing by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) Chairman. The Chairperson emphasized the distinction between blocking specific content and implementing a complete internet shutdown, asserting that the latter is unwarranted. Senator Kamran Murtaza echoed this sentiment, suggesting that such shutdowns appear politically motivated rather than based on technical considerations, and called for the process to be politicized. Highlighting a report published in Dawn that estimated financial losses in billions due to internet disruptions, Senator Palwasha expressed concern over the poor quality of internet services in Pakistan, which ranks just above Myanmar globally despite significant investments. She underscored that such reports often have some factual basis, though Ministry officials denied the claims, clarifying that national outages referenced in the media occurred only during elections. The PTA Chairman informed the committee that social media applications are restricted based on the Supreme Court's and High Court's directives. To address legal ambiguities, the Committee instructed that the Law Division provide clarity on the rules framed under the PECA Act, 2016, particularly regarding internet outages, and report back to the Committee. The Secretary of the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication (MoITT) acknowledged the significant impacts of internet shutdowns and stressed the importance of addressing public perceptions about such actions.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Christen community singing song during special pray on the eve of New Year 2025 at St. Thomas Church, in the federal Capital.

ISSI holds roundtable on Pakistan-China relations

ISLAMABAD: The China-Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted an In-house Roundtable discussion on 'Pakistan-China relations.' Pakistan's Ambassador to China Mr. Khalil Hashmi was the Keynote Speaker. The event brought together senior diplomats and renowned scholars to reflect on the enduring partnership between Pakistan and China and evaluate its future trajectory in the wake of the evolving bilateral, regional and global context. In his welcome remarks, DG ISSI Ambassador Sohail Mahmood reaffirmed the Institute's commitment to fostering meaningful dialogue on Pakistan's strategic relationships, particularly the Pakistan-China All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership. He highlighted the steady progression of Pakistan-China relations since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, the salience of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and the implications of the evolving global order marked by major-power contestation and growing multi-polarity. Ambassador Khalil Hashmi provided a comprehensive analysis of China's rise, Beijing's engagement with the region and globally, and the current state of play in bilateral relations. He also underlined the efforts of the Pakistan mission in Beijing towards imparting greater depth and substance to the trade, investment and economic dimensions of the relationship. Participants engaged in a wide-ranging exchange of ideas during the interactive session, emphasizing the importance of sustained collaboration, improvement of business-to-business (B2B) interface, and enhanced people-to-people exchanges. The participants stressed the vital importance of policy foresight and preparedness to maximize the potential of this critical partnership in a changing global order. The event concluded with a renewed commitment to further strengthening the Pakistan-China relationship in light of contemporary challenges and opportunities.—APP

Pakistan Navy ship Moawin seizes large cache of narcotics



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Navy Ship MOAWIN seized a large cache of narcotics during a counter-narcotics operation in North Arabian Sea. The seized narcotics are estimated to be worth approximately USD 1 million in international market. The cache was being transported via sea to international destinations. During the operation, PNS MOAWIN, supported by Pakistan Navy air assets, successfully intercepted a Dhow, conducted boarding operations, and apprehended the narcotics, which were stowed in a hidden compartment of the vessel. The successful execution of this anti-narcotics operation demonstrates Pakistan Navy's vigilance, professionalism, and resolve to deter and disrupt all illegal activities, ensuring good order at sea.—DNA

Crackdown on illegal petrol agencies, price violations

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration has intensified its crackdown on violators of official price lists and illegal petrol agencies operating in residential areas in the Federal Capital. According to the spokesman of ICT administration, a targeted operation was carried out by the Assistant Commissioner (Nilore) against the violators of official price lists and illegal petrol agencies in Ghorri Town and Khanna areas late night. During the operation, five individuals were arrested for breaching the official price lists. One person was arrested for running an illegal petrol agency in a residential area. Additionally, two petrol dispensing machines from illegal agencies operating within the jurisdictions of Khanna and Karpa police stations were also seized, he added. This action is part of the administration's broader efforts to regulate fuel distribution and enforce compliance with official pricing policies. Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad Irfan Nawaz Memon urged the residents to report such agencies and avoid buying petrol from them. "Community cooperation is essential to eliminating such illegal activities and ensuring safety and compliance," the DC emphasized.

Sufi teachings vital for peace in troubled times: Minister

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Housing and Works, Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada, underscored the critical role of Sufi teachings in fostering peace, harmony, and brotherhood during the launch of Kalyam Kooch-i-Ishq, a book celebrating the life and teachings of Hazrat Mian Fazluddin Kalyami. The ceremony, held at the Pakistan Academy of Letters, marked the 133rd death anniversary of the revered mystic. The book, co-authored by Syed Ahmad Iqbal Tirmazi and Iftikhar Ahmad Hafiz Qadri, explores the biography and discourses of Hazrat Mian Fazluddin Kalyami, a spiritual disciple of Hazrat Baba Fariduddin Ganjshakar. The event drew a distinguished audience, including former president of the Islamic International University, Sahibzada Dr. Sajid ur Rehman, who presided over the session, and Professor Dr. Abdul Aziz Sahir, Dean of Social Sciences at Allama Iqbal Open University, as the guest of honor. Professor Dr. Najeeba Arif, President of the Pakistan Academy of Letters, also graced the occasion alongside other prominent academics and scholars. Addressing the gathering, Minister Pirzada lauded the authors for their contribution to Sufi literature, emphasizing

the timeless relevance of mystics in shaping Islamic teachings and spreading the values of humility, tolerance, and love. "The teachings of Hazrat Mian Fazluddin Kalyami remain a beacon of hope and inspiration, especially in today's fractured world," the minister remarked. He called for preserving and promoting Sufi literature to bridge divides and instill harmony among communities. Dr. Sajid ur Rehman elaborated on Hazrat Mian Kalyami's spiritual guidance, highlighting his role in inspiring generations through his devotion and wisdom. "His teachings continue to offer guidance to seekers of truth, even more than a century after his passing," he stated. Professor Abdul Aziz Sahir praised the authors for shedding light on the life of the great mystic, calling the book a vital effort to preserve the spiritual heritage of the region. Similarly, Professor Najeeba Arif highlighted Hazrat Mian Kalyami's miraculous abilities and profound understanding of Islamic mysticism. Sahibzada Professor Rashad Masood Kalyami commended the authors for narrating the Sufi's emphasis on introspection, self-reflection, and inner purification, central to the Sabriya branch of the Chishti Order to which he belonged.—DNA

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Briefs

Tarar greet newly elected leaders of KJF office bearers

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage, and Culture, Attaullah Tarar, on Wednesday congratulated the newly elected office bearers of the Kashmir Journalists Forum (KJF). In his message, the minister extended his felicitations to President Sardar Irfan Sadozai and General Secretary Maqsood Muntazir, expressing confidence in their ability to lead the forum toward greater success. He also conveyed his best wishes to the new leadership. Highlighting the significance of the KJF, the minister noted its vital role as a voice for the people of Kashmir, emphasizing its contributions to promoting the freedom movement, addressing Azad Kashmir's political landscape, and raising public concerns. The KJF continues to be a powerful platform advocating for the rights and aspirations of the Kashmiri people.—APP

BISP beneficiaries to get increased Benazir Kafalat stipends in New Year

ISLAMABAD: Chairperson of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Senator Rubina Khalid Wednesday announced an increase in the quarterly installment under the Benazir Kafalat Programme from Rs. 10,500 to Rs. 13,500 with advent of the year. The amount has been raised for providing much-needed financial relief to deserving women across Pakistan. The announcement was made at a ceremony where Senator Rubina Khalid, along with Secretary Amir Ali Ahmed, Additional Secretary Dr. Tahir Noor, and other staff members, celebrated the New Year by cutting a cake. Senator Rubina Khalid declared 2025 as the "Year of the Benazir Humarmand Programme", emphasizing the initiative's potential to empower underprivileged individuals by equipping them with skills to earn a livelihood and achieve self-sufficiency.—APP

Best healthcare facilities top priority

ISLAMABAD: During a meeting with Dr Rana Imran Sikandar, Executive Director of the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS), he commended the government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, for prioritizing healthcare reforms. He said that efforts are underway to address public healthcare challenges and to plan large-scale developmental projects for various departments of PIMS. Dr. Sikandar provided a comprehensive briefing on the hospital's performance, challenges, and the state of medical facilities. The Deputy Chairman praised PIMS as a vital healthcare institution serving patients from across Pakistan but acknowledged the immense pressure it faces as a primary healthcare provider. "The provision of medical facilities is becoming increasingly challenging due to the rising number of patients," Syedaal Khan added.—APP

AIOU Offers 80 Educational Programs for Int'l students

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has offered over 80 educational programs for overseas Pakistani and international students in its admissions for the Semester Spring 2025. These programs include Matriculation, FA, I.Com, Associate Degrees in Arts, Commerce, and Education, BS programs, B.Ed programs of 1.5, 2.5, and 4 years, and Diploma Programs in 12 disciplines. The university is offering these educational programs to international students through an online management system. All academic activities, from admissions to examinations, will be conducted online. For monitoring online examinations, MS Teams or a monitoring application approved by the authorities will be used. The last date for admissions is February 10. Students can apply online through the link <http://fmbp.aiou.edu.pk>. It is noteworthy that to facilitate international students, Vice-Chancellor Professor Dr. Nasir Mahmood has activated and empowered the International Collaboration and Exchange Office at the university. This office maintains continuous contact with international students, provides them with extensive guidance, and arranges orientation sessions for new international enrollees. While discussing international admissions, the Vice-Chancellor stated, "It is a matter of pride for us that 1,007 students from 37 countries have already enrolled, and we aim to increase this number to 5,000 within the next five years." Overseas Pakistanis and international students can contact the International Collaboration and Exchange Office for further details via email at overseas@aiou.edu.pk or phone at +92519572495.—DNA

Ministry launches biometric B-Forms for Children over 10

Minister Mohsin Naqvi said, "These measures will prevent the misuse of children's identity information and strengthen our national identification system. I commend NADRA and the Passport Department for their swift action in implementing these reforms"

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The ministry of Interior, on directives of Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, has announced the introduction of a new B-Form equipped with advanced security features for children aged 10 and above. This initiative aims to enhance identity verification and curb crimes such as identity theft, human trafficking, and illegal passport acquisition. The new

B-Form will now include mandatory fingerprint impressions and photographs of children in the specified age group. According to officials, the phased rollout of these enhanced B-Forms will commence on January 15, 2025. Speaking on the development, Minister Mohsin Naqvi said, "These measures will prevent the misuse of children's identity information and strengthen our national identification system. I commend NADRA and the Pass-

port Department for their swift action in implementing these reforms." In the first phase, children between the ages of 10 and 18 will need to visit NADRA centers, accompanied by a parent or legal guardian, to provide their fingerprints and photographs. Guardians must also present their Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) and the child's computerized birth certificate issued by the Union Council or Town Committee.

Once the process is completed, NADRA will issue a new B-Form featuring the child's photograph and biometric details. The updated document will be a prerequisite for obtaining a new passport for children in this age group. The Ministry of Interior spokesperson confirmed that the old B-Form, which lacks biometric details, will no longer be accepted for children over 10 years old. Additionally, further reforms, such as integrating iris

scans and enhancing services through the Pak-ID Mobile App, are planned for future phases. This initiative is part of a broader effort to integrate NADRA's systems with provincial civil registration databases and ensure the issuance of Digital IDs to all Pakistani citizens. "These steps will play a crucial role in securing the identity of our citizens and combating crimes effectively," said the spokesperson.

ANF recovers over 32 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting 10 operations across the country managed to recover 32.914 kg drugs worth over Rs 5.8 million and arrested 11 suspects, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Wednesday. He informed that 24 grams weed was recovered from a parcel sent from the UK at a courier office in Rawalpindi. 12 kg hashish hidden in a vehicle near M-1 Motorway Islamabad was recovered and two suspects were rounded up during the operation. In third operation, 1.2 kg hashish was recovered from the possession of a suspect held near M-1 Motorway in Islamabad. 10 kg hashish hidden in an uninhabited area of Jiwani in Gwadar was seized and 6 kg hashish was recovered from the possession of a suspect near Mehria Town, Attock. In three operations near Iqbal Shaheed Toll Plaza GT Road Attock, ANF recovered 120 intoxicated tablets, 290 grams opium and 136 grams hashish from the possession of three suspects. 1.2 kg hashish was recovered from an accused near Satellite Town, Rawalpindi. In 10th operation, 2 kg heroin was recovered from a trolley bag in Sohrab Goth Al-Asif Square Karachi and three accused were arrested. Separate cases have been registered against the arrested accused under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.

IRSA releases 28,000 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Wednesday released 28,000 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 39,400 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1472.53 feet and was 74.53 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 16,600 cusecs and 6,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1132.85 feet, which was 82.85 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 4,800 cusecs and 4,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 22,300, 17,200, 17,300 and 1,100 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 11,700 cusecs of water released at Nowshera.—APP

7th agriculture census launched: Ahsan

The census would leverage advanced technology and a centralized dashboard to streamline data collection and analysis, facilitating targeted interventions and optimal resource allocation. Ahsan Iqbal also unveiled an innovative dashboard designed for real-time tracking of census progress and data insights

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Wednesday launched the long-overdue 7th Agriculture Census, underscoring the importance of accurate data collection in policy-making to effectively address future food security challenges. "Pakistan's population growth rate has increased from 2.4 percent to 2.55 percent. If this trend continues, an additional 380 million people will be added to the existing population of 240



million by 2047," he said while addressing the agriculture census launch ceremony. Commenting on the potential consequences, he asked the gathering to consider the implications for food security in 2047 if a viable agricultural strategy was not developed based on reliable data collected by field enumerators using digital tools. "That is why the Planning Ministry places great importance on accurate data collection. If there is wrong reporting (in compiling statistics), it will lead to wrong policies," he said. Ahsan Iqbal said the 7th Agriculture Census was a key initiative that could revolutionize this sector, which has long been considered the backbone of the national economy. He expressed confidence that the census results would be available by coming August and would lay the foundation for the much-needed transformation in the agriculture sector. He emphasized the necessity of judiciously utilizing available resources and ensuring they were directed toward the right goals. The census data would provide critical insights into crop patterns, the use of modern machinery, and livestock statistics, enabling targeted interventions and fostering self-reliance in the sector, he added. The Planning minister also commended the management and team at the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) for their efforts in preparing for the agriculture census and thanked the provinces for their workforce contributions and support from relevant departments. For the first time, all agriculture-related censuses covering machinery, livestock, and crops have been merged into a single comprehensive census to ensure accurate and actionable data. The census would leverage advanced technology and a centralized dashboard to streamline data collection and analysis, facilitating targeted interventions and optimal resource allocation. Ahsan Iqbal also unveiled an innovative dashboard designed for real-time tracking of census progress and data insights.—DNA

Senate body discusses voting rights for overseas Pakistanis

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Senate Standing Committee on Parliamentary Affairs held a comprehensive discussion on granting overseas Pakistanis, including dual citizens, the right to vote in future elections. The meeting was presided over by Senator Dr. Mohammad Humayun Mohmand. Highlighting the significance of extending voting rights to overseas Pakistanis, the Chairman said that many countries successfully implement postal balloting and questioned why Pakistan could not adopt a similar mechanism. He observed that the current legal framework neither grants voting rights to dual citizens nor provides a system to facilitate their participation. A representative from the Election Commission of Pakistan

(ECP) briefed the committee on past efforts, explaining that a third-party audit had previously advised against internet voting due to significant security concerns, including the risk of hacking. The audit concluded that online voting was unsafe for general elections. The Chairman stressed that all Pakistanis living abroad or holding dual citizenship should have the right to vote, suggesting that postal balloting could be a viable solution for Pakistan. While the ECP representatives acknowledged the practicality and cost-effectiveness of postal balloting, they cautioned that it could be prone to malpractice due to the lack of direct supervision. Drawing from international experiences, the Chairman asked the committee members to explore advanced electoral systems, citing Brazil's progress

in implementing modern technologies for elections. Senator Shibli Faraz added that reluctance to adopt systems like postal balloting or electronic voting machines (EVMs) reflects a lack of commitment to ensuring free and fair elections. The Chairman posed the question of whether the committee would support amending the laws and Constitution to facilitate voting systems such as postal balloting and EVMs. However, Senator Kamran Murtaza expressed reservations, arguing that such measures might not align with constitutional provisions. Faced with limited support for constitutional and legal amendments, the Chairman adjourned the meeting, stating, "If the committee members are unwilling to consider changes to enable a transparent and modern voting system, there is no point in continuing the discussion."

Bright prospects for Pakistan in 2025

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Business leader and former President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Dr. Shahid Rasheed Butt, said on Wednesday that outlook for 2025 is positive as military and political leadership has played a very positive role in improving the economy and steering the country out of troubles. Last year, Pakistan continued to experience many unstable events. Still, he said the extensive steps taken by the COAS Gen. Asim Munir and the government to improve the economy and political processes have paid dividends. Shahid Rasheed Butt said in a statement issued here today that due to the efforts of COAS and PM Shahbaz Sharif, the people of Pakistan are hopeful for a better future, one with growth, wealth, and much-needed political stability. He said that 2024 was a year of uncertainty and chaos. The country did not have the political stability it needed because of many factors that were dealt with most professionally. The business leader noted that a political party saw tough times because it crossed the line, and its "do or die" movement died because its primary goal of getting

its leader out of jail was not met.

However, he said, now the ice has finally broken, which gives people in Pakistan hope for a path toward political stability, which is still one of their main worries. He said that terrorism also became a bigger problem in 2024, and the TTP, which Afghanistan backed, made things worse between Islamabad and Kabul. Pakistan had to use the air to attack terrorist hideouts in Afghanistan. This led to short-lived border battles, but the tension was kept in check by timely diplomatic action, which is laudable. Shahid Rasheed Butt said that the economy got better in 2024 thanks to the sensible policies of the current government and the hard work of its economic managers. The biggest problem in the country was rising prices. Still, by the end of the year, the inflation rate had dropped to its lowest level in six years. The country's leaders promised to lower the price of electricity. The stock market index also crossed 100,000 for the first time in history, and the policy rate dropped from 22% to 13%. It is hoped that it will fall more in 2025 providing relief to the businesses and masses.

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Flooded tents in Gaza

FROM the north to the south of the Gaza Strip, images of suffering and oppression have repeated after the tents of displaced people were flooded due to heavy rains, while cold weather has affected children and women, who lack suitable clothing and blankets. As the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip continues, rainwater has inundated the tents of displaced families, exacerbating the suffering of thousands who have lost their homes due to continuous bombardment. In the city of Gaza, the majority of tents for displaced individuals, most of whom recently arrived from northern Gaza, have been submerged as the rain intensified, with no suitable places or even tents to shield them from the rain. Um Mohammed, trying to warm her children in her embrace, said, "All the tents have drowned; what can we do? There are no homes or even schools to seek refuge in, and the tents are old and worn out, unable to withstand the heavy rains." The Baptist Hospital in the city has received many patients suffering from the effects of severe cold, according to media sources. The Civil Defense in Gaza reported that it has received hundreds of calls from displaced people whose tents have been flooded. It explained that its teams can only relocate families to other shelters, which are often unsuitable, leaving them directly exposed to the cold and rain. The Civil Defense issued an urgent call to relief organizations and those able to provide assistance to save the affected families and transfer them to safe locations. The Al-Mawasi area in the south of the Strip experienced a harsh night as the weather system entered its second day. Heavy rains fell early this morning, leading to the flooding of dilapidated tents housing hundreds of thousands of displaced individuals. Most of these tents lack even the most basic living conditions, offering no protection from strong winds or extreme cold. Over 100,000 tents have become unusable, forcing families to face shortages of heating and clothing amid extremely difficult conditions, especially for children and the sick. In western Deir Al-Balah, more than a million displaced people are living in tragic conditions. Most rely on charitable assistance for food amid the Israeli blockade that prevents the entry of relief supplies. According to the Ministry of Health, seven Palestinians, including five children, died due to the cold this month, reflecting a tragedy that is increasing day by day, as families are trapped between the threat of Israeli bombardment and harsh weather conditions. The Government Media Office (GMO) confirmed that the Israeli occupation army is creating a new tragic humanitarian crisis threatening the lives of thousands of displaced people as 81% of their tents have deteriorated with the onset of winter and severe cold waves. Displaced individuals are living in harsh conditions that have resulted in five deaths in recent days due to extreme cold and the destruction of housing by the occupation forces. It confirmed that two million displaced people have been living in fabric tents for over a year, which have now become unusable due to the passage of time and weather conditions. Of the 135,000 tents, 110,000 have been rendered out of service, representing 81% that have completely deteriorated. The GMO warned that this catastrophic humanitarian situation is a direct result of the genocide committed by the Israeli occupation army, which has completely destroyed hundreds of thousands of homes for these citizens, forcing them to live in tents lacking the minimum requirements for a decent life.



US sanctions and China-Pakistan

ON December 18, the United States imposed sanctions on Pakistan's ballistic missile programme under executive order 13382, which targets proliferators of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. Sanctions were imposed on four Pakistani entities, including the state-owned National Development Complex. This round of sanctions is the fourth of its kind in 14 months. In October 2023, the US sanctioned three Chinese entities for allegedly supplying Pakistan with materials that could be used in its missile programme. Similarly, in April last year, the US sanctioned three Chinese companies and a Belarusian firm, and in September, it sanctioned four Chinese firms and a Chinese individual for working with Pakistan on its missile programme. The latest round of sanctions, however, stands out as it is the first time in recent history that the US has openly sanctioned a state-owned company. US Deputy National Security Adviser Jon Finer, speaking at an event organised by the Arms Control Association and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, spelled out the rationale for the sanctions, alleging that Pakistan is developing large rocket motors that could eventually provide it with the ability to strike targets well beyond South Asia, including in the United States. Pakistan's foreign office, in response, termed the sanctions unfortunate and biased. In a statement, it said: "Pakistan has also made it abundantly clear that our strategic programme and allied capabilities are solely meant to deter and thwart a clear and visible existential threat from our neighbourhood and should not be perceived as a threat to any other country. Hence, any irrational assumption of a hostile intent from Pakistan by any other country including the US is perplexing as well as illogical." Currently, Pakistan's medium-range ballistic missile, the Shaheen-III, is the longest-range missile in its arsenal. It can travel 2,750km and has a motor with a diameter of 1.4m. For Pakistan to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile that can reach the US, the range would need to be about 12,000km. The United States sanctioning Pakistani companies on the basis of unproven assumptions will strain relations between the two countries. Pakistan has, on multiple occasions, reiterated its stance that its nuclear capabilities are only to deter India. The US does not seem to understand the strategic realities of South Asia, where the Indo-US partnership is already aggravating Pakistan's anxieties. India's recent missile developments – including its Agni-5 nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile, hypersonic glide vehicle and K4 submarine-launch ballistic missile – have ramifications for regional stability which the US has ignored. Instead, Washington is further strengthening its defence and security partnership with New Delhi through agreements like the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies, which covers collaboration on cybersecurity, chip manufacturing, artificial intelligence, quantum technology, space and other sectors. Moreover, India recently signed a deal to procure 31 MQ-9B unmanned aerial vehicles from the US and both states also entered into a security of supply arrangement, committing to "provide reciprocal priority support for goods and services that promote national defence".

Will 2025 be better for Pakistan than 2024?

Qamar Bashir



In 2024, Pakistan's relations with neighboring countries were marked by significant tensions and security challenges. On January 16, Iran conducted missile strikes in Pakistan's Balochistan province. In retaliation, on January 18, Pakistan carried out airstrikes in Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan province, targeting Baloch separatist militants. Similarly, on April 16, Pakistan conducted its first notable strike in Afghanistan, targeting TTP hideouts in Kunar and Nangarhar provinces reportedly killing several militants

THE year 2024 was a defining period for Pakistan, marked by political upheaval, constitutional controversies, and economic struggles. The year began with severe economic challenges in January, including skyrocketing inflation, low GDP growth, and rising unemployment. Political tensions heightened as the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) continued protests and sit-ins, demanding early elections. In response to the growing unrest, the much-anticipated general elections were held on February 8, 2024, following a delay from 2023. The general elections were marred by widespread allegations of rigging, particularly against the military establishment, which was accused of manipulating results to favor the Pakistan Muslim League (N) and to marginalize Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). The PTI organized nationwide protests demanding the restoration of what they termed their "stolen mandate" and the release of detained party leaders. PTI also called for a boycott of products from companies owned by the armed forces and threatened civil disobedience, escalating tensions. The party accused the military of permeating civilian decision-making processes and undermining democratic institutions. The U.S. State Department called for a transparent investigation into the alleged irregularities, emphasizing the importance of adherence to democratic principles. Additionally, over 60 Democratic lawmakers in the U.S. House of Representatives urged President Joe Biden to leverage U.S. influence to secure Khan's release. Richard Grenell, a close aid of the USA President Elect Trump publicly criticized the Pakistani government's actions, expressing support for Khan and condemning the alleged electoral manipulation. In response to both domestic and international pressure, the Pakistani government initiated negotiations with PTI. To consolidate power, the new government enacted significant legislative and constitutional amendments in 2024. In October, Parliament passed the 26th Amendment to the Constitution, introducing controversial changes to the judiciary. This amendment shifted the appointment of the Chief Justice of Pakistan to a Special Parliamentary Committee, replacing the seniority-based system, and fixed the Chief Justice's tenure at three years. Additionally, amendments were made to election laws, effectively disabling the functioning of Election Tribunals and frustrating the Supreme Court's rulings on electoral disputes. Alongside these developments, stricter internet regulations were implemented to curb misinformation and dissent, heightening fears over the erosion of freedom of expression and the suppression of political dissent. In November 2024, the National Assembly approved amendments extending the service terms of the

chiefs of the Pakistan Army, Navy, and Air Force from three to five years. On December 13, 2024, a larger bench of the Supreme Court, led by Justice Aminuddin Khan, suspended the earlier decision of the Supreme Court on suspension of military courts, and allowed military courts to resume trials of civilians accused of involvement in the May 9, 2023, pending final appeals. Following this ruling, military courts sentenced 85 civilians to prison terms ranging from two to ten years by December 26, 2024. These developments have drawn condemnation from human rights organizations for the lack of transparency and due process in military court proceedings. In 2024, Pakistan's relations with neighboring countries were marked by significant tensions and security challenges. On January 16, Iran conducted missile strikes in Pakistan's Balochistan province. In retaliation, on January 18, Pakistan carried out airstrikes in Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan province, targeting Baloch separatist militants. Similarly, on April 16, Pakistan conducted its first notable strike in Afghanistan, targeting TTP hideouts in Kunar and Nangarhar provinces reportedly killing several militants. On December 25, Pakistan carried out additional airstrikes in Afghanistan's Paktika province, reportedly killing 46 people. Taliban interim government retaliated and carried out attack inside Pakistan claiming achieving the objectives. Relations with India also remained tense, with frequent border skirmishes and disputes over Kashmir. In 2024, Pakistan's missile program faced heightened scrutiny as the United States imposed sanctions on four Pakistani entities, including the National Development Complex. The U.S. alleged that advancements in Pakistan's missile capabilities, such as the Shaheen-III missile with a range of 2,750 kilometers, could pose risks of regional destabilization and potential nuclear proliferation. In the fiscal year 2023-2024, Pakistan's economy exhibited modest growth, with a 0.92% increase in the first quarter, driven by the agriculture and services sectors, but experienced contraction of industrial sector by 1.03%. Inflation rates showed a significant decline, dropping from 29.2% in 2023 to 4.9% in 2024, which allowed the State Bank of Pakistan to reduce the policy rate from 22% to 13% by December. Regarding trade, Pakistan's exports for the fiscal year 2023-2024 were approximately \$30.68 billion, marking a 10.65% increase from \$27.72 billion in the previous fiscal year. Imports during the same period amounted to \$63.29 billion, resulting in a trade deficit of about \$32.61 billion. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) showed signs of recovery, with a 17% increase to \$1.9 billion in July 2024, primarily sourced from China, Hong Kong, the UK, US,

and Singapore. However, challenges such as complex regulations, security concerns, and energy shortages continued to hinder the investment climate. Internationally, Pakistan maintained its support for Palestinian rights, condemning Israeli actions in Gaza and calling for a just and lasting solution based on pre-1967 borders with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as the capital of a sovereign Palestinian state. Additionally, Pakistan advocated for de-escalation in Syria, urging respect for the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. citeturn0search1 These positions underscore Pakistan's commitment to addressing both its internal economic challenges and its stance on key international issues. In 2024, Pakistan faced significant challenges in governance, justice, freedom of speech, political freedom, and its international image. Freedom House's "Freedom in the World 2024" report rated Pakistan as "Partly Free," with a score of 35 out of 100, indicating limited political rights and civil liberties. The World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index placed Pakistan at 130th out of 139 countries, reflecting systemic issues in justice and governance. In terms of press freedom, Reporters Without Borders ranked Pakistan 150th out of 180 countries in its 2023 index, noting slight improvements but ongoing concerns about media restrictions. Additionally, Pakistan's position in the global soft power index declined from 63rd in 2021 to 84th in 2023, highlighting challenges in its international image. In 2025, Pakistan must address its challenges with a strategic focus on political stability, economic resilience, and global engagement. Political unrest should be defused through dialogue, transparent governance, and respect for democratic principles, while ensuring judicial independence and safeguarding freedoms to rebuild public trust. Economic priorities include diversifying exports, reducing the trade deficit, attracting foreign investment by addressing systemic barriers, and reducing reliance on external financing like IMF loans to regain fiscal sovereignty. Diplomatically, Pakistan should foster regional stability through improved ties with neighbors—India, Afghanistan, and Iran—and engage constructively with global powers like the USA, Europe, Russia, and China for mutual economic and strategic gains. Improving governance, reducing corruption, and upholding justice and freedoms are critical for elevating Pakistan's global rankings and international image. By implementing these measures with accountability, Pakistan can achieve sustainable progress and enhance its standing on the world stage. – Press Secretary to the President (Rtd) Former Press Minister at Embassy of Pakistan to France Former MD, SRBC

“A masterclass in organizational success”

Book review by Ghazala Anbreem

THIS book was written by Jim Collins in 2001. Jim Collins, a consultant and a speaker from United States and was born in 1958. It is an influential business book and discovers the underlying variables that enable any type of organization to make the leap from good to great and also explores the reason why other organizations remain only good. This book examines what it takes for ordinary companies to become great and outperform their competitors, what it takes to build something that is world class organization and how to turn a good organization into an organization with sustained great results. This book is duly supported by evidence. The concept of the book can be described in one word, "Discipline. Disciplined thought means to be aware of the facts. This book is about those companies which were good and then acquired the proportions of great companies afterwards. Wells Fargo is such an example which for fifteen years remained the best in the arena of finance. Part of the book focuses on enterprises and teaches us how to become better leaders. The basic concept of a leader is examined in detail and the book grabs the concept of a good to great leader as well. The framework the writer suggests to enable organizations to move from good to great are in three stages. Stage one: Disciplined people Level One Highly capable individual Level two Contributing team member Level 3 Competent manager Level 4, Effective leader Level 5, Executive leaders (Their predominant attributes are humility and personal will). These leaders are always modest and down to earth. According to author in order to become a great leader all these five qualities should be there. They take responsibilities for failures. They take tough decisions for the benefit of company's benefits. Their whole ambition is for the growth of the companies not for their personal reasons. First who then what it means first to choose right people and then giving them the right role. If a level four leader is given a bus and is asked for ten people in the bus and takes them somewhere then first he will think where he has to go. However, a level five leader if asked to take 10 people with him in the bus then first he will choose the ten right people and put them on the right seat. If some wrong person boards the bus, then he will remove him and take the right person and then all will collectively decide where they have to go. After going ten kilometers if they need to change the direction then the team will not be facing any problem. Right people are self-motivated people. In like manner if the wrong persons are there in your life then you will not be able to achieve anything in life. This level five management was there in every company which was a great company in the world. Author says that he interviewed all those leaders who belonged to good to great companies and all of them shared a commonality that

they attributed the success to their team.

Stage Two: Disciplined thought

Stage three: Disciplined action

Jim Collins' earlier book "Build to Last" was published in 1994 which raised some important questions. His book "Good to Great" answers these question that contribute to making the visionary leaders. This book helped the companies to stay visionary over decades. During the period of forty years 1435 companies were scrutinized and examined and then 11 companies were listed out. The answer to finding out the question as to what made these companies great was the answer to find the disciplined people, disciplined thought and disciplined action. The Key Takeaways of the book. This book gives us an outline of the habits and practices that can help a company transition from good to great including:

1. Finding the hedgehog concept: The hedgehog with its simple defense strategy of curling up always comes on top and becomes unapproachable as compared to the clever fox and snake who use different strategies.
- To find your hedgehog concept, good to great companies must find out the answer to three questions.
 1. What can we be the best in the world at?
 2. Which things can we be passionate about?

Good to Great

By James C. Collins

3. What is the key economic indicator that we must concentrate on?
2. Success comes from many tiny incremental pushes in the right direction. The success of the companies revolves around many transformative processes. Success of the companies is because of their simple strategy and small steps combined together and these small steps lead to the results which help the companies to go ahead.
3. New technology should be taken as an accelerator towards the goal not as a goal itself. The writer advises to only adopt new technology if it helps to accelerate your momentum. Anchor, Musical.ly, Tick tick, snapchat, Instagram and twitter are the examples of innovations that flood the market with an incredible technology every year. But it is a fact that not all of them really benefit us. The implied lesson is that you may experiment with the new technology but do not jump without having a clear strategy. For example, Wall Greens very carefully crafted their online strategy to achieve the goal of becoming the best online pharmacy store and they offered online prescriptions for in-store pick up.
4. Leaders drive successful transformation from good to great. Collins discovered through his research that every company which went from good to great,

its leadership was of level 5. Level 5 leaders are the best team members with single modality ambition. They are oriented towards results and are modest, understanding and always find the opportunity for appreciating their team members and for any negligence accept the responsibility instantly.

5. The right people in the right place is the foundation of greatness. Collins found that focus should be on finding good people with a good character. They can always be trained and educated and such people are helpful in creating an atmosphere where industrious people prosper and slow people are left behind. 6. Success requires confronting reality. Good to great companies have the ability of facing the hard realities and have a conviction about their victory.

7. During management meetings leaders should play the role of charismatic leaders and must create such an environment where the team members can communicate the unpleasant facts or mistakes without any hesitation. The important lessons from the book can be enumerated as follows:

Lesson 1: The companies that go from good to great always go for consistently pushing the strategies which eventually make them come on the top. Some of the examples are Zappos and Walgreens.

Lesson 2: Always confront uncomfortable truth head on but never lose the faith that you work it out.

Realistic optimism is a habit which is shared by good to great companies. They do not ignore hard facts and do not despair. The book teaches us that when you are just not profitable enough to make it or your latest market campaigns do not work, accept it and deal with it. For example, when Procter and Gamble entered the paper goods market the situation looked pretty tough for the incumbent Scott Paper and Kimberly Clark. But while Scott Paper gave up the battle even before they began, Kimberly Clark on the other hand, took it as an opportunity. It rallied up the opportunity to compete. Twenty years later Kimberly Clark not only owned Scott Paper but they also outperformed the P&G in six out of eight categories. There are some other real examples which help us in understanding the writer's message. For example, he points out that great companies face the brutal facts. In US market both A&P and Kruger companies are two examples which used to operate low-cost general stores. The market share of A&P was more than 70 percent in early years of 1970. But when later the lifestyle of Americans started improving, the Kruger realized the changing lifestyles of the Americans and went with changing aspirations of the middle-class people. They introduced the barcode concept their stores. Eventually, in some years Kruger became a big company and A&P was on the verge of bankruptcy. In 1960s Philip Morris and RJ Reynolds were two big tobacco companies in America. When in 1964 it was discovered after researches that tobacco causes cancer, it went for diversification and expanded in shipping and oil and became bankrupt but Philip Morris went on with their addictive business, like soft drinks and chocolate business and gave 4 times returns than before. In short, this book is the output of the best research and teaches us how we can use the principles of great people in our personal life and is therefore, strongly recommended for reading.

Briefs

Peace accord signed to resolve...

FROM PAGE 01

In today's statement, Barrister Saif echoed Sawab Khan's remarks, saying that both sides have agreed to surrender their weapons and demolish their bunkers. "The peace agreement will usher in an era of peace and prosperity in Kurram," he added. Another jurist member, Raza Hussain said that plans were being chalked out to open routes and establish peace. "We will work in collaboration with the law enforcement agencies (LEAs) to ensure peace and order," he said, adding that the ceasefire would be implemented immediately as per the agreement. Kurram, a district of more than 600,000 residents near Pakistan's border with Afghanistan, has long been a hotpot for sectarian violence. But recent months have seen escalating tensions, with clashes since July to date leaving over 200 people dead. The recent clashes exacerbated a humanitarian crisis in the district, with medicine and oxygen supplies running critically low due to the prolonged closure of the main highway linking Parachinar to Peshawar. Reports suggest that over 100 children may have died from a severe shortage of medicine, though Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government spokesperson Barrister Saif has denied these claims.

CM KP welcomes Kurram...

FROM PAGE 01

He described the agreement as a clear message to those spreading discord that the people of the area are peace-loving. He also appealed to the parties to reject elements spreading hatred and to foster unity among their ranks. "Our efforts and aspirations are focused on addressing the issues faced by the people of Kurram and restoring normalcy in their lives as quickly as possible," he added. Ali Amin Gandapur emphasized that violence and conflict are never the solutions to any problem. "Issues and disputes are always resolved through dialogue. Violence only begets violence, which benefits neither the parties involved, the region, nor the government. Peaceful coexistence and tolerance are fundamental teachings of our religion," he said.

Indian agency involved...

FROM PAGE 01

have murdered an Indian passenger during the hijacking of an Indian Airlines flight in 1999. The report said it was told by unidentified Pakistani officials that a woman who called herself Tanaz Ansari but was in fact said to be an Indian intelligence official, was involved in the operation to kill Mistry. To track Mistry, the woman allegedly hired two Pakistanis and two Afghan citizens to shoot him. Furthermore, three others from South East Asia, Africa and West Asia were also hired to send at least \$5,500 to those involved in the killing. Citing unidentified Pakistani officials, newspaper also reported that the woman, who is believed to be an Indian agent, was also allegedly involved in killing Syed Khalid Raza, who had been active in Kashmir in the 1990s.

Pakistan, India swap..

FROM PAGE 01

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Simultaneously, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs handed over the list of India's nuclear installations and facilities to a representative of the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi. "Signed on December 31, 1988, the agreement, inter alia, provides that both countries shall inform each other of their nuclear installations and facilities, falling within its definition, on 1st January of each calendar year," said FO spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch. As the agreement between Pakistan and India entered into force on January 27, 1991, the two countries have been exchanging the lists since January 1st, 1992, she added.

Kazakhstan reaches semis, Iga Swiatek leads Poland to final 8

Elena Rybakina put Kazakhstan ahead with a comprehensive 6-3 6-1 victory over Laura Siegemund

SPORTS DESK

SYDNEY: Kazakhstan shattered Germany's title defence at the United Cup on Wednesday and secured their place in the semi-finals of the mixed team tennis tournament. Elena Rybakina put Kazakhstan ahead with a comprehensive 6-3 6-1 victory over Laura Siegemund in the first match of the tournament's knockout stages. Germany suffered a blow when world number Alexander Zverev withdrew from the quarter-final tie with a bicep strain minutes before his match. His replacement Daniel Masur began well but Alexander Shevchenko prevailed 6-7(5) 6-2 6-2 to give Kazakhstan an unassailable 2-0 lead in the tie.

"It was a struggle in this heat. He made me run a lot, he was more aggressive," Shevchenko said after prevailing in a physical battle in Perth. Shevchenko significantly cut down on his unforced errors after the first set and asserted himself more in a brilliant comeback. Iga Swiatek inspired Poland to reach the knockout stage of the 2025 United Cup with victories in singles and mixed doubles against the Czech Republic. After teammate Hubert Hurkacz's three-set defeat to Tomas Machac in the men's singles rubber, Swiatek downed world No 22 Karolina Muchova 6-3, 6-4 to level the tie and force a decisive mixed doubles match in Sydney. The five-time Grand Slam winner now holds a 3-1 head-to-head record



against Muchova, who she defeated in the 2023 French Open final. "Honestly I love playing Karolina," the world No 2 revealed. "She always brings precision and intensity. She has a different game than most of the girls." "It was a challenge. I was happy I got my intensity higher in the last two games. You looked like you were just enjoying your tennis. "I knew what was at stake. In tough moments I tried to loosen up my hand and forced myself to not change any move-



ments because of any thoughts. "This is the most important thing in tennis. To try to use your intuition as much as possible. I think I did that in the last rallies for sure." Swiatek and Hurkacz then combined in the doubles to earn a 7-6(3), 6-3 triumph over Muchova and Machac, sealing a 2-1 win for Poland. The duo have improved their excellent record as a doubles pairing to 5-1. The victory ensured Poland, who beat Norway 2-1 in their opening tie, finished top

of Group C. In the quarter-finals, Poland will face the best-placed runner-up from the groups that played in Sydney.

Swiatek's win against Muchova was her 10th singles victory at the United Cup, making her the first female or male player to reach this milestone since the competition was introduced in 2023.

The 23-year-old Pole's only singles defeat at the United Cup came against Jessica Pegula in 2023. Asked if she has any New Year's resolutions, Swiatek said: "Nothing specific honestly. I feel like I can have more distance after what happened to me the last couple of months. "I'm gonna try to just enjoy tennis as I did today. It's not always easy to do that. But I feel a lot of positive energy here in Sydney. Thank you for cheering for us." Tomas Machac put the Czech Republic ahead with his 7-5 3-6 6-4 victory against Hubert Hurkacz. World number two Swiatek brought Poland level with a hard-fought 6-3 6-4 win against Karolina Muchova. She returned to team up with Hurkacz to beat the Machac-Muchova pair 7-6(3) 6-3 in the deciding mixed doubles to secure their place in the last eight. "Honestly I was sure they were going to play amazing tennis because they have always great teams in doubles and mixed doubles," Swiatek said. "But I knew that we have the game to win it. For sure we were leading from the beginning," added Swiatek, who became the first player to secure 10 singles victory at the United Cup.

Saud surges, Babar Azam and Shaheen drop in Test rankings

Several Pakistan cricketers experienced decline in the latest update

DNA

LAHORE: Pakistan's middle-order batter Saud Shaheen made notable progress in the latest ICC Test rankings, while several Pakistan cricketers experienced decline. Shaheen's impressive 84-run knock in the second innings of the first Test against South Africa saw him rise three spots, moving from ninth to sixth with 764 rating points.

However, the news wasn't as positive for Babar Azam, who, despite scoring a half-century in the same Test, dropped two places to 17th with 669 rating points. Wicketkeeper-batter Mohammad Rizwan and all-rounder Salman Ali Agha also saw decline, sliding to 21st and 23rd, respectively. Out-of-form opening batter Abdullah Shafique dropped to 51st, while skipper Shan

Masood retained his 57th spot. England's Joe Root remains on top as the number-one Test batter, accompanied by teammate Harry Brook in second, while New Zealand's Kane Williamson is third. In the bowling rankings, Pakistan's spinner Noman Ali slipped to ninth place with 751 rating points, while pace bowler Shaheen Afridi dropped to 18th with 661 points. Mohammad Abbas, who returned to international cricket with six wickets against South Africa, has secured the 23rd spot. Pace sensation Naseem Shah surged six places to 33rd, while Hasan Ali and Sajid Khan dropped to 40th and 41st spots, respectively. Khurram Shahzad moved up one place to 57th, while Abrar Ahmed slipped three spots to 59th. India's Jasprit Bumrah continues to lead the Test bowler rankings.

Josh Hazlewood replaced Kagiso Rabada as the new second-best Test bowler, with Australian captain Pat Cummins joining him in third place. In the ODI rankings, Pakistan's white-ball captain Mohammad Rizwan made a slight rise, climbing three places to 21st, while Saim Ayub achieved a meteoric rise, jumping 57 places to 23rd with 603 points. Pakistan's opening batsmen, Fakhar Zaman and Imam-ul-Haq, saw minor dips, each dropping one spot to 17th and 19th respectively. Vice-captain Salman Ali Agha made a significant leap, moving up 28 places to 80th, while Abdullah Shafique slipped to 98th. Babar Azam continues to dominate the ODI rankings, holding onto the top spot, with India's Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill in second and third. In the ODI bowling rankings, Haris Rauf

saw a small dip, dropping from 15th to 16th, while Mohammad Wasim Jr. held his position at 61st. Naseem Shah's rise was notable, jumping 10 spots from 61st to 51st. Mohammad Nawaz, however, slipped six places to 73rd. Afghanistan's Rashid Khan retained the top spot in the ODI bowling rankings, with Shaheen Afridi slipping to 6th, overtaken by India's Kuldeep Yadav, who moved into second. In the T20I rankings, Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan fell to seventh, ninth respectively, while Saim Ayub held his ground at 57th. Despite being out of action, Fakhar Zaman remained in the 68th position, while Iftikhar Ahmed moved up one spot to 77th. Australia's Travis Head leads the T20I batter rankings, followed by England's Phil Salt and India's Tilak Varma.

Gambhir slams India's 'natural game' approach

NEW DELHI: India's cricket team head coach, Gautam Gambhir, delivered a scathing address to the players in the dressing room following their defeat in the fourth Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against Australia. Gambhir expressed frustration with the players' lack of discipline and adherence to team strategies, accusing them of prioritising their 'natural game' over situational demands. "Enough is enough! Players are doing whatever they want in the name of a 'natural game' without playing according to the situation," said Gambhir. "For six months, players were allowed to play as they wished for the team. Now, it will be decided how they should play for the team," he added. "If any player does not play according to the strategy, they will be told 'thank you.' Instead of following the plan, players have been doing as they please," he concluded. His outburst highlighted a growing rift within the team, with Indian media reporting that selectors, players and the coaching staff are not on the same page. "The atmosphere in the Indian dressing room is not ideal, as selectors, players and coaching staff are not on the same page," Indian media quotes. India's latest loss in Melbourne, where they lost seven quick wickets in 20.4 overs during the second innings, tilted the series in Australia's favour. After dominating the first Test under stand-in captain Jasprit Bumrah, India struggled to maintain momentum. India won the series opener in Perth by 295 runs despite missing regular skipper Rohit Sharma, who was unavailable due to the birth of his child. However, Australia fought back, winning the second Test by 10 wickets in Adelaide. - Agencies

Boulter win takes GB into United Cup last eight

SYDNEY: Katie Boulter beat Australia's Olivia Gadecki in straight sets to ensure Great Britain reached the United Cup quarter-finals in Sydney. Boulter knew a straight-set victory from any of the three rubbers against the hosts would take GB through as Group F winners. In the first match of the tie, Boulter won 6-2 6-1 inside 70 minutes to secure qualification before Australia won the next two encounters. Alex de Minaur, Boulter's fiance, thrashed GB's Billy Harris 6-2 6-1 before joining up with Gadecki in the mixed doubles and beating Charles Broom and Olivia Nicholls 6-3 7-6 (7-3). Britain had beaten Argentina 2-1 in their opening tie at the event on Tuesday and while all three teams in the group finished with the same points, GB finished in top spot because they had won the most sets. "I've been trying to avoid all the stats on all this but we were at dinner with [former British number one] Laura Robson last night, and she thankfully told me I had to win in straight sets," Boulter said. "So I was feeling the pressure from last night." Alexander Shevchenko helped Kazakhstan reach the quarter-finals as they knocked out defending champions Germany, who were without world number two Alexander Zverev because of a biceps injury. Poland also qualified, with Iga Swiatek beating the Czech Republic's Karolina Muchova. - Agencies

Djokovic, Kyrgios beaten in doubles in Brisbane

Daria Kasatkina overcame Peyton Stearns 7-6 4-6 7-5 in a slugfest

WEB DESK

BRISBANE: Grigor Dimitrov stayed on course for his title defence but women's second seed Emma Navarro was stunned by local favorite Kimberly Birrell at the Brisbane International on Wednesday. Two-time men's champion Dimitrov downed Aleksandar Vukic 6-2 7-6(5) to advance to the quarter-finals, overcoming late resistance from the Australian wildcard. "It's such a home atmosphere, honestly. It doesn't feel like a tournament to me," the Bulgarian said. "That's why I think the excitement is different. My attitude I think also changes quite a bit. It's a very special week." Birrell gave the local fans something to cheer about as she pulled off the biggest win of her career, beating Navarro 7-5 7-5. Egged on by the vociferous crowd at Pat Rafter Arena, the 113th-ranked wildcard broke to serve for it at 5-4 in both sets before closing it out on her second attempt. "I've spent so many hours on this court since I was little," the 26-year-old said. "I watched the Brisbane International when I was a kid and to get to play here and have the tournament that's basically at home is so special." The journey of Novak Djokovic

and Nick Kyrgios as a doubles pair ended with a 6-2 3-6 10-8 defeat by top seeds Nikola Pietrangeli and Michael Venus, who advanced to the quarter-finals. Kyrgios, playing his first tournament since a wrist surgery in September 2023, was beaten by Frenchman Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard in a battle of big servers in men's singles on Tuesday.



Snow sports: Opportunity for cross-cultural exchanges

Arrived with his family for new year celebrations, he said the striking snowfall feature, skiing and trout fish made Swat an ideal winter tourists destination of snow sports in Pakistan

SWAT: As the New Year celebrations unfold, an influx of tourists from Pakistan's plains has made its way to the northern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), drawn by the region's snow sports, trout fish and winter adventure opportunities. The breathtaking snowfall and the exhilarating activities of skiing and snowboarding in Upper Swat have become a significant draw, with thousands of visitors flocking to the picturesque valley. The annual snow sports extravaganza become a great source of attraction for domestic and foreign tourists being held regularly at Abbottabad, Mansehra, Swat, Dir and Chitral in January-February every year, making positive impact on the economy of rural areas and enhance the country's image of being tourists friendly destination in the world. These winter sports create an environment of camaraderie, bringing together people from various cultures, religions, and regions of Pakistan to enjoy the thrill of the mountain slopes at Malam Jabba, Bahrain, Osho valley and Kalam in Upper Swat.

"The new year tourism surge is not just an economic boon but also a platform for intercultural interaction and bolstering of rural economy," said Professor Dr Naveed Farooq of the Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan while talking

to APP. Arrived with his family for new year celebrations, he said the striking snowfall feature, skiing and trout fish made Swat an ideal winter tourists destination of snow sports in Pakistan.

As families, adventure enthusiasts, and groups of friends come together in the spirit of fun and recreation, the winter season in KP becomes a celebration of unity in diversity and the strengthening of cultural bonds. The visitors, whether from the bustling cities or more remote areas of Punjab, Sindh, KP, Balochistan, Azad Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan, share stories, experiences, and smiles, breaking down barriers and building lasting connections. The tourism boost is also a shot in the arm for the rural economy, as local businesses, from ski instructors to hoteliers, experience increased demand for their services. Vendors, shopkeepers, and hospitality workers in the region are seeing a rise in revenue, making this seasonal influx of tourists vital for the livelihoods of many. "The revenue of hotels increased due to new year celebrations in Swat," said Kamran Ali Yousafzai, a manager of Swat Paradise hotel at Kalam. "The response of snowfall lovers arrived from across Pakistan is overwhelming these days and our rent charges are minimal

compared to four-star hotels here at Kalam," he told APP.

"With snow-capped mountains, crisp air, and a festive atmosphere, KP's snow sports scene is more than just a recreational activity; it's a symbol of the diverse cultures and shared experiences that make Pakistan a rich and vibrant tapestry" he said. He hoped of an increase of tourists for the annual snow sports event at Parwak village in Upper Chitral where thrilling 'ice hockey' matches are played among different teams amid great fun and laughter. The players of Fox and Snow Leopard teams besides girls players last year had received warm applause from the spectators, skiers, skaters, snowboarders and adventure enthusiasts. Kaghlasht snow festival is also planned that attracted a large number of tourists at Upper Dir last year where thousands of skiers, skaters, snowboarders, hikers, adventurers, mountaineers, athletes, musicians and foodies entertained visitors amid great fun and cultural events. Free mountain bike, bicycle race, archery and rock climbing add colours to the Upper Chitral festival. KP's snow-clad mountainous valleys including Kalam, Madain, Gabin Jabba, Malam Jabba and Mahudhand in Swat, Nathiagali, Ayubia, Khanuspor in Abbottabad, Naran and Kaghan in Mansehra,

Kumrat in Upper Dir and Chitral Lower have drawn an influx of tourists, hikers and skiing lovers in the wake of the new year enjoying different snow games including skiing, skating, throwball, snow kabaddi, tug of war, archery, karate, mountain biking, cycle race, snow rugby, besides trout fish and ancient heritage of Gandhara civilization. A Shandor, Broghal, Kalam and Gabin Jabba festival are also planned by the Provincial Government to explore northern KP's winter sports and tourism potential, an official of the Sports and Tourism Department said while talking to APP.

Throw ball, tug of war, rocks and mountain climbing amid trout fish would add colours to these snowfall festivals. A mega project has been prepared for organizing different winter sports and tourism events in various districts including Swat this year. Kalam's winter gala and four-day cycle race would be organized in Swat while first-ever sports rafting at River Swat planned besides an international paragliding event at Saidu Sharif. A skiing event at Malam Jabba was also planned. These distinctive characteristics of Northern KP, which are second to none in any other districts of KP, draw adventure sportsmen, archeologists, water rafters, mountaineers, snowfall lovers, foodies, and eco-tourists throughout the year. APP

Shafqat Khan appointed new FO spox

FROM PAGE 01

ambassador to France upon recommendation of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar. The transition marked a significant reshuffle in Pakistan's diplomatic and foreign communication strategy.

Yemen shoot down another...

FROM PAGE 01

downed with a homegrown Yemeni surface-to-air missile, as it was carrying out a reconnaissance drone operation above the area. Back on December 28, Saree said Yemeni forces had intercepted and shot down a US MQ-9 Reaper drone over the central province of al-Bayda. Saree said in a televised statement at the time that the unmanned aerial vehicle was targeted with a locally-made surface-to-air missile. Yemenis have been hitting Israeli and American targets in support of Palestinians in Gaza since the regime launched its devastating war on Gaza on October 7, 2023, and in response to the American-British aggression on their homeland. Yemen's Ansarullah resistance movement has been also targeting ships linked to Israel, the United States, or the United Kingdom to force an end to the Tel Aviv regime's genocidal war on Gaza.

PM convenes SIFC Apex Committee..

FROM PAGE 01

friendly countries' investments and the facilities provided to them in Pakistan will also be shared. In a related development, the Prime Minister has also convened a second Apex Committee meeting on Friday to discuss the implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP). The meeting will focus on the security situation and is expected to finalize critical decisions regarding the plan's execution, sources said. Both meetings are anticipated to yield significant outcomes as the government addresses key economic and security challenges.

Ukraine halts transit of Russian...

FROM PAGE 01

the Soviet Union - to Europe, under a five-year agreement. Gazprom earned money from the gas and Ukraine collected transit fees. Before the war, Russia supplied nearly 40 percent of the European Union's pipeline natural gas. Gas flowed through four pipeline systems, one under the Baltic Sea, one through Belarus and Poland, one through Ukraine and one under the Black Sea through Turkey to Bulgaria. After the war started, Russia cut off most supplies through the Baltic and Belarus-Poland pipelines, citing disputes over a demand for payment in rubles. The Baltic pipeline was blown up in an act of sabotage, but details of the attack remain murky.

'Uraan Pakistan' to take country to new...

FROM PAGE 01

overcome by positive progress in the new year. He said the ambitious home-grown five-year plan titled "Uraan Pakistan" that was launched yesterday would prove to be a milestone for the country's future provided "we remain on track and work hard to achieve the goals set in the plan". He specifically appreciated the efforts of Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb and other cabinet members along with the relevant government officials. He said having achieved economic stability, the country had now entered the growth stage. "If we want to achieve the economic development, then we will have to focus on export-led growth and we have no other option. The prime minister also appreciate the efforts of Deputy PM Ishaq Dar, Governor SBR, FM and Chairman FBR for collecting additional Rs 72 billion under ADR.

Briefs

China defends Covid-19 data-sharing

DNA

BEIJING: Beijing insisted on Tuesday that it had shared information on Covid-19 "without holding anything back", after the World Health Organization implored China to offer more data and access to understand the disease's origins. Covid-19, which first emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2020, went on to kill millions of people, shred economies and overwhelm health systems. The WHO published a statement on Monday saying it was a "moral and scientific imperative" for China to share more information. In response, China defended its transparency, saying it had made the "largest contribution to global origin tracing research". "Five years ago... China immediately shared epidemic information and viral gene sequence with the WHO and the international community," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said. "Without holding anything back, we shared our prevention, control and treatment experience," she told reporters at a regular press briefing. But over the course of the pandemic, the WHO repeatedly criticised Chinese authorities for their lack of transparency and cooperation. A team of specialists led by the WHO and accompanied by Chinese colleagues conducted an investigation into the pandemic's origins in early 2021.

Syria's FM calls for lifting of sanctions

DAMASCUS: Syria's new Foreign Minister Asaad Hassan al-Shaibani has spoken to an Arab news channel about the new administration's goals, orientation, and progress so far. Speaking to channel Hashem Ahelbarra on New Year's Day, a little more than three weeks after longtime Syrian ruler Bashar al-Assad was ousted, al-Shaibani was eager to outline progress so far. The interim administration - led by the commander-in-chief, Ahmed al-Sharaa - is expected to hold talks on January 5 to discuss Syria's future agenda at a crucial National Dialogue Conference, which will clarify a great deal about the path forward. After a brutal wave of repression of protesters in 2011 that led to Syria spiralling into war, Australia, Canada, the European Union, Switzerland and the United States imposed sanctions on the al-Assad regime. The aim at the time, al-Shaibani said, was to send a message of support to the Syrian people who were suffering under the repressive regime. But now, he argued, the main reason for them was gone; the thousands of detainees that al-Assad kept in "human slaughterhouses" around the country were free, and the country was working to repair the damage. As such, "continuous enforcement [of sanctions] has become meaningless and ineffective", al-Shaibani noted. - Agencies

Romania, Bulgaria join borderless Schengen zone

Romania and Bulgaria, both members of the European Union since 2007, were partially included in the Schengen zone in March, eliminating border checks at ports and airports

BUCHAREST: Romania and Bulgaria became full members of the Schengen zone on Wednesday, expanding the borderless area to 29 members and ending a 13-year wait for the two eastern European countries. expansion, made possible when Austria and other members dropped their objections to the former communist countries joining, officially took place at midnight (2200 GMT) on January 1, marked by ceremonies at various border posts. Romania and Bulgaria, both members of the European Union since 2007, were partially included in the Schengen zone in March, eliminating border checks at ports and airports. But Austria had threatened to veto their full entry over migration

concerns, which meant that controls still applied at land border crossings. Vienna backed off its veto threat in December after the three countries reached a deal on a "border protection package", clearing the way for Romania and Bulgaria, two of the EU's poorest countries, to join Schengen. Created in 1985, the zone will now include 25 of the EU's 27 members, as well as Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, covering a total population of more than 400 million people. Romania and Bulgaria had met the Schengen zone's technical requirements for membership since 2011. But "member states objected every time" they tried to join, analyst Valentin Nau-

mescu told AFP. That became "a source of frustration exploited by anti-EU parties, which alleged Romania was being treated unfairly", he said. The resentment came into play in Romania's recent presidential elections, in which far-right candidate Calin Georgescu surged to a surprise first-round win, before the polls were cancelled amid claims of Russian interference. Now, "that feeling of being second-class citizens" should fade, Naumescu said. Leaders on both sides hailed the expansion as "historic". Austria had for years complained about hosting a disproportionate number of undocumented migrants as a result of poorly protected external Schengen borders. It dropped

its objections to Romania (population 19 million) and Bulgaria (6.5 million) joining Schengen after the three countries signed a border protection agreement in November. The deal provides for the joint deployment of guards to the Bulgarian-Turkish border and temporary controls at land crossings for an initial period of six months. Joining the zone will boost Romania's and Bulgaria's gross domestic product (GDP) by at least one percentage point, analysts estimate. Lorry drivers, who currently wait up to 20 hours at border crossings, celebrated the news. "It was a pure waste of time for drivers, who couldn't even stop to rest because they had to move their vehicles every 10

minutes," said Benjamin Lucescu, head of a Romanian transport federation. Poor road and railroad infrastructure in Bulgaria could limit the positive impact there, however. The countries' tourism sectors are meanwhile expecting a surge in visitors from the two countries to nearby Greece. "It's excellent news," said 46-year-old sales manager Ivaiko Kirov, who owns a house in northern Greece. "We'd been waiting impatiently." Greek teacher and tour guide Gueorgui Grantcharov predicted a rush of Romanian and Bulgarian tourists to Greece. With no queues at the border, "it takes just over four hours to get from Sofia to Thessaloniki", he said. - Agencies

Iran to hold nuclear talks with 3 European powers

TEHRAN: Iran will hold nuclear talks with France, Britain, and Germany on Jan. 13 in Switzerland, local media reported on Wednesday, quoting a foreign ministry official. "The new round of talks between Iran and three European countries will be held in Geneva on January 13," said Kazem Gharibabadi, Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs, according to ISNA news agency. He added the talks were only "consultations, not negotiations." The three European countries had on Dec. 17 accused Iran of growing its stockpile of high-enriched uranium to "unprecedented levels" without "any credible civilian justification." They have also raised the possibility of restoring sanctions against Iran to keep it from developing its nuclear program.

Iran has in recent years increased its manufacturing of enriched uranium such that it is the only non-nuclear weapons state to possess uranium enriched to 60 percent, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) nuclear watchdog said. That level is well on the way to the 90 percent required for an atomic bomb. On November 29, Iran held a discreet meeting with the three European powers in Geneva which Gharibabadi at the time described as "candid." Iran insists on its right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and has consistently denied any ambition of developing nuclear weapons capability. Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the final say in all state matters, has long issued a religious decree, or fatwa, prohibiting atomic weapons. - Agencies

Israeli attacks pushing Gaza healthcare towards total collapse: UN

UNITED NATIONS: Israel's pattern of deadly attacks on and near hospitals in Gaza, and associated combat, have pushed the healthcare system to the brink of total collapse, with catastrophic effects on Palestinians' access to health and medical care, the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) said Wednesday. A report published by the Office documents attacks carried out between 12 October 2023 and 30 June 2024, raises serious concerns about Israel's compliance with international law. Medical personnel and hospitals are specifically protected under international humanitarian law, provided they do not commit - or are not used to commit, outside their humanitarian function - acts harmful to the enemy. "As if the relentless bombing and the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza were not enough, the one sanctuary where Palestinians should have felt safe in fact became a death trap," said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk. "The protection of hospitals during warfare is paramount and must be respected by all sides, at all times." The study has been released just days after the last functioning major healthcare facility in northern Gaza, Kama Adwan Hospital, was taken out of service after a raid by Israeli military forces, leaving the population of North Gaza with almost no access to adequate healthcare. - APP

Thousands rally in Istanbul to support Palestinians on first day of year

ISTANBUL: More than 450,000 people gathered at Istanbul's Galata Bridge on New Year's Day to express solidarity with Palestine. Participants marched from mosques across the historic peninsula and beyond after early morning prayers, beating the wintry chill and carrying Turkish and Palestinian flags. The event was organized by the National Will Platform, a coalition of 308 NGOs. The demonstrators, including the elderly, women, and children, prayed for an end to the Israeli massacre in Palestine before assembling on the bridge, which spans the iconic Golden Horn, to demand international action against the ongoing atrocities. In the middle of the bridge, where extensive security measures were taken, a huge banner was present reading: "Stop Genocide in Gaza" in Turkish and English, along with Turkish and Palestinian flags. Boats also supported the protest from the sea. In addition, "ForFairFuture" stickers were placed on a platform set up for the press, and giant screens and a sound system were also set up in the area. Several Turkish and



foreign NGO members and human rights activists also gave speeches during the event. Speaking at the rally, Bilal Erdogan, the chair of a foundation's board of trustees, condemned Israel's actions in Gaza, marking the 453rd day of the genocide. He recalled Israel's killing of infants, children, women, the elderly, doctors, journalists, and aid

workers, as well as targeting schools, mosques, and churches. The "masks" of the West have fallen in Gaza, he said, asking: "Where are human rights? Where are children's rights? Where are women's rights? Where is press freedom, freedom of expression? All Western values died in Gaza and the West." Ibrahim Besinci, another NGO

leader, added: "Children who should be tired from playing are (rather) exhausted from war. Mothers' eyes have no tears left, and fathers have no strength in their knees. Every square meter of Gaza has been watered with the blood of martyrs." Protesters chanted slogans: "Murderer Israel will be held accountable" and "Martyrs do

not die." The massive rally on Galata Bridge concluded with prayers and widespread participation, including foreign attendees and international media coverage. The event, attended by 450,000 people as announced by organizers, featured chants and songs about Palestine, with participants joining in unison.

Exports increase by 10.52% to \$16.561b

ISLAMABAD: The exports from the country increased by 10.52 percent during the first half of the current fiscal year as compared to the corresponding months of last year, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported Wednesday. Exports during July-December (2024-25) were recorded at \$16.561 billion against \$14.985 billion during July-December (2023-24), according to PBS data. On the other hand, imports into the country went up by 6.11 percent by growing from \$26.137 million last year to \$27.733 million during the first six months of the current year. Based on the figures, the trade deficit during the months under review was recorded at \$11.172 billion against the deficit of \$11.152 billion last year, showing a slight increase of 0.18 percent. Meanwhile, on year-on-year basis, the exports in December 2024 increased by 0.67 percent to \$2.841 billion from \$2.822 billion in December 2023. On the other hand, the imports went up by 14.02 percent by going up from \$4.635 to \$5.285 percent, according to PBS data. - APP

Poland kicks off presidency of EU Council

BRUSSELS: Poland has taken over the presidency of the Council of the European Union for six months, following Hungary's controversial tenure. Under the slogan "Security, Europe!", Poland is taking over the presidency of the Council of the European Union, marking the start of a six-month rotation for the second time in Poland's history. The country in presidency is tasked with guiding the council's work and representing all member states in negotiations with other EU institutions. The spot rotates among the EU's 27 member states every six months, with Hungary wrapping up its controversial tenure in December. Marked by the ongoing war in neighbouring Ukraine and escalating tensions at the Polish-Belarusian border - which Prime Minister Donald Tusk has called an example of "hybrid warfare" - the Polish Presidency will take a broad view of strengthening European security and defence. This means that Poland "will support activities strengthening European security in all its dimensions: external, internal, information, economic, energy, food and health", according to the official program of the Polish presidency. During the EU Presidency, Poland also plans to host over 300 official meetings, 22 informal councils of EU ministers, and about 200 cultural events. Made up of all heads of state and government of EU member states, the European Council sets the agenda and priorities of the EU, and debates legislation proposed by the EU Commission. "We are prepared to take over the presidency," Adam Szapka, the Minister for EU Affairs, said in a press conference in December, "but for us it's also important that Europe speaks our language and notices what's most important." - Agencies

China-Pakistan Young Engineers Exchange Program held in Beijing

The program brought together experts and engineers to discuss water management, pumped storage, and hydropower innovations. It focused on connecting engineering theory with practice, taking into account the participants' professional backgrounds and real-world work

BEIJING: The China-Pakistan Young Engineers Exchange Program, organized by the Chinese Society of Engineers and co-organized by the Chinese National Committee on Large Dams and the Pakistan Engineering Council, was held here in the recent week. The program brought together experts and engineers to discuss water management, pumped storage, and hydropower innovations. It focused on connecting engineering theory with practice, taking into account the participants' professional backgrounds and real-world work. Activities included expert lectures, interactive discussions, visits to universities and research institutions, and field trips to hydropower stations. These activities aimed to promote mutual learning among young engineers from both countries and improve their ability to tackle complex engineering challenges. Moaz Awan from the Karot Hydropower Project shared his thoughts on energy generation in Pakistan with Gwadar Pro. He said the installation of floating photovoltaic systems, or solar panels on water bodies, could be a promising solution to the country's energy challenges. "These systems increase energy production while saving land, which is especially important in a country with limited arable land. Feasibility studies for such projects are already underway in various regions of Pakistan," he explained. Aliyan Syed from the Bhasha Hydropower Project added, "During the program, we discussed pumped storage as a game-changer for Pakistan's energy needs. It offers a sustainable way to stabilize the grid, integrate renewable energy, and reduce reliance on fossil fuels. With its mountainous terrain and existing hydropower infrastructure, Pakistan has great potential to use this technology for energy security and economic growth." This initiative marks a significant step in implementing the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation between the Chinese Society of Engineers and the Pakistan Engineering Council. It also strengthens engineering collaboration between the two countries. Nearly 40 young engineers and technical professionals from over 20 research institutions and companies in China and Pakistan took part in the program. Experts and professors from top Chinese universities and companies, including Tsinghua University, the China Institute of Water Resources and Hydropower Research, China Three Gorges Corporation, and China Beifang Investigation, Design, and Research Co., Ltd., presented and engaged with young engineers on the latest developments in the hydropower sector. Topics covered included cemented dams, rockfill concrete dams, dam safety, new power systems, and energy storage technology, according to Gwadar Pro. - DNA

ZTBL loan schemes instrumental in promoting growth in various sectors

MUMTAZ AHMED BHATTI



ISLAMABAD: Zarai Taraqati Bank Limited (ZTBL) stands as the largest agricultural bank in Pakistan, providing a comprehensive array of banking and financial services tailored specifically for the rural population. Through its extensive network of 501 branches and the dedication of trained mobile credit officers, ZTBL has become an essential pillar of support for the country's farming community. The institution's official

website offers a wealth of information about its services, corporate structure, and products, alongside valuable data related to Pakistan's agricultural sector. By incorporating advanced digital tools, such as a mobile application, ZTBL has further enhanced accessibility and efficiency in its services. Remarkably, ZTBL is the only public sector institution in the country consistently generating profits, a testament to its robust operational model and strategic focus. For over six decades, ZTBL has been a specialized financial institution catering to the unique needs of the agricultural sector. The bank's steadfast commitment to its mission is evident in its outstanding credit rating of AAA/A-1+, which it has upheld for the last five years. This achievement reflects ZTBL's financial stability, operational excellence, and unwavering dedication to supporting Pakistan's farming community. In response to the evolving needs

of this community, ZTBL has introduced a range of innovative products and services, placing special emphasis on empowering women and youth. The bank's collaborations with educational research organizations further underscore its commitment to advancing agricultural practices and enhancing the sector's contribution to Pakistan's overall development. Under the leadership of its President and CEO, Tahir Yaqoob Bhatti, ZTBL has reached new heights of success. His strategic vision and leadership have been instrumental in steering the bank towards unprecedented growth and development. ZTBL has played a pivotal role in promoting agriculture across Pakistan by offering accessible loans to farmers, particularly in Punjab. This financial support has not only uplifted farmers but also contributed to the availability of agricultural commodities in affordable and plentiful quantities

for the general population. Such



efforts have significantly enhanced the prosperity of farmers and the broader agricultural landscape in Pakistan. ZTBL has continuously worked to improve its digital presence and enhance the accessibility of information. The bank's website now features comprehensive details about its corporate structure,

products, and services, as well as the locations of its branches and ATMs. In addition, it offers information on investor relations and economic data, reflecting ZTBL's commitment to transparency and customer-centricity. By integrating technology into its operations, ZTBL has ensured that its services remain relevant and easily accessible in today's fast-evolving financial landscape. To meet the diverse needs of the farming community, ZTBL offers an extensive portfolio of agricultural loans. These loans cater to a wide range of farming and agribusiness activities, including: Floriculture & Greenhouses, Asan Qarza, Bee Keeping, Biofloc Fish Farming, Black Australorp Chicken Farming, Crop Insurance, Financing Scheme for "Dairy Value Chain", Digital Kissan Karobar (DKKS), Electric Chakki, Electronic Warehouse Receipt, Agri. Tourist Outlet/ Orchard, High Efficiency Irrigation System, Financing of

"Oil Expeller Unit", Fruits & Vegetable Saver, Potato Grader, Rice Transplanter, Agri. Land Development, Financing of Milk, Chilling Unit, Golden/ Misri Chicken Farming, Khawateen Rozgar, Garment Sector (Women), Khushk Ratab, Kissan Rozgar (KRS), Loan for Tractor, Raw Sugar (Jaggery/ Shakkar), Red Meat of Sheep/ Goat Rearing, Production Loans, Kissan Khushhal (KKS), Electronic Warehouse, Soya Bean Cultivation, Loan Tools, Izhar-e-dilchashi, Product Key Factor, Government Loans, GOP Markup Subsidy, Agri. e-Credit, Farm Mechanisation, Youth Business. Beyond agricultural loans, ZTBL offers an array of financial services and schemes designed to address the broader needs of its clientele. These include: Crop Insurance, Hajj Schemes, Treasury Services, Home Remittance Services, Locker

Facilities, Deposit Protection Services, Over-the-Counter (OTC) Services, IBFT, and Government Tax Collection, Financial Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Women Financial Services, NFLP and ALFP Training Programs. ZTBL is poised for continued growth and development, with its leadership and workforce striving to achieve greater heights. To maintain this trajectory, it is crucial for the bank's management to foster a culture of excellence by recognizing and rewarding high-performing employees while taking corrective actions against underperformers. Such measures will ensure sustained progress and operational efficiency. If ZTBL continues on this path of innovation, strategic partnerships, and unwavering commitment to its mission, it will not only solidify its position as a leader in Pakistan's banking sector but also gain recognition among the world's renowned financial institutions.

Briefs

Prisons in Punjab overcrowded by 80%

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: The prisons across Punjab are overcrowded with inmates, a Pakistani private news channel reported on Wednesday. According to the information, the jails are 80pc overcrowded in Punjab. The data revealed that the jails of Punjab have capacity of 37,563 inmates but more than 67,000 prisoners are there in 43 jails across the province. There are 1,167 women and 932 juvenile inmates languishing in the prisons across Punjab. The high-security cells and barracks have the capacity of 6,616 inmates. The high-security cells and barracks have been established in Lahore, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, Multan and Mianwali. As many as 824 death cells have been established in nine districts of Punjab during the last 14 years. The central jail of Lahore has the maximum number of death cells. There are 312 death cells in the central jail of Lahore. It merits mention here that 11 new prisons have been established since 2010 across the province but the jails are still 80pc overcrowded. Legal expert Chaudhry Naseer Kamboh said it's against the fundamental rights of inmates and the government should address this issue immediately.

15 killed in Israeli strike in Jabalia

GAZA STRIP: Gaza's civil defence agency said on Wednesday that an overnight Israeli air strike targeting a house in Jabalia, in the territory's north, killed at least 15 people. "Fifteen people were martyred and more than 20 were injured in this massacre after midnight in a house where displaced people were living in the town of Jabalia," civil defence agency's spokesman Mahmud Bassal told AFP. The Israeli military, when contacted, said it was looking into the reported strike. Bassal said that those living in the house were members of the Badra, Abu Warda, and Taroush families who had sought refuge there. Most of Gaza's 2.4 million people have been displaced at least once since the start of the war on October 7 last year. Since October 6, the Israeli military has been conducting a major land and air offensive in northern Gaza, particularly targeting the city of Jabalia and its adjacent refugee camp, in what it described as an effort to prevent Hamas from regrouping there. The assault has since been expanded across the northern areas of the Palestinian territory and last week targeted a major hospital which is now empty of its staff and patients. - Agencies

10 deadas truck ploughs into New Orleans crowd

NEW YORK: Ten people have been killed and 35 others injured after a man intentionally drove into a large crowd in New Orleans and then began firing a weapon, police have said. Police chief Anne Kirkpatrick said the attacker drove a pickup truck along Bourbon Street "very fast ... trying to run as many people as he could" at around 03:15 (08:15 GMT). He crashed barriers and then shot and injured two police officers. She said the man was "hell-bent on creating the carnage and the damage that he did". Police did not disclose any information about status of the attacker. A witness told the BBC that he "walked past dead and injured bodies all over the street" in the aftermath. A CBS reporter saw multiple people with injuries on the ground at the intersection of Bourbon and Canal streets. A video confirmed as genuine by BBC Verify show a person lying on the ground and a crowd scattering as what appear to be gunshots are heard. Another shows two injured people lying in a street. - Agencies

Pakistan reaffirms collaboration with UN for peace: Deputy PM

Pakistan looked forward to seeking just and peaceful resolution of situations on the agenda of UNSC



KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: As Pakistan begins a two-year term as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for the years 2025-2026, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on Wednesday reaffirmed the country's commitment to working constructively with all UNSC members and with the broader UN membership. The deputy prime minister, addressing a reception he hosted for the heads of resident missions of the UNSC member states here at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said that Pakistan would work to bridge divides, foster consensus, and uphold the UNSC's mandate in accordance with the purposes

and principles of the UN Charter. He said that elected for the eighth time, Pakistan brought to the Security Council a rich legacy of experience and an unwavering commitment to the principles and purposes of the UN Charter. Ishaq Dar highlighted Pakistan's contributions to international peace and security, especially through its active role in UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding endeavors worldwide. The deputy prime minister underlined that Pakistan looked forward to seeking just and peaceful resolution of situations on the agenda of the UN Security Council. "As a member of the Council, Pakistan will continue to oppose the unilateral and illegal use or threat of force; combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations; and support effective UN peacekeeping, and peacebuilding efforts."



He also expressed gratitude to all UN member states for their resounding support in electing Pakistan to UN Security Council. In June, Pakistan was elected to the Council with a massive majority as a non-permanent member, polling 182 votes in the 193-member General Assembly - far more than the required 124 votes representing a two-thirds majority. "We enter the Council at a time of great geopolitical turbulence, intense competition between the two largest powers, raging wars in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere and a sharply escalating and multidimensional arms race," Ambassador Akram said. "As a responsible State - the fifth largest by population - Pakistan will play an active and constructive role, in accordance with the UN Charter, to halt wars, promote the pa-

cific settlement of disputes and contain the negative impacts of great power rivalries, the arms race, new weapons and domains of conflict as well as the spreading scourge of terrorism." At the same time, he added, Pakistan is also obliged to address - in the Council and other UN forums - the threats posed to peace and security in our region by cross border terrorism, the suppression of Kashmiri self determination, the growing arms imbalance in South Asia as well as the discriminatory restraints imposed against Pakistan to compromise its strategic deterrence capabilities. "Fortunately, Pakistan has a well trained and professional team at the UN with the proven capacity to address these challenges effectively. Our presence will be felt in the Security Council," Ambassador Akram remarked.

Pakistan to export pilots to foreign airlines

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has announced plans to export trained pilots to international airlines to meet a regional shortage of cockpit crew. Director General of CAA, Nadir Shafi Dar, confirmed the initiative, stating that there is a significant demand for pilots within the region, and CAA has already begun addressing this issue. He highlighted that the number of pilots required for Pakistan's aviation sector would exceed domestic needs, and the surplus would be offered to foreign airlines. According to Dar, two international companies have expressed interest in the programme. One company has already started Phase 1 of the project, providing ground training to selected young pilots from Pakistan. These trainees were then sent to Sharjah to receive flight training on aircraft. After completing their training, eight pilots have already begun working with private airlines in Pakistan. As part of the new plan, the CAA has secured agreements with training companies that will take pilots from initial cockpit training to commercial cockpit positions. Dar emphasised that once the training academies are established in Pakistan, efforts would be made to finance these young pilots' training. Local flying clubs have also been encouraged to expand their capabilities, contributing to the growth of the country's aviation industry.

Protests by MWM, ASWJ continue in Karachi amid police crackdown

"Govt to establish its writ in any case [...] we cannot allow unrest in the city and sit idly by," says Zia Lanjar

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: A day after clashes between the police and Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen (MWM) protesters in multiple spots in the city, the Sindh government on Wednesday extended a "final offer" to the protesting religio-political party to move to a designated location or face action as the sit-ins against the Parachinar crisis entered the ninth day. "The government will establish its writ in any case [...] we cannot allow unrest in the city," Sindh Home Minister Zia Lanjar said while addressing a press conference along with Inspector-General of Police (IGP) Ghulam Nabi Memon. A day earlier, the police cracked down on the MWM's central sit-in at Numais, where the party's activists have been holding the protest to express solidarity with Parachinar and Kurram

Agency's people since December 24. The situation escalated after police baton-charged and tear-gassed the protesters to clear the area. During the clashes, six police motorbikes, a police post and a car were torched. Police detained several people on charges of rioting and eventually cleared the roads around Numais. The MWM later resumed its sit-in at Numais, where they blamed police for torching their protest camp and sound system, as well as protesters' motorbikes. MWM leader Allama Mubashir Hassan accused police of torching private property and causing the situation to worsen under the Sindh government's directives. Briefing the media today, the Sindh home minister questioned the closure of roads in the metropolis on the Parachinar issue, saying that it was the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's government responsibility to resolve the long-standing issue.

Faiz Hamid's trial likely to conclude within weeks

Lawyer says he "can't confirm" possibility of former ISI chief becoming approver against Imran

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Former Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) director general (DG) Lieutenant General (retd) Faiz Hamid's military trial is expected to conclude in the next few weeks, the ex-spy-master's lawyer said. Talking to a Pakistani newspaper, Barrister Mian Ali Ashfaq said that he along with his two associates is representing Gen (retd) Faiz in the military trial, that the former spy chief is currently facing. When asked if the former ISI chief is becoming an approver against Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf founder Imran Khan, MianAshfaq said: "I cannot confirm any such thing at all as the proceedings of the trial are covered within the scope of Official Se-

crets Act." When asked about the initiation of military trial against Faiz, he did not deny it. "I have seen different media reports suggesting it has started. I am in no position to deny such reports," he said. Asked when he sees the trial getting concluded, he said he "can't predict exactly. Possibly in a few weeks time". Regarding the story about Faiz vehemently denying charges of guiding the PTI, he said, "All facts and very much stated position." A Pakistani newspaper recently reported that the former spy chief is of the view that his post-retirement political contacts were routine social interactions. The Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a recent statement that the former ISI chief had been formally charged with multiple offences, including engaging in political activities and violating the Official Secrets Act. The ISPR stated these violations have compromised state security and interests. Faiz has been formally arraigned on charges of engaging in political activities, violations of Official Secrets Act which, according to the ISPR, were detrimental to safety and interest of the state, misuse of authority and government resources and causing wrongful loss to a person(s). The former spy-master's role in May 9 "in collusion with vested political interests" was also being investigated. His involvement in events related to creating agitation and unrest, leading up to multiple incidents including but not limited to 9th May 2023 incident for fomenting instability at the behest of and in collusion with vested political interests, is also being separately investigated, the ISPR statement had added.

UN rights chief slams Taliban ban

NEW YORK: The United Nations has told the Taliban to revoke a ban on Afghan women working in NGOs after the de facto government issued a circular warning international groups that they faced suspension and possible revocation of their license if they were found in violation of a decree first issued in 2022. The measure, issued by the de facto Ministry of Economy on 26 December, enforces a two-year-old decree prohibiting women from working with both national and international NGOs. In a statement, Volker Turk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, emphasized the devastating impact on the delivery of critical humanitarian aid in Afghanistan the decree will have, where more than half the population lives in poverty. NGOs, he noted, are essential to the survival of millions of Afghans, offering life-saving support to women, men and children alike. "This is absolutely the wrong path," Turk said, urging the de facto authorities to reconsider what he described as a "deeply discriminatory decree." Since coming to power, Afghanistan's de facto authorities have restricted the rights of women and girls, barring them from education, work, healthcare, and movement. These measures, including the latest crackdown on NGO employment, effectively erase women from public life, undermining Afghanistan's prospects for progress. The High Commissioner called on Afghanistan's leaders to rethink their course, not just for the sake of women and girls but for the future of the nation as a whole. He also highlighted the broader implications of these policies for the global community, noting that restricting women's participation in public life exacerbates poverty and hampers efforts to build a stable and resilient society. - Agencies

'Hezbollah has revived its prowess'

BEIRUT: The secretary general of Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement says the group has recuperated well following the assassination of its late leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah in an Israeli airstrike on Beirut on September 27, emphasizing that his group has revived its military prowess as well. "We proved through resistance that we will not allow the [Zionist] enemy to advance its agenda. It is the responsibility of the Lebanese government and the international community to confront the acts of aggression that are currently taking place [against Lebanon]," he pointed out. - Agencies

Iranian envoy calls on Fazl, discuss Israeli aggression

Raza Amiri lauded the efforts of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam in support of Palestine during their Gaza solidarity protests held across Pakistan






MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan Raza Amiri-Moghaddam visited the residence of JUI chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman on Wednesday to inquire after his health and also held discussions on Israeli aggression in Middle East. During the meeting Iranian ambassador expressed best wishes for the health and well-being of JUI chief. Both sides also held talks on boosting of Iran-Pakistan relations, the regional situation, especially Israeli aggression in Gaza. Raza Amiri lauded the efforts of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam in

support of Palestine during their Gaza solidarity protests held across Pakistan, Iranian ambassador told Fazl that, "he wanted to consult with scholars, especially wise and wide political leaders like you". On the occasion, JUI Chief said entire Ummah should raise a strong voice in support of the Palestinians. Fazl said regional countries especially, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia should take concrete measures against Israel aggression in Gaza. "We, along with the people of Pakistan, have buried the conspiracy to recognize Israel in Pakistan", JUI chief added. JUI Spokesperson Aslam Ghoori, former MNA Maulana Muhammad Qasim, Mufti Abrar Ahmed and others also attended the meeting.

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