



Islamabad POST

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During SIFC meeting

PM: No economic development sans political stability

2025 will be Pakistan's year of prosperity: Shehbaz

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has stated that 2025 will prove to be a year of economic growth for Pakistan, stating that political stability is essential for economic progress and prosperity. Addressing a Special Investment Facilitation Council meeting, the prime minister highlighted that inflation had dropped to 4.1 percent and all members played a vital role in achieving economic stability in 2024. The meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, was attended by military officials, federal ministers, and provincial chief ministers. "Economic stability is linked to political stability," the prime minister maintained. Shehbaz Sharif further stated that remittances increased by 34 percent over five months, and foreign reserves surged from \$4 billion to over \$12 billion. "The stock exchange has reached a historic high, and this journey of growth and prosperity is only possible with political stability," he maintained. The prime minister also mentioned a significant rise in exports, with \$4 billion earned from rice exports alone. Goods are now being transported to Russia via NLC, he added. "Agreements in various sectors with Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar are progressing, and the government has secured Rs72 billion through ADRs from banks," the PM said. However, he expressed concern over the resurgence of terrorism, urging unity to eliminate this menace. He said that peace is crucial for the country's development, and progress is impossible without eradicating terrorism. The prime minister vowed that the law enforcement agencies were fully committed to halting the nefarious designs of the enemies. "Security has become a big challenge today and without crushing the menace of terrorism, we cannot move forward," he said. The prime minister also congratulated the relevant stakeholders on the agreement between tribes to normalise the situation in Kurram. However, he expressed deep grief over the loss of dozens of innocent lives in the area.

Imran offered to be shifted to Bani Gala, claims lawyer

PTI founder says he will not move "anywhere until those detained without trial are released"

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has claimed that Imran Khan was offered a deal under which he would be shifted to Bani Gala, his residence in Islamabad, to serve the remaining jail time, his lawyer said on Thursday. "[Imran] Khan said he was offered to be moved to Bani Gala. However, he stressed that he would not move anywhere until those detained without trial are released," Faisal Chaudhry, his lawyer, told reporters outside Adiala jail. The reports of a "deal" have emerged at a time when the federal government and the former ruling party have sat down for talks on two key issues of the PTI: the release of all "political prisoners" and the formation of a commission to probe the May 9, 2023, events and November 26, 2024, events. Earlier this week, PTI founder's sister Aleema Khan said that the former PM had refused to strike any deal, asking "why he would enter any deal when he has already spent one-and-a-half years" in prison. "The PTI founder said that his cases have been wrapped up and he was

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ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq chairing 2nd meeting on negotiations between Treasury and Opposition at Parliament House. - DNA

Constitutional Bench to hear plea against Mily Courts

The hearing of the case against the discretionary powers of the CJs of the High Courts will be held on January 10

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Supreme Court's Constitutional Bench has issued the cause list of the cases which will be heard from January 6 to 10. 7-member Constitutional Bench under the chair of Justice Aminuddin Khan is scheduled to hear plea against Military Courts trial on January 7, 2025. Justice Jamal Mandokhel, Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Hasan Azhar, Justice Musarrat Hilali, Justice Naeem Akhtar Afghan and Justice Shahid Bilal will be part of the bench. The hearing on PTI MNA Sher Afzal Marwat's petition against

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Justice Shah issues written judgment on ADR

Justice Mansoor emphasized that economic benefits of resolving disputes through arbitration are crucial

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court's senior-most judge, Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, has issued a written judgment highlighting the economic importance of resolving disputes through Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). In his judgment, Justice Mansoor Ali Shah emphasized that the economic benefits of resolving disputes through arbitration are crucial. He noted that arbitration is a low-cost, effective, and confidential method that not only reduces the burden

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Govt, PTI talks PTI requests time to consult Imran Khan on demands

'Talks held in more conducive environment', says Sadiq as PTI to present charter of demands in next meeting

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: The PTI requested the government on Thursday to grant more time so it could consult party founder Imran Khan on a final list of talks as the third round of talks between both sides was set for next week. The first meeting between committees representing the government and the opposition PTI took place on Dec 23, kicking off long-anticipated talks between the rival parties to defuse prevailing political tensions. A notification issued by the National Assembly (NA) Secretariat on Monday said that NA Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq would chair an in-camera meeting of the second round between the negotiating teams of the federal government and PTI on January 2 (today). The meeting kicked off under the NA speaker's oversight and is being attended by Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly Omar Ayub, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, PTI MNA Asad Qaiser, Sunni Ittehad Council chief Hamid Raza, Majlis Wahdat-i-Muslimeen chief

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Siddiqui supports PTI demand to meet Imran Khan

Senator Siddiqui stated legal cases are filed based on the nature of crimes

DNA

ISLAMABAD (Dunya News) - PML-N leader and Senator Irfan Siddiqui said that PTI members' demand to meet their party founder is valid. Speaking to the media outside Parliament, Senator Siddiqui said that discussions between the negotiation committees took place in a cordial atmosphere. "We had expected them to present their demands in writing today," he remarked. He further disclosed that PTI members requested a meeting with their founder, which the PML-N expressed its

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Briefs

'Can't afford politics of confrontation'

Chaudhry Shujaat said govt and opposition should come on the same page

DNA

LAHORE: Prominent businessman and social figure Malik Kamran Munir met with Pakistan Muslim League chief Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain at his residence in Lahore on Thursday. The party's Central Information Secretary Ghulam Mustafa Malik was also present at the meeting. Malik Kamran Munir announced his joining in Pakistan Muslim League on this occasion. Talking on the occasion Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain said joining of youth and business community in the Muslim League is welcome. Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain said the government and the opposition should come on the same page to solve the country's problems. The people and the country cannot afford the politics of confrontation. Chaudhry Shujaat said.

KSA ministers meet Syrian counterparts

The meeting also included prominent Saudi officials, among them Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah

FOREIGN DESK

RIYADH: Saudi defense minister Prince Khalid bin Salman held a high-level meeting on Thursday in Riyadh with senior officials from Syria's new administration, the Saudi Press Agency reported. The discussions focused on advancing Syria's transitional political process to meet the aspirations of the Syrian people while ensuring the nation's security, stability, and territorial integrity, SPA added. The Syrian delegation was led by foreign minister Asaad bin Hassan Al-Shaibani.

May 9 riots

19 convicts pardoned on humanitarian ground

All those pardoned were serving two-year sentences; decisions on 48 mercy pleas pending

STAFF REPORT

RAWALPINDI: Sequel to the promulgation of punishments to 9th May Tragedy convicts, they have exercised their right to appeal and have asked for mercy / remission in their punishments. A total of 67 convicts have given their mercy petitions. 48 petitions have been processed to Courts of Appeal while, petitions of 19 convicts have been accepted purely on humanitarian grounds, in accordance with law. Mercy petitions of remaining will be decided in due course of time, following the legal process. Those whose punishment has been remitted are:

1. Muhammad Ayaz s/o Sahibzada Khan
2. Sami Ullah s/o Meer dad Khan
3. Laeeq Ahmed s/o Manzoor Ahmed
4. Anjad Ali s/o Manzoor Ahmed
5. Yasir Nawaz s/o Ameer Nawaz Khan
6. Said Alam s/o Maaz Ullah Khan
7. Zahid Khan s/o Muhammad Nabi
8. Muhammad Suleman s/o Said Ghani Jan
9. Hamza Sharif s/o Muhammad Azam
10. Muhammad Salman s/o Zahid Nisar

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Pardon 19 'not a major development'

Barrister Gohar says Imran Khan-founded party against trial of civilians in military courts

DNA

ISLAMABAD: After the military's Courts of Appeal granted clemency to more than a dozen convicts of the May 9, 2023, violent protests "on humanitarian grounds" earlier today, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan has said that pardoning 19 out of 67 inmates is "not a major progress". Talking to journalists in Islamabad on Thursday, Gohar said that 48 out of 67 convicts had filed appeals against their sentences but only 19 were granted pardon. The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) announced that the sentences of as

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'Decisions over cup of tea' led to TTP's re-entry: Ishaq Dar

Efforts underway to make nuclear Pak an economic power: DPM Dar

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on Thursday said that the government was making all-out efforts to accomplish Pakistan's journey from nuclear to economic power and regain its lost stature in the world. The deputy prime minister, addressing a news conference, gave a roundup of the government's efforts to bring economic stability and enhance Pakistan's diplomatic footprints through bilateral and multilateral engagements with the latest one being the beginning of country's two-year term as non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council for years 2025-26. Highlighting the high-level exchanges, and Pakistan's participation in and hosting of international events, he said the incumbent government had strived to enhance Pakistan's diplomatic footprint during its first 10 months, which led to the burying of the impression of an "isolated Pakistan." The deputy prime minister said that the PML-N-led coalition government inherited huge challenges of around 25% policy rate, slow GDP growth and skyrocketing inflation. However, the government's prudent economic policies downed the policy rate to 13%, inflation below 5%, and remittance, foreign exchange reserves and exports on the rise.

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FO expresses concern over Indian target killings inside Pakistan

Pakistan desires friendly relations with all its neighbours including Afghanistan

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office has expressed concerns over Indian extraterritorial and extrajudicial killings inside Pakistan. At her weekly news briefing in Islamabad on Thursday, Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said this is not just limited to Pakistan. India's network of extraterritorial killings and abductions has now gone global and other countries are also concerned about India's extraterritorial activities. The spokesperson said Pakistan desires friendly relations with all its neighbours including Afghanistan. She said Pakistan has a robust mechanism of dialogue with Afghanistan and it will

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PSCA introduces virtual blood bank facility

LAHORE: Punjab Safe Cities Authority (PSCA) has introduced a virtual blood bank facility on Punjab Emergency Helpline 15 on a trial basis. According to PSCA spokesman, the Safe City Emergency Virtual Blood Bank had been established under the special direction of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif. Citizens could easily access the Safe City Emergency Blood Bank by calling 15 and pressing 4. Upon receiving the call, a Safe City officer would connect the caller with a registered donor from the blood bank database via a conference call. Blood donor agencies, NGOs and blood banks of colleges and universities have been linked to the Safe City Blood Bank database. Citizens, students, and members of civil society could register themselves as blood donors by calling 15 or through the safe city website.—APP

Crackdown launched on fake weapon dealers

LAHORE: The Punjab Home Department, during a crackdown, identified 19 fake weapon dealers and repairers across the province and imposed ban on them. Acting under the Punjab Arms Ordinance of 1965, the department initiated legal action against the identified individuals. Cases have been filed against them, and steps have been taken to enforce the law. In line with the instructions of Punjab Home Secretary Noor-ul-Amin Mengal, the department released the names and addresses of the illegal weapon dealers and repairers. The listed counterfeit weapon dealers include: National Rifles Company Johar Town Lahore, MS Moakil Arms Company Begum Kot Shahdara, English Arms Company Nee-la Gumbad Lahore, Outdoor Sports Arms and Ammunition Dealer, Mazang Chungi Lahore, Muhammad Akhtar Property Pak Arms Store Shahdara, Akhtar Brothers Arms and Ammunition Manawan Lahore, Ameen Brothers Arms.—APP

Court Notice

In the court of Suleman Asif Civil Judge 1st class Gujrat.

Title: Syed Sadeef Abbas etc. Versus Zafar Iqbal etc.

Notice to:
1-Zafar Iqbal S/o. Muhammad Shafi cast Arain R/o. Kot Ameer Hussain, 2C-Seerat Abbas, 2E1-Nabeel Abbas Sons Abid Hussain Shah, 3-Syed Safer Abbas, 4-Syed Husnain Abbas Sons Syed Sadiq Hussain Shah cast Syed R/o. Kot Ameer Hussain Tehsil & District Gujrat.
Suit for Partition of Land Whereas in the above mentioned case it has been proved to the satisfaction of the court that the above mentioned defendants are not served in ordinary way. It is therefore proclaimed under order 5 rule 20 CPC that if the said defendants will not appear personally or through a duly authorized agent or pleader in court at 8 AM on 08-01-2025, otherwise case will be decided ex parte.

Court Reporter Gujrat

KSA gifts 100 tons of dates to Pakistan as friendship gesture

Saudi envoy opens scenic photo display celebrating Pak-Saudi friendship

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Pakistan, Nawaf bin Said Al-Malki on Thursday inaugurated an amazing display of Pakistan's scenic photos on the boundary wall of the Diplomatic Enclave opposite the Saudi Embassy, symbolizing the enduring friendship and cultural ties between the two brotherly nations. The inaugural ceremony was attended by the Chairman of Capital Development Authority (CDA), Muhammad Ali Randhawa, along with other dignitaries and officials. Speaking to the media, Ambassador Al-Malki described the initiative as a tribute to Pakistan's vibrant culture and rich heritage. "This effort highlights the beauty and diversity of Pakistan to the world while celebrating the deep-rooted brotherhood between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan," he stated. The photo display captivated participants with its vivid portrayal of Pakistan's cultural and natural diversity. Among the highlights were the majestic Badshahi Mosque, the lively Shandur Polo Festival, the rustic charm of desert life, the architectural wonder of the mosque located within the Khewra Salt Mine and K2, the second highest mountain on earth. Other images showcased traditional activities, such as jaggery-making, and featured Pakistan's unique wildlife, including the partridge and cheetah providing a window into the coun-



ISLAMABAD: Chairman CDA Ch. Muhammad Ali Randhawa and Nawaf Bin Said Al-Malki cutting the ribbon at the inauguration ceremony to unveil the mural painting of Pakistani culture at the Royal Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

try's lifestyle and biodiversity. The event underscored the profound and enduring relationship between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, rooted in shared values and mutual respect. This initiative forms part of a larger effort to promote cultural exchange and strengthen the historic ties between the two nations, further enriching their longstanding partnership. Earlier, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on Thursday gifted 100 tons of dates

to Pakistan, symbolizing goodwill and solidarity between the two brotherly nations. A formal hand-over ceremony was held at the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in the federal capital, where Ambassador Nawaf bin Said Al-Malki and the Director of King Salman Humanitarian Aid & Relief Centre (KSrelief), Abdullah Al-Baqami, officially presented the consignment to Director General Military Wing, Brigadier Alamgeer Ayub. Continuing its annual tradi-

tion of generosity, the Saudi government, under the leadership of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, reaffirmed its commitment to supporting the people of Pakistan through this heartfelt gesture. The gift exemplifies the enduring bonds of friendship and brotherhood between the two countries, rooted in shared values of generosity and mutual support. On the occasion, Brigadier Alamgeer Ayub expressed

his gratitude to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and the leadership of Saudi Arabia for their unwavering generosity and consistent support for Pakistan. "This noble act of solidarity not only strengthens our ties but also reflects the profound relationship our nations cherish," Brigadier Ayub remarked. The annual donation of dates is part of Saudi Arabia's efforts to enhance its humanitarian outreach and foster bilateral relations with Pakistan.

DC Murree ensures emergency facilities

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Commissioner Murree, Agha Zaheer Abbas Sherazi, has assured that the administration has taken comprehensive measures to deal with any emergency situation during the ongoing winter season in the Murree and Galiyat regions. Talking to a private news channel, he said that the administration has arranged food and shelter for emergency situations, and our staff remains vigilant to provide facilities to tourists. While highlighting the administration's preparedness, he urged tourists to take essential precautionary measures while traveling to these hill stations. Tourists should avoid bringing elderly people and children during severe weather conditions, use snow-compatible vehicles, and carry sufficient food supplies, he said.—APP

Dense fog disrupts routine life in city

BAHAWALPUR: Bahawalpur and its surrounding areas experienced heavy fog on Thursday, severely reducing visibility and disrupting daily life. The mist, which began on Wednesday evening, blanketed the entire region, with visibility dropping to zero overnight. The dense fog persisted through Thursday, hindering routine traffic as only a few vehicles ventured onto city roads. Most residents stayed indoors, with only those compelled by work or business stepping out.—APP

Pakistan digital city project to transform digital economy: Shafqat

DNA

HARIPUR: The Pakistan Digital City project Haripur, currently under construction, has been hailed as a transformative initiative for the country's digital economy. Special Assistant to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Science and Technology Shafqat Iqbal expressed these views during his visit to the project site. Speaking on the occasion, he described the project as a milestone in realizing Pakistan's vision for digital development,

he emphasized the project's potential to create extensive employment opportunities for the youth and strengthen Pakistan's position in the global digital economy. The advisor instructed all relevant departments to ensure transparency and maintain high standards throughout the project's execution. The visit was also attended by prominent political figures, including the Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly, Umar Ayub Khan, Provincial Minister for Local Government Arshad Ayub Khan, and Provincial Parliamen-

tary Leader and Chairman DDAC Akbar Ayub Khan. Retired Colonel Tauqeer briefed the delegation on the project's progress and outlined its future goals. Recognizing the importance of the initiative, Opposition Leader Umar Ayub Khan announced an additional PKR 200 million to ensure the project's timely and quality-driven completion. He termed the project a game-changer for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and a significant step toward elevating Pakistan's technological sector to global standards.

Provincial Minister Arshad Ayub Khan and Chairman DDAC Akbar Ayub Khan expressed their commitment to supporting the initiative, assuring that the government would provide all necessary assistance to ensure its success. The Pakistan Digital City project is expected to serve as a driving force for technological and innovation-led development in the country, creating world-class opportunities for Pakistan's youth and establishing the nation as a hub for digital advancement.

KPRA collects Rs 24.2b, showing 45pc growth

DNA

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA) has successfully collected Rs24.2 billion in the first six months of the financial year 2024-25, marking an impressive 45% growth compared to the same period last year. Last year, it collected only Rs 16.7 billion in the first six months which shows an impressive Rs7.5 billion increase in the revenue. As per the details shared by the KPRA's media wing, the Authority has collected Rs18.15 billion from the sales tax on services, and Rs6.07 billion from the Infrastructure Development Cess (IDC).

Last year, collections from sales tax on services amounted to Rs14.6 billion, while Rs2.1 billion was collected from the IDC, reflecting a 24% growth in sales tax on services and an astonishing 189% growth in IDC. Director General KPRA, Fouzia Iqbal, praised the dedication and hard work of the KPRA team, which has resulted in an impressive performance over the past six months. She expressed her confidence that with sustained efforts, not only will the annual revenue target be achieved, but it will also be exceeded significantly. "With the same level of commitment and our strategic approach, I am confident that we will

surpass this year's target. And by the end June, KPRA will once again stand out as a beacon of excellence in performance," she remarked. The Director General also extended her gratitude to taxpayers for their trust, confidence, and cooperation, which have been instrumental in KPRA's achievements so far. Additionally, she acknowledged the support and guidance of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur, and Advisor to the CM on Finance, Muzammil Aslam. Their leadership, she noted, has been pivotal in enabling KPRA to implement effective strategies and move closer to its objectives.

Muqam slams shelling, baton charge on LG members in KP

PESHAWAR: Federal Minister Kashmir affairs and Gilgit Baltistan, States and frontier regions Ameer Muqam on Thursday decried the acts of violence perpetrated against local government representatives on the orders of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government on the very first day of the new year. Talking to media here at Peshawar Press Club, Muqam condemned the use of tear gas against protesters here and said that there must not be double standards. "The brutal use of force on LG representatives had exposed the real face of PTI leadership." He lamented the suffering of local representatives in the province. Muqam further accused certain quarters in the provincial setup of misappropriating NFC funds, calling for accountability and transparency in their utilization. Referring to the ongoing political discourse in the country, the minister decried that when the federal government was trying to hold negotiations and discussions, certain political elements were involved in threats and propagandas. He recalled that when the current Prime Minister was in opposition, efforts were made to initiate dialogue on a charter for peace and economic development in the country. However, the PTI government of the time, he claimed, squandered these opportunities and brought only losses to the nation through prolonged protests. Muqam criticized the PTI's governance, alleging neglect of critical developmental projects during their tenure. "Projects like Dattu and Bhasha dams were now receiving billions in funding after being sidelined by the previous government," he stated, highlighting his government's commitment to sustainable progress. Regarding the deteriorating law and order situation, Muqam called it a national crisis, stressing the importance of provincial cooperation for effective countermeasures. He lauded the sacrifices of police and military personnel in the face of rising violence and lamented the provincial government's failure to act decisively. Later, the federal minister vowed to continue his pursuit of justice and development, urging all political actors to prioritize the nation's welfare over personal gains.—DNA

Naqvi orders timely completion of Serena Chowk interchange

The Interior Minister reviewed the beautification plan of Serena Chowk and accorded its approval. He highlighted that the underpass will be completed in the next 5 days but it will be opened for the traffic after the completion of work on sewer

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Labourers carpeting road with the help of heavy machinery during Serena Chowk interchange construction work. Islamabad: Another public welfare project in Islamabad is nearing completion at an incredible pace. The work on Serena Chowk Interchange project which comprises of three underpasses is being carried out day and night. Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi visited the project site and directed its completion within the deadline. The Interior Minister reviewed the beautification plan of Serena Chowk and accorded its approval. He highlighted that the under-



pass will be completed in the next 5 days but it will be opened for the traffic after

the completion of work on sewer. He directed to complete the work on sewer im-

mediately. He said that the work on the project started with a delay of 10 days but it

should be completed within the stipulated time by making all out efforts. Interior Minister also inspected the ongoing construction work of the project. He reviewed the progress of the project and directed to further accelerate the pace of work. He directed that all possible resources be utilized for the timely completion of the project. Mohsin Naqvi directed that the surroundings of the project should be decorated with plants and flowers. He added that all possible efforts should be made to save the trees around the project. On the occasion, Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa gave a briefing about the construction activities of the project.

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

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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
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Rawalpindi.....9270601-20



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Importance of books remain intact: Iranian Ambassador

The other translator, Dr. Muzaffar Ali Kashmiri, mentioned, "Qaisar Aminpur lived for only 48 years but authored nine books, five of which have been translated into Arabic, Persian, and now Urdu."

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Dr. Reza Amiri Moghadam, has said that despite the abundance of information available on the internet, the importance of books remained intact. He expressed these views during the book launch event of the Urdu translation of Qaisar Aminpur's selected poetry titled Shikasta Aarzoain (Shattered Dreams), organized by the National Language Promotion Department (NLPD), here late Wednesday. He further stated, "Translators'

work is highly commendable, and there is also a need for Persian translations of Urdu literature, for which he is optimistic." Director General (DG) of NLPD Prof. Dr. Muhammad Saleem Mazhar thanked the Iranian ambassador, the translators, and other participants. He said, "Qaisar Aminpur is one of the most prominent poets of the revolution. We must honor scholars to encourage them to produce more remarkable work." Cultural Counsellor at the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Dr. Majid Mashki, remarked, "Translating poetry is not an easy task, as it requires pre-

serving the essence, culture, rhythm, and theme of the original." "The translators have performed this challenging task with great dedication, and their efforts deserve immense praise," he added. One of the book's translators, Dr. Mehr Noor Muhammad Khan, shed light on Qaisar Aminpur, describing him as a modern Iranian poet, writer, researcher, and professor at Tehran University. The other translator, Dr. Muzaffar Ali Kashmiri, mentioned, "Qaisar Aminpur lived for only 48 years but authored nine books, five of which have been translated into Arabic, Persian,

and now Urdu." Dr. Mohiuddin Hashmi of Allama Iqbal Open University highlighted that much of our civilization, language, and intellectual heritage was rooted in Persian. Dr. Abid Sial, Head of the Department of Pakistani Languages at NUML University, attributed the introduction of a fine Persian poet's work into Urdu to the efforts of his mentors. Dr. Amber Yasmeen, Head of the Urdu Department at NUML University, noted that while translations of Persian classical literature into Urdu exist, contemporary works were seldom translated. The translators had skillfully chosen

words to render an excellent Urdu version. Dr. Shagufta Yasmeen remarked, "Qaisar Aminpur remains alive through his poetry even after his death." She added, "Both translators, who are also her mentors, hold a prestigious status in her eyes." The institution's Executive Director (ED), Dr. Rashid Hameed, inaugurated the event by stating, "Pakistan enjoys strong relations with Iran. Persian classical literature has been translated into Urdu multiple times, as translations serve as a bridge to bring the cultures and literature of the two nations closer."

CCI, SECP host awareness session on 'ezfile' to simplify company registration

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) organized an awareness session at the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) on eZfile and the Companies Regulations 2024. This session aimed to inform the business community about the newly introduced filing system and regulations, which provide a unified regulatory framework for company registration and post-incorporation compliance. The session was wellattended by ICCI executive members and other business professionals seeking guidance on company incorporation and post-incorporation compliances and easy compliance with the updated regulations. In his welcome address, the acting President of ICCI, Abdul Rehman Siddiqui, commended the SECP for taking proactive steps to modernize and simplify business operations. He highlighted the importance of the SECP's initiatives in promoting corporatization and introducing e-filing systems, which have streamlined processes and enhanced ease of business. He brought Pakistan's practices in line with international standards. The acting President expressed confidence that the session would benefit



the business community and facilitate smoother business operations. He further suggested that the SECP consider setting up a dedicated desk at the ICCI, similar to other service desks like NADRA, IESCO, Police, FTO, and TDAP, for greater convenience and support for businesses. Saadullah Khan, the Registrar at SECP, said that the session underscores SECP's commitment to making business operations more efficient and transparent while providing the tools necessary for businesses to comply effectively with the new regulations. He noted that the SECP had reviewed existing regulations, reduced the number of forms required for filing from 75 to 28, and eliminated redundan-

cy, ensuring greater clarity. He highlighted that the drive towards corporatization and e-filing is key to fostering a transparent and efficient business environment. He also stressed that these reforms are crucial for promoting sustainable economic growth, improving governance, and making Pakistan more competitive globally. Khan explained that the core aim of these initiatives is to minimize human intervention and formalize the informal economy. Amir Saleem, Additional Registrar Licensing and Registration Division at SECP provided an in-depth presentation on the SECP's digitization initiative titled LEAP (Leading Efficiency

through Automation Process). He explained that LEAP aims to enhance organizational efficiency, improve business efficiency, and increase transparency by fully digitizing the registration process. The new interface, named file, is designed to simplify the navigation through the registration process, improve accessibility to information, and streamline the submission of returns and documents. Saleem noted that eZfile would also feature communication tools, such as alerts, notifications, and announcements, informing users about corporate registry matters. Special Advisor to the ICCI President, Naeem Siddiqui,

moderated the session and raised important challenges, such as limited digital literacy, restricted access to technology, and concerns about regulatory scrutiny. He suggested that SECP conduct more sessions to educate businesses and address these concerns. The session was also attended by senior ICCI members, including Acting Senior Vice President Nasir Mehmood Chaudhry, Acting Vice President Mohammad Waheed, Executive Members Naeed Satti, Atiqur Rehman, Ishaq Sial, Zulqurnain Abbasi, Chaudhry Mohammad Irfan, and Malik Mohsin Khalid, all of whom contributed to the success of the event.

13 outlaws nabbed; drugs, illegal weapons seized

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police arrested 13 outlaws involved in various criminal activities, including drug peddling and possession of illegal weapons, recovering firearms, ammunition, and narcotics during separate operations on Thursday. A police spokesman told that the (ICT) Police Aabpara, Margalla, Shalimar, Industrial Area, Sabzi Mandi, Shams Colony, Khanna and Bhara Kahu police teams took legal action against accused involved in possessing illegal weapons, and drug peddling activities. He said the police team arrested 11 accused and recovered 08 pistols, one 8mm rifle with ammunition and dagger from their possession. Moreover, 02 absconders were also arrested from various areas of the city during the last 24 hours. SSP Operation Muhammad Arslan Shahzaib said that the Islamabad Police is actively working to ensure the safety of citizens' lives and property in the federal capital, emphasizing that no elements will be allowed to disrupt citizens' peace. Protecting the lives, property, and dignity of citizens is the Islamabad Police's top priority.—APP

Need stressed for clear roadmap to drive Pakistan's uplift

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning Ahsan Iqbal on Thursday highlighted the importance of a comprehensive roadmap to ensure Pakistan achieves sustainable development. Speaking to a private news channel, he reflected on the country's past efforts and outlined the way forward under the new vision of progress. He emphasized that the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government had introduced Vision 2020-25 in 2013, a strategic plan aimed at placing Pakistan among the top 25 global economies by 2025. The progress we made was disrupted in 2018," he said while adding that the incoming government buried our development vision, abandoned our policies, and didn't introduce any alternative plan. "That was like a non-planned period for Pakistan's economic development," he added. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif launched "Uraan Pakistan," a homegrown five-year national economic transformation plan. "This plan is aimed at steering the country toward sustainable growth from the macroeconomic stability," he added. He said that "Uraan Pakistan" aims to place Pakistan on the path of sustainable high growth, moving towards a stronger and more prosperous future.—APP

Efforts afoot to control artificial price hikes

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration has intensified its efforts to control artificial price hikes and enforce official rates for essential goods in the Federal Capital. In a recent operation directed by Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad, Irfan Nawaz Memon, Magistrate Saddar Zone, Mir Yamin conducted a price inspection across several markets within the Tarnol police station's jurisdiction, said the spokesman of ICT's administration. During the inspection, Mir Yamin visited fruit and vegetable shops, dairy stores, and grocery outlets in Tarnol area.—APP

Chairman CDA chairs meeting to review parking plaza project

The engineering wing was tasked with completing all finishing work, including the installation of lifts and electrical systems, at the earliest

ISLAMABAD: A review meeting regarding the Parking Plaza at Blue Area was held on Thursday under the chairmanship of CDA Chairman Muhammad Ali Randhawa at CDA Headquarters. The CDA members and the relevant senior officers participated in the session. During the meeting, Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa was briefed that the structural construction of the Blue Area Parking Plaza has been completed. The plaza will have the capacity to accommodate approximately 1,000 vehicles. The facility includes two basements, a ground floor, and five additional floors. Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa was further briefed that the parking plaza will feature 64 shops, an open-air rooftop restaurant, and a café. In addition, the plaza will house a cinema to cater to the recreational needs of citizens. Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa directed that options for creating a vertical garden on the façade should be explored to make the structure more visually appealing. He emphasized the need for a well-structured business model to ensure the plaza is fully functional and contributes effectively to revenue generation. Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa directed the installation of digital and 3D SMD screens within the parking plaza. The engineering wing was tasked with completing all finishing work, including the installation of lifts and electrical systems, at the earliest. Chairman CDA reiterated that every part of the parking plaza should be utilized efficiently to maximize its potential and serve the needs of the public for parking effectively.—DNA

Zafar Bakhtawari emphasis on Int'l literary and cultural relations

ISLAMABAD: Secretary General of the United Business Group and Chairman of the Pakistan Cultural Forum, Zafar Bakhtawari, visited the Pakistan Academy of Letters (PAL) in Islamabad, where Chairperson Dr. Najeeba Arif, Director General Sultan Nasir, and the Academy's staff warmly welcomed him. During his address, Zafar Bakhtawari emphasized the need for institutions to establish international literary and cultural relations with various countries in the modern era. He highlighted that such efforts can

promote diverse cultures, global harmony, peace, and brotherhood. Chairperson Dr. Najeeba Arif spoke about the Academy's contributions and shared that it has published books in the languages of five different countries, including China, Portugal, Azerbaijan, and the United States. This initiative not only introduces Pakistan's literary achievements to the world but also strengthens cultural ties with other nations. Director General Sultan Nasir gave Zafar Bakhtawari a tour of the Academy's auditorium and explained that

it holds a unique status as it represents Pakistan's 74 languages. He mentioned that this is the country's first auditorium dedicated to highlighting Pakistan's linguistic and cultural diversity. Zafar Bakhtawari praised the efforts of the Pakistan Academy of Letters and expressed hope that the institution will continue to play a pivotal role in promoting literary and cultural ties in the future. He also anticipated its contribution to fostering relations with other countries through literature and culture.—APP



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Briefs

ANF recovers over 287 kg drugs in five operations

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting five operations across the country arrested three accused including a woman and recovered over 287 kg drugs worth Rs 209 million, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Thursday. He informed that 231 kg morphine was recovered from an uninhabited area of Hazarganji, Quetta. In second operation, 35 kg opium, 12 kg ice and 6 kg heroin were recovered from Goth Lakha Othal area of Lasbela. 3 kg ice concealed in secret cavities of a vehicle was recovered near M-1 Motorway, Islamabad. 740 grams ice was recovered from the possession of two accused including a woman arrested in two operations near Iqbal Shaheed Toll Plaza Attock. Separate cases have been registered against the arrested accused under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.—APP

Services exports grew by 7.8% in 05 months

ISLAMABAD: Services exports from the country during first five months of the current financial year grew by 7.8 percent as compared to the exports of the corresponding period of the last year. During the period from July-November, 2024 services worth \$3.275 billion were exported as compared to the exports of \$3.044 billion of the same period of the last year, according to the trade data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. During the period under review services imports into the country also grew by 2.88 percent as it was recorded at \$4.425 billion as against the imports of \$4.301 billion of the same period of the last year, it added. In first five months of the current financial year, the services trade deficit contracted 9.48 percent as compared to the five months of the last financial year, the data revealed. On year on year basis, the services exports from the country during the month of November 2024 grew by 6.15 percent as it was recorded at \$657.69 million as compared to the exports of \$634.39 million of the same month of the last year, it added. Meanwhile, the services imports into the country grew by 4.60 percent and reached to \$828.56 million in November 2024 as compared to the imports of \$792.15 million of the month of November 2023, it added. On year on year basis, the services trade balance narrowed by 3.10 percent as compared to the trade balance of the same period of the last year, the data revealed. On month on month basis, the services exports from the country decreased by 1.76 percent in November 2024 against the month of October 2024 as it was recorded at \$675.69 million as compared to the exports of \$687.79 million, it added. Meanwhile, services imports went also down by 13.07 percent during the period under review as it was recorded at \$828.56 million as against the imports of \$953.16 million of the previous month (October), it added.—APP

COMSTECH to launch its expert service program

Coordinator General COMSTECH remarked that recognizing the abundant yet underutilized technical expertise within OIC member states, this initiative aims to build a robust network of experts, engineers, technologists, and professionals to provide hands-on training and knowledge sharing

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: COMSTECH, the OIC Ministerial Standing Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation has decided to launch its Expert Service Program to foster technological collaboration among member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), as follow up of preliminary discussion with Secretary General OIC. It was decided during an important meeting of the Advisory Committee for the COMSTECH Expert Service Program held on Thursday. The meeting was presided over by Coordinator General COMSTECH Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary while convener of the Committee Prof. Dr. Shahid Mahmood Baig, former Chairman Pakistan Science Foundation and Head of Life Sciences Department, Health Services Academy, Prof. Dr. Moazur Rahman Director Centre of Excellence in Molecular Biology, University of the Punjab, and officials from COMSTECH

attended the meeting. Coordinator General COMSTECH remarked that recognizing the abundant yet underutilized technical expertise within OIC member states, this initiative aims to build a robust network of experts, engineers, technologists, and professionals to provide hands-on training and knowledge sharing. The program addresses critical developmental sectors, enabling recipient institutions, such as universities, research centers, industry, companies, and laboratories, to access specialized technical services and enhance their capacities. The key objectives of this initiative would include facilitating the transfer of technical expertise and best practices, strengthening technical capabilities through training and capacity-building programs, establishing a collaborative network of experts and promoting solidarity, volunteering, and shared responsibility within the OIC community. The program will support di-

verse fields, including biomedical engineering and health, renewable energy, information technology, manufacturing and engineering sciences, agriculture, urbanization, and smart cities, etc. The participants appreciated the initiative and assured their utmost cooperation in making it a successful, vibrant, and productive one. This program is a strategic step toward enhancing technological self-reliance, fostering sustainable development, and mitigating brain drain in OIC member states. It also underscores the values of collaboration and mutual benefit, reinforcing the collective progress of the OIC community. Huawei Technologies Pakistan Pvt Ltd, a global leader in information and communications technology (ICT), and COMSATS University Islamabad have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) aimed at fostering collaboration in the fields of technology. The agreement was signed during a ceremony held

at the office of Huawei Technologies in Islamabad said a news release. Federal Minister of Science and Technology, Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui and key representatives from both organizations attended the event. This partnership is set to enhance technical vocational training and skill development to create employment opportunities for students and young technicians by equipping them with the latest ICT technologies. Under the MoU, Huawei will provide COMSATS University Islamabad with equipment and train their resources in delivering the technical training to the attendees of these courses. Initially, this program will commence with the COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore campus. Subsequently, COMSATS University Islamabad will also help develop a similar facility in Karachi as well. This collaboration is designed to equip students with the necessary skills to thrive in a rapidly evolving digital landscape. Dr. Tahir Naeem,

Director (P, D &HRD) at COMSATS University Islamabad, expressed enthusiasm about the partnership: "This collaboration with Huawei represents a significant step forward in our mission to provide students with a comprehensive education in technology and innovation. We are excited to work together to develop programs that will enhance learning and research capabilities." Ahmed Bilal Masud, the Director Subsidiary Board at Huawei, emphasized the importance of such collaborations: "At Huawei, we believe in the power of partnerships to drive innovation. By working with COMSATS University Islamabad, we aim to nurture talent and inspire the next generation of technology leaders." The MoU will also pave the way for further collaboration between both organizations including knowledge exchange and fostering an environment of innovation that benefits both institutions and the wider community.

IRSA releases 27,100 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Thursday released 27,100 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 1473.05 feet and was 75.05 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 17,500 cusecs and 6,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1132.90 feet, which was 82.90 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 15,100, 20,000, 10,700 and 1,100 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 11,100 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 6,000 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marla.—APP

PM lauds Pakistan Navy

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday extended appreciation to Pakistan Navy for conducting successful anti-narcotics operation in Northern Arabian Sea. During the operation, the Pakistan Navy Ship (PNS) Moawin confiscated a drug shipment worth around US\$1 million. This is a very significant milestone in the anti-narcotics campaign, the prime minister said in a press statement issued by the PM Office. He said the Pakistan Navy played a central role in preventing drug smuggling on the country's maritime defense and sea routes. The nation is proud of the personnel of the Pakistan Navy, the prime minister added.—APP

CTP issue over 8,000 challans to unfit PSVs

RAWALPINDI: City Traffic Police (CTP) Rawalpindi issued over 8,000 challans under special campaign against unfit Public Service Vehicles (PSVs) and heavy vehicles during December. According to a CTP spokesman, 16 fatal road accidents occurred including six in the city area within the limits of CTP during December. Eight accidents occurred due to negligence and carelessness of the drivers of heavy vehicles and PSVs, speeding, one-way violation and wrong overtaking. 16 persons lost their lives in the fatal road accidents, he informed. He said that City Traffic Officer (CTO) Rawalpindi Beenish Fatima sent a letter to the concerned authorities requesting to fix entry hours on the main roads of the rural areas like the timing restriction for heavy vehicles in the city area so that fatal road accidents could be prevented and the loss of precious lives could be controlled. In addition, on the special orders of the CTO Rawalpindi, a 3-day training workshop would also be organized at the Traffic Headquarters Race Course in which heavy and public service drivers across the city would be made aware of the causes of the accidents, preventive measures, and casualties so that such fatal accidents could be controlled. He informed that 21 persons were injured in 19 other road accidents reported in December.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Sanitation workers of Capital Development Authority hold protest in favour of their demands outside National Press club, in the Federal Capital.

Global political and economic scene may deteriorate in 2025

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, the President of the Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, the President of All Karachi Industrial Alliance, the Chairman of the FPCCI Advisory Board, and the President and former provincial minister, Mian Zahid Hussain, said on Thursday that the global political and economic landscape is more likely to deteriorate than improve in 2025. He said that the idea that the situation would improve after the end of the Cold War proved wrong, and various conflicts have increased instead of decreasing. Mian Zahid Hussain said that after the end of the Cold War, millions of lives have been lost. At the same time, billions of people have been affected. Talking to the business community, the veteran

business leader said that the change in the balance of power will become more evident during the New Year. Israel and the United States will turn to Iran after controlling Gaza, Hamas, Syria, and Yemen. The business leader noted that the West's economic dominance would further decrease, and the anti-Western camp would become stronger. During this time, instability, uncertainty, and political tension will increase, environmental risks and losses will grow, and the war in Ukraine and the Middle East will continue. The situation in the Middle East may even become tense. Mian Zahid Hussain said the newly elected US president had stated his policy on ending both wars. Still, Ukraine will suffer more than Russia. At the same time, Israel will benefit in the Middle East, so perhaps the parties will not accept the Trump formula. Mian Zahid Hussain said

that the newly elected US president wants European countries to bear the burden of the Ukraine war instead of the United States. In contrast, European countries do not have enough resources to do so, which will likely affect relations between Europe and the United States. He said that the newly elected US president had started explaining his policies even before assuming power, which has caused a wave of concern worldwide and increased instability. In the present situation, the US allies and rivals are equally worried. Concerns are being expressed about the political and economic relations between the US and China, which will affect the whole world. Mian Zahid Hussain said that, on the one hand, militancy is ongoing in different regions of the world, while on the other hand, fears of a global trade war are growing. During the New

Year, trade and investment in more friendly countries will become more subject to politics, and protectionism may also give rise to new blocs. A large number of Chinese companies will move to other countries to avoid US trade measures, which will have a positive impact on these countries' economies. Pakistan can also play its part in this changing trade situation, but it will have to correct its affairs because Chinese investors view Pakistan's internal situation with concern. Mian Zahid Hussain further said that democracy is under threat all over the world, tolerance and moderation are disappearing, political fundamentalism is growing, democratic rights and public freedoms are being denied, authoritarian rule is becoming popular, and lawlessness is increasing. The root of all these problems is the failure of political governments to meet the people's expectations.

Ahsan stresses need for clear roadmap

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning Ahsan Iqbal on Thursday highlighted the importance of a comprehensive roadmap to ensure Pakistan achieves sustainable development. Speaking to a private news channel, he reflected on the country's past efforts and outlined the way forward under the new vision of progress. He emphasized that the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government had introduced Vision 2020-25 in 2013, a strategic plan aimed at placing Pakistan among the top 25 global economies by 2025. The progress we made was disrupted in 2018," he said while adding that the incoming government buried our development vision, abandoned our policies, and didn't introduce any alternative plan. "That was like a non-planned period for Pakistan's economic development," he added. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif launched "Uraan Pakistan," a homegrown five-year national economic transformation plan. "This plan is aimed at steering the country toward sustainable growth from the macroeconomic stability," he added. He said that "Uraan Pakistan" aims to place Pakistan on the path of sustainable high growth, moving towards a stronger and more prosperous future.—DNA

Railways earn Rs 46b in six months

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways has earned an amount of Rs46 billion in the first six months of the current fiscal year 2024-25 due to the organization's effective policies which reflects the institution's positive trajectory. "The department has achieved a revenue of Rs46 billion in the first half of the fiscal year, marking an increase of Rs5 billion as compared to the same period last year," an official in the Ministry of Railways told APP. As per the figure, he said Pakistan Railways has generated Rs24 billion from passenger trains and Rs16 billion from freight services while Rs6 billion was earned through land leases, coaching, and other sources. To a question, the official said around 41.91 million passengers traveled by train during 2023-24 compared to 35.40 million in 2022-23 - an increase of 6.51 million in the annual count. He said a total passenger earning in the fiscal year 2023-24 was Rs. 47.712 billion, exceeding the budgetary target by a margin of Rs. 8.712 billion. Besides, there is an increase in earnings by Rs. 13.799 billion as compared to the earnings of the previous financial year 2022-23. The official said Pakistan Railways has made special arrangements to facilitate passengers at stations and in trains en-route including provision of state-of-the-art dining cars, mobile charging sockets in coaches, and provision of water dispensers in coaches to provide clean drinking water to passengers. Besides this, the department has installed Ticket Vending Machines (TVM) for purchasing tickets, information counters to guide and facilitate passengers, digital display boards for the arrival and departure of trains, and provision of wheelchairs and ramps for disabled people. To improve the punctuality of trains, he said Pakistan Railways is removing speed restrictions through special maintenance of track, the signaling system is being improved through computerized interlocking and installation of solar system, locomotive failures are being removed through timely maintenance, and new passenger coaches are being inducted.—APP

The Urran Pakistan, an over-ambitious or doable framework?

GHULAM MURTAZA



GOVERNMENT of Pakistan has introduced an ambitious five-year economic framework titled "Urran Pakistan", designed to stabilize and diversify the national economy through clearly defined, quantifiable objectives to be achieved by 2028. While

some critics may regard the targets as overly ambitious, the initiative represents a significant shift toward strategic economic planning. As the adage suggests, "Failing to plan is planning to fail," and this framework has the potential to serve as a foundational roadmap for future administrations, provided it is implemented consistently and remains insulated from political instability. The overarching goal of "Urran Pakistan" is to strengthen Pakistan's economic infrastructure and introduce sector-specific reforms to promote sustainable and inclusive growth. This strategy aims to address critical economic challenges, foster innovation, enhance institutional capacities, and ensure equitable development across various sectors. Among its key objectives, the plan targets an annual GDP

growth rate of 6% by 2028. Sustained economic growth at this level is deemed essential for reducing unemployment, increasing industrial output, and enhancing national income levels. This target aligns with global standards for emerging economies and leverages Pakistan's untapped potential in sectors such as manufacturing, services, and technology. Achieving this objective, however, requires structural reforms to address barriers to growth. Another critical component of the framework is the improvement of per capita income, with a goal of reaching \$2,405 by 2028. This enhancement would not only increase household purchasing power but also contribute to poverty alleviation, reduce income inequality, and foster the growth of a robust middle class. The framework further emphasizes

the importance of raising the investment-to-GDP ratio to 17% by 2028. Expanding foreign direct investment and domestic private investment is central to this goal, with a focus on fostering industrial growth, technological innovation, and high-value job creation. While the establishment of special economic zones and the simplification of regulatory processes are expected to attract investment, significant institutional and policy barriers must be addressed to ensure success. The framework also aims to enhance export performance, setting a target of \$63 billion by 2028 to diversify the economic base. Strengthening exports will bolster foreign exchange reserves, reduce trade deficits, and improve global competitiveness. Diversification into high-tech and value-added

manufacturing will be essential to achieving this objective. Furthermore, the government recognizes the critical role of remittances in the economy and seeks to increase inflows through policy reforms and financial integration. Stabilizing the current account balance through increased remittance inflows will require reducing costs, enhancing financial inclusion, and adopting digital financial services. In addition to these economic targets, "Urran Pakistan" outlines fiscal measures, including raising the tax-to-GDP ratio to 13.5% by 2028. Achieving this goal necessitates substantial reforms in tax administration, broadening the tax base, and addressing the informal economy. Enhanced revenue generation would reduce reliance on external borrowing and improve fiscal autonomy. To ensure fiscal

sustainability, the government also aims to reduce public debt to 60% of GDP by 2028. This objective requires fiscal discipline, robust revenue generation, and prudent debt management strategies. Recognizing the importance of human capital development, the framework allocates 4% of GDP to education by 2028. This investment is critical for addressing skill deficits, improving literacy rates, and fostering a knowledge-driven economy. However, the specific mechanisms for implementation remain to be clarified. For the successful realization of these objectives, several structural challenges must be addressed. Strengthening the domestic investment climate is essential for attracting foreign capital, and transparent, secure economic policies are crucial in this regard. Bureaucratic inefficiencies must also be min-

imized to enhance ease of doing business, with streamlined regulatory frameworks, such as one-window operations, significantly improving the investment landscape. Addressing structural inefficiencies, including high energy costs and political instability, is imperative for enhancing regional competitiveness. Finally, a stable political and institutional environment is necessary to foster economic growth and inspire investor confidence. By setting measurable goals and addressing structural challenges, "Urran Pakistan" represents a transformative attempt to reshape the country's economic trajectory, contingent upon consistent policy implementation, institutional reforms, and a commitment to long-term development. —The writer is the Secretary General ICCI

US-China trade war

AS Donald Trump prepares to return to the White House as US president, Wall Street banks are debating the economic and financial market implications of additional tariffs on imports into the United States. While predicting Trump's moves is a futile task, one of the areas where there is consensus is that Asia is acutely vulnerable to the fallout from an onslaught of protectionism. Given Trump's obsession with bilateral trade balances, Asian economies are in the firing line. According to Morgan Stanley, seven of the 10 economies with the largest trade surpluses with the US are in Asia. Moreover, Asian economies are much more trade-dependent – exports account for between 37 and 85 per cent of economic output in Taiwan, South Korea and Malaysia – and are more sensitive to shifts in US monetary policy. Many banks are using the impact of the 2018-19 US-China trade war as a template for their analyses and predictions of how the rest of Asia is likely to fare if Trump implements the extra tariffs he threatened to impose on China. Those in place so far are largely much lower than the 60 per cent levy on all Chinese goods he proposed during the presidential campaign. However, today's economic and financial landscape differs markedly from the one in 2018. Inflation and interest rates are much higher, posing a bigger challenge to Trump's policy agenda but also amplifying the risks for the global economy and markets. Furthermore, China's economy is in a far more precarious position, cyclically as well as structurally. Several other factors increase Asia's vulnerability to external shocks. First, economic activity in many countries remains below pre-pandemic levels. By contrast, output gaps – the difference between actual and potential output – in most economies excluding China were positive in 2017, giving the region "much more of a cushion to absorb a trade hit than it has now," JPMorgan said. China sees slowest economic growth in over a year with 4.6% GDP in third quarter Second, Asian economies, with the exception of China and India, have become more reliant on exports in the past several years. While the share of exports to China has dropped, China is still far and away the region's biggest export market. Furthermore, the proportion of Asian exports to the US has risen sharply since 2018, partly because of the surge in technological exports. Asia ex-China's trade surplus with the US has doubled since September 2019 to US\$400 billion, according to data from Morgan Stanley. Third, although the share of Asian exports to China has fallen, many economies have become more dependent on Chinese imports, in part because of trade diversion effects stemming from the 2018 conflict. The share of China value added in Southeast Asia's exports has risen significantly. Nomura noted that "if the US decides to clamp down on trade diversion by China via third countries, then countries with a higher value added from China in their exports to the US could face additional tariffs". Fourth, the pandemic-induced surge in public spending has left Asian economies with less fiscal room for manoeuvre. Although there is more scope for easing monetary policy, the gap between interest rates in Asia and the US stands at a record low. This makes it more difficult for Asian central banks to reduce borrowing costs without endangering financial stability, especially if the US Federal Reserve turns more hawkish because of concerns about the inflationary impact of Trump's policies.

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Under the radar

ISRAEL" capitalized on the fall of the Syrian regime on the 8th of this month, launching a wide-scale operation to destroy the qualitative capabilities of the Syrian Arab Army. The operation targeted missile weapons stores, manufacturing and development sites, air force facilities, air defense systems, radar installations, research centers, and naval combat assets. Israeli warplanes are still freely parading in Syrian airspace, with Syrian citizens always hearing the sounds of Israeli reconnaissance planes overhead. In this scenario, the Syrian Arab Army would have lost the majority of its weaponry. If reconstituted, it would become a fragile and symbolic army force, incapable of effectively facing an overwhelming, American-backed Israeli military that occupies whatever land it wants, and bombs whatever it wants, whenever it wants. While the head of the new Syrian administration, Ahmad al-Sharaa, (formerly Abu Muhammad al-Julani), was busy receiving political and security delegations from various countries, "Israel" initiated a large-scale ground incursion into southern Syria. This action was justified by the new governor of Damascus who stated, "Recently, Israel might have felt afraid, so it advanced a little and bombed a little. These fears are natural, but Syria's problem is not with Israel, and we do not wish to tamper with Israel's security." In full view of the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) posts, Israeli forces violated the 1974 agreement and took control of more than 10 Syrian villages, covering an area of more than 20,000 km. "The Israeli forces raised their flag on the Quneitra Governorate building, and destroyed numerous houses in the surrounding countryside, along with small farms in various towns. They bulldozed lands and farms and uprooted trees, and erected earthen barriers and fortifications around the Mantara Dam, Syria's second-largest dam, cutting off our water supply. Additionally, they installed extensive surveillance cameras and communication devices. When civilians protested against their actions, the Israeli forces fired live ammunition directly at them, resulting in numerous injuries. They sought to disarm all the villages, either by destroying heavy machinery or confiscating individual weapons, which had proliferated after the Syrian army withdrew from its military positions. Initially, we refused to hand over weapons except to the Syrian state. However, the Israelis informed the local dignitaries that they would not allow any armed faction to operate in the area." The population is gripped by anxiety and panic following the Israeli incursions, the summoning of young men for investigations, evacuation warnings, and the imposition of a curfew, are all happening without any reaction from Damascus. The Yarmouk Basin, the area richest in water resources in the Daraa countryside, came under complete Israeli control. Contrary to reports of an Israeli withdrawal, the region instead saw the establishment of a military presence on the heights overlooking the area. This occurred amidst a significant wave of displacement from the villages in the basin. The Israeli occupation forces advanced to seize control of the strategic summit of Mount Hermon and destroyed the crosses where Syrian Christians traditionally gather to celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration every year. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently visited the summit of Mount Hermon, where he stated, "On this occasion, I would like to thank my friend, President-elect Donald Trump, for responding to my request to recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights in 2019."

A bloody new year in the USA

Qamar Bashir



There is no justification for such barbarity, regardless of the motive or alleged rationale. The perpetrator, reportedly an American citizen of Middle Eastern descent, used a truck as a lethal weapon. The vehicle was allegedly displaying an ISIS flag, potentially signaling allegiance to the group's hateful ideology, which may have been triggered by the killing of innocent Palestinians in Gaza

THE New Year celebrations in the USA were marred by tragedy when a barbaric act of terrorism in New Orleans claimed the lives of at least 10 holidaymakers and injured 30 more. This heinous attack serves as a stark reminder that terrorism, driven by intolerant and extremist ideologies, can strike anywhere in the world and kill innocent citizens or individuals who, by any measure, had no connection to any conflict or issue that could justify such violence. There is no justification for such barbarity, regardless of the motive or alleged rationale. The perpetrator, reportedly an American citizen of Middle Eastern descent, used a truck as a lethal weapon. The vehicle was allegedly displaying an ISIS flag, potentially signaling allegiance to the group's hateful ideology, which may have been triggered by the killing of innocent Palestinians in Gaza. However, even if the attack was meant to avenge the killing of innocent citizens in Palestine, Syria, Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq, Iran, or Ukraine, targeting innocent civilians elsewhere is devoid of logic or justification. Killing innocent people, regardless of the motive—whether revenge or hatred—is unjustifiable. While this statement may seem simple and straightforward, humanity, unfortunately, is not. The complexities of ideology, emotion, and vengeance often cloud judgment, leading to actions that perpetuate cycles of violence and suffering. In this state of clouded negativity, they abandon logic, ignore the universal message of peace promoted by almost every religion, and forget the lessons of peaceful coexistence taught in schools, mosques, synagogues, and churches. Instead, they succumb to the destructive influence of hatred and violence. In this warped state of mind, they derive a twisted sense of pleasure and satisfaction from inflicting wounds, causing suffering, or even taking lives—targeting anyone they can. It is deeply unfortunate that some societies and countries assume for themselves the authority to destroy nations, obliterate communities, demolish homes, and carry out drone strikes around the world—all without judicial oversight or accountability. Operating with a self-assumed license to kill, they often escape scrutiny or consequences for their actions. Even more deplorable is the fact that

those who make these decisions to use force and wreak havoc on countries, societies, and communities remain untouched and unaccountable. Meanwhile, innocent citizens—who played no role in these decisions and had no direct or indirect involvement in any acts of violence—become the victims of such kinetic actions. Pakistan has been one of the worst victims of terrorism—domestic, regional, and international. Since the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan, the country has lost over 80,000 lives, including members of its security forces and countless innocent citizens. Even today, there is no respite, as acts of terrorism continue to claim lives almost daily, involving security forces, terrorists, separatists, and innocent civilians. Unfortunately, the world will remain entangled in the grip of this multi-headed, deadly python until we fundamentally change our strategies and tactics for dealing with unfavorable regimes or governments. Without a shift in approach, the cycle of violence and suffering will persist, leaving nations wounded and societies fractured. The use of non-state actors to achieve kinetic and political objectives—most notably during the effort to push back the USSR from Afghanistan—marked the inception of hateful, religiously tainted ideologies. The United States led the conceptualization and execution of this strategy, which involved spreading the lethal and poisonous ideology of "Islamic Jihad." Muslims from across the globe were encouraged to join the fight against the "Russian infidels." To bolster this movement, sociological engineering was employed, including altering school curricula to emphasize the importance of Jihad and recruit fighters. Various militant outfits were created to serve as role models, with figures like Osama Bin Laden being elevated as heroes under a carefully crafted strategy. This approach proved immensely successful in repelling and ultimately dismantling the USSR. However, the success of this model set a dangerous precedent. It was later employed to destabilize and destroy societies in Libya, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, and beyond. These militant assets—equipped with weap-

ons, fueled by ideology, and funded by seemingly unlimited resources—became forces intoxicated by power and violence. With unrestrained authority over their domains, these groups perpetuated conflict and sought new wars to sustain their insatiable appetite for chaos and terror. The use of unconventional, unethical, and informal war tactics is perhaps the root cause of much of the pain and suffering endured by innocent people around the world—individuals who have no connection to acts of brutality or violence. These tactics have inflicted untold sorrow, tears, and anguish on innocent citizens in countries like France, the UK, the USA, Pakistan, and India. Thousands of lives have been shattered, leaving countless people with lifelong wounds—whether physical, emotional, or both—suffered by themselves or their loved ones. While this may not be the sole cause, it is undoubtedly a significant factor among the many reasons behind these heinous and abhorrent acts of violence. Terrorism indiscriminately harms people of all religions—be it Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, or others. It takes the lives of individuals across racial lines—white, Black, Asian, or others—and targets people of all ethnicities, philosophies, and perspectives, without distinction or discrimination. The global community must address this issue with urgency. At the national, regional, and international levels, laws and protocols should be established to prohibit the use of non-state actors as kinetic assets. Nations must desist from arming such groups with ideological and kinetic tools of destruction. The world must return to conventional and formal warfare, to be used only as a last resort in cases of extreme necessity or compulsion. By ceasing the practice of empowering contractors or raising militant organizations to achieve strategic or ideological objectives, the international community could take a significant step toward preventing the indiscriminate killing of innocent people. This shift could help reduce the pain, agony, despair, and helplessness that so often plague innocent citizens across the globe.

From hybrid warfare to AI-driven conflicts

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



This rise in Chinese power would not only challenge regional stability but could also pave the way for China to assert itself as a global leader. Concurrently, China's expanding influence would likely prompt a shift in the regional power balance, with countries aligning in either support or opposition to China's policies. Meanwhile, Russia's increasing imperial ambitions and revanchist behavior are becoming more pronounced, with the country intensifying

THE geopolitical landscape in the near future is likely to be shaped by several significant phenomena that could alter the balance of global power, particularly in relation to the Western world. One such scenario is the potential withdrawal of the United States from its historically dominant role, accompanied by the adoption of a doctrine of non-interference in international affairs. Should this occur, it could lead to a diminished global leadership role for the U.S., thereby creating a power vacuum that may enable China and Russia to expand their influence on the world stage. A second key development would be the continued ascent of China as a global power, resulting in heightened tensions with its neighboring states, especially Taiwan. This rise in Chinese power would not only challenge regional stability but could also pave the way for China to assert itself as a global leader. Concurrently, China's expanding influence would likely prompt a shift in the regional power balance, with countries aligning in either support or opposition to China's policies. Meanwhile, Russia's increasing imperial ambitions and revanchist behavior are becoming more pronounced, with the country intensifying its interventions in former Soviet republics. However, in the event of a Russian defeat in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine an outcome that appears increasingly likely Russia could experience a reduction in its geopolitical influence. It may be relegated to a secondary state status, heavily dependent on China both politically and economically and would lose its ability to exert significant influence over European policies for a prolonged period. Another possible scenario that poses a significant challenge to Western dominance would be the disintegration of the European Union (EU), particularly given the EU's growing disinterest in developing its defense capabilities, its struggles with the immigration crisis and the increasing influence of right-wing and nationalist movements. These forces seek to redefine the EU's role and, in some cases, advocate for its dissolution. While the war in Ukraine has underscored the need for European nations to rebuild their military strength and preserve political and economic unity in the face of external threats, the subversive activities of Russia and China could destabilize the EU further, presenting a formidable challenge to its cohesion. Simultaneously, the Middle East will likely continue to grapple with entrenched challenges, including the persistence of jihadist terrorism, weak governance structures and rising economic instability. Additionally, sectarian tensions between Shiite and Sunni states, as well as geopolitical conflicts involving Iran and Israel, are already

shaping regional dynamics, as seen in Syria, Yemen and beyond. As global powers, particularly China and Russia, vie for dominance and seek to shift the global hegemonic order, their growing influence presents a direct challenge to the United States, especially in economic, military and technological spheres. These two powers, in particular, are engaging in a range of strategies to challenge U.S. supremacy, including the use of force and the implementation of hybrid warfare techniques. Should the conflict in Ukraine conclude with a partial or complete victory for Russia, a new regional order could emerge, with China, Russia and Iran forming a strategic bloc that extends its influence over neighboring countries, as well as in Africa and South America. Conversely, a Ukrainian victory could lead to a realignment of former Russian spheres of influence, with some countries seeking to join NATO or form new alliances with the United States. Concurrently, China is expected to extend its reach into Africa and South America, further consolidating its position as a global strategic player, on par with the United States. The technological advancements of the future will undeniably play a pivotal role in reshaping the nature of conflict. The ongoing issue of climate change, exacerbated by human activity, is already having significant geopolitical ramifications. The reduction in Arctic ice cover has encouraged Arctic-bordering nations, including Russia, Canada, Norway, Denmark and the United States, to expand their claims to natural resources in the region. Russia, for instance, has staked a claim to the area north of Siberia extending to the North Pole, asserting that it is an extension of its continental shelf. In anticipation of future resource exploitation, Russia has already deployed Arctic units within its military structure to ensure control over these newly accessible regions. This intensifying competition for Arctic resources underscores the broader geopolitical shift toward the resource-rich Polar Regions. At the same time, urbanization trends are expected to continue, with a growing population migrating toward coastal cities. This shift will have implications for both economic development and military strategy, as these cities will become critical centers of activity. By 2030, the number of megacities with populations exceeding 10 million is expected to rise to 41, further concentrating global power in these urban hubs. In response to these emerging geopolitical realities, NATO has outlined its strategic priorities, including deterrence and defense, crisis management and collaborative security. NATO's focus on technological advantage, resilience and climate change mitigation reflects its recognition of the shifting global landscape.

However, the growing influence of China, particularly its use of economic advantage and military power, poses a significant challenge to NATO's interests. China's hybrid strategies, which include disinformation campaigns, cyberattacks and military expansion, threaten the security and cohesion of the alliance. Furthermore, the Sino-Russian partnership, which continues to deepen, further complicates NATO's ability to maintain its position as the dominant global military and economic power. As new technologies continue to evolve, they bring both opportunities and risks to global security. In the future, military operations will increasingly rely on advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence, autonomous systems and cyber capabilities. These advancements will not only reshape the nature of conflict but will also alter the strategies employed by both state and non-state actors. In particular, the development of anti-access and area-denial technologies, precision strike capabilities and electronic warfare tools will allow adversaries to counter NATO's traditional military strengths. These innovations will create an environment in which traditional military power will be less effective unless integrated with cutting-edge technologies. The future of warfare will be characterized by rapid technological advancements, requiring military forces to adapt swiftly. Technologies such as AI-supported command and reconnaissance systems will enable faster decision-making, providing a strategic advantage in combat. The integration of autonomous systems in combat units, alongside human soldiers, will redefine military tactics, with the ability to conduct operations more efficiently and effectively. However, despite these advancements, the survival of human forces will remain a crucial factor in the success of military operations, particularly as the risks associated with urban warfare and precision strikes increase. As the battlefield becomes more digitized, the importance of information warfare, including psychological operations and cyberattacks, will grow, emphasizing the need for robust defense capabilities in these domains. In the end, the ability of military forces to adapt to these new technological realities will determine their effectiveness in future conflicts. The integration of artificial intelligence, automation and information warfare strategies will play a central role in shaping the outcome of wars, particularly as global powers such as China, Russia and the United States continue to develop and deploy new military technologies. The evolving nature of conflict, marked by the convergence of traditional and hybrid warfare strategies, will challenge established military doctrines and necessitate a rethinking of military readiness and strategy in the coming decades.

Briefs

Imran offered to be shifted to Bani...

FROM PAGE 01
not making a deal [with the government] over this matter," said Aleema while speaking to media persons outside Adiala jail on Monday. Her remarks are to be taken alongside PTI Senator Shibli Faraz's clarification who has refuted the "false perception" that Khan was seeking relief for himself in negotiations with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) coalition government. Claiming that some elements wanted to sabotage the dialogue between the two sides - which have been at loggerheads for months now - Chaudhry called for the party's negotiation committee to be allowed to meet Khan who has been behind bars in Adiala jail for more than a year. "The PTI founder has said that the party's time had come and no power could stop it," remarked the ex-PM's lawyer.

'Decisions over cup of tea' led to...

FROM PAGE 01
Ishaq Dar told the media that following Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visits and effective engagements with the leadership of the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Azerbaijan, there were indications of around \$29 billion investment in coming to Pakistan. He highlighted Pakistan's participation in the Nuclear Energy Summit, World Economic Forum in Saudi Arabia, OIC summit in Gambia, the visit of Saudi foreign minister, Iran's president late Ebrahim Raisi and his foreign minister, and that during all interactions Pakistan effectively raised the issue of Kashmir and ongoing Israel's genocide of Palestinian population. Pakistan's consistent efforts at the OIC summit in Gambia led to the appointment of OIC envoy on Islamophobia.

PTI requests time to consult...

FROM PAGE 01
Senator Raja Nasir Abbas Jafri and PTI Secretary General Salman Akram Raja from the opposition while from the government side are attending Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, PML-N Senator Irfan Siddiqui, PPP MNAs Raja Pervaiz Ashraf and Naveed Qamar, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Political and Public Affairs Rana Sanaullah and others. Addressing a press conference after the negotiations, the NA speaker said the previous meeting had decided that the PTI would present its demands today but the opposition requested today that it still needed time for consultation with Imran on a "conclusive list" of demands. "The hope is that we will have the third meeting next week," he said. Sadiq hailed today's talks, saying they were held in "an even more cordial atmosphere than previously".

Justice Shah issues written...

FROM PAGE 01
on domestic courts but also enhances business productivity. The senior-most judge of the Supreme Court wrote that arbitration offers a timely resolution of disputes, which minimizes business disruptions. The ability to enforce international arbitration decisions strengthens trade and business. The Supreme Court stated that a stable and predictable dispute resolution system through arbitration fosters investor confidence. Arbitration makes the country an attractive destination for foreign investment. The judgment also mentioned that the Law and Justice Commission had prepared a draft of a new Arbitration Act, which was presented to the federal government through the Ministry of Law and Justice on May 2, 2024. This draft seeks to modernize the outdated arbitration system, which has remained unchanged since 1940.

Swiatek bundles Boulter & Britain out of United Cup

Earlier on Thursday, Britain's Billy Harris played a solid match but he was outclassed by the men's No 16 Hubert Hurkacz

SPORTS DESK

SYDNEY: Over the course of the past 18 months, by far the rewarding period in her blossoming career, Katie Boulter has gradually established herself as one of the best tennis players in the world. She has won noteworthy titles, defeated top opponents and embedded herself inside the top 30. Yet no battle in her career has quite matched the delirium of an unforgettable night in Sydney when she went shot-for-shot with the greatest active women's player, Iga Swiatek, and came so close to securing the biggest win of her career. After three hours of tennis of the highest quality, Swiatek somehow survived a brilliant performance from Boulter, winning 6-7 (4), 6-1, 6-4 to secure a 2-0 win for Poland over Great Britain and a spot in the semi-final of the United Cup. Earlier on Thursday, Britain's Billy Harris played a solid match but he was outclassed by the men's No 16 Hubert Hurkacz, who closed out a tough 7-6 (3), 7-5 win to secure Poland's first win of the tie. "I'm just exhausted, you know?" said Swiatek, the world No 2. "I'm happy that I won so I don't need to play mixed doubles. This match was crazy. So many changes of momentum. I thought I had it under control in the first set but for sure I got tight and didn't work on it. But then I did not want to repeat the same mistake in the third." Having finished her 2024 season by reaching a new career high ranking of No 23, Boulter started the new year in strong form, registering two dominant wins over lesser opponents as she led Great Britain out of their round robin group despite the late withdrawal of the British men's No 1 Jack Draper. Her reward for those efforts was a shot at Swiatek, one of the great



challenges in professional tennis today. It took just a few minutes for Boulter to understand the task before her as Swiatek put Boulter under immense pressure from the very first game. Every time Boulter's rally ball dropped short or slowed, Swiatek pounced. In the blink of an eye, Swiatek had established a 4-1 lead. Fully aware that only her best level would suffice, Boulter responded brilliantly. She recovered the early break with an exemplary exhibition of first-strike tennis, desperately looking to take the initiative as early as possible and injecting massive pace into every groundstroke. As she levelled the



Pole at 4-4, Boulter average forehand and backhand speeds read 76mph and 75mph respectively. By the time they reached the first set tie-break, Boulter simply could not miss as she took control of every point and put Swiatek under suffocating pressure. After opening the tie-break with two searing forehand winners, she ended it completely on fire, pummeling three consecutive backhand winners to seize the opening set from 4-4 in the tie-break. Unsurprisingly, Swiatek responded immediately. She took full advantage of Boulter's intensity dropping at the beginning of the second set, breezing through the set. Boulter gathered herself at

the beginning of the final set and made the first move, breaking serve for 2-1 as Swiatek took a medical timeout. Even when Swiatek pulled her back on serve, Boulter continued to battle hard. She pulled out a stupendous service hold for 4-4 after saving two break points. "I took four painkillers because a lot hurt but I'm happy that we won and, for sure, I'm going to use the day off tomorrow," said Swiatek. With the quality of ballstriking from both players continuing to rise deep in the final set, this spectacular contest, which is an early contender for one of the best matches of the year, came down to a moment of total brilliance from a determined Swiatek.

'Unfortunate,' Watson on India not visiting Pak

'The India-Pakistan rivalry is just as huge,' says Watson

WEB DESK

SYDNEY: Former Australian all-rounder Shane Watson expressed dis-appointment over India's decision not to travel to Pakistan for the ICC Champions Trophy 2025, calling it "unfortunate" for cricket fans in Pakistan. Speaking during the ICC Champions Trophy Tour, Watson emphasised the importance of the India-Pakistan cricket rivalry and its unparalleled energy at global events. "It's unfortunate that things worked out that way. But there's no doubt that what everyone loves is watching the India-Pakistan game," said Watson. "Whenever they come together, whether in ICC events, it's a really special time because we get a sense of what's on the line. From an Australian cricket perspective, we know how big the rivalry is between us and England. The India-Pakistan rivalry is just as huge. No cricket fan wants to miss that game. So, it's unfortunate that India isn't travelling to Pakistan for this Champions Trophy," he added. The 43-year-old remained optimistic for Pakistan's cricket fans, calling the tournament a monumental event for the nation. "It's going to be huge for the Pakistan cricket fans to have the opportunity to watch world-class cricket in the country," he said. Reflecting on his own experience playing in Pakistan during the Pakistan Super League (PSL) in 2019, Watson shared fond memories of the passionate Pakistani fans. "I got a small opportunity to play in the Pakistan Super League in 2019, the first time after playing there in 2005. It was one of the highlights of my career. To go to Pakistan after a long time and see the love and joy they have for cricket was incredible. They were starved of world-class live cricket," he said. The right-handed batter participated in six PSL editions, representing Islamabad United and Quetta Gladiators. In 46 PSL matches, he scored 1,361 runs at a strike rate of 138.59, including nine fifties. It is pertinent to mention that the International Cricket Council (ICC), on December 24, 2024, announced the highly anticipated schedule for the men's Champions Trophy 2025, which will be hosted by Pakistan. The eight-team tournament, consisting of 15 matches, will run from February 19 to March 9 across three venues: Karachi, Lahore, and Rawalpindi in Pakistan, as well as Dubai. The eight participating teams are divided into two groups. Group A comprises Pakistan, India, New Zealand, and Bangladesh, while Group B includes Afghanistan, South Africa, England, and Australia. Hosts Pakistan will face New Zealand in the curtain-raiser on February 19 in Karachi. The highly anticipated clash between arch-rivals Pakistan and India is scheduled for February 23 in Dubai. Pakistan will host a total of 10 matches at their home venues, while four matches, including all three of India's group-stage games and the first semi-final, will be played in Dubai.

Rashford dismisses claim over United exit

LONDON: Marcus Rashford has blasted "ridiculous" claims that the unsettled Manchester United star wants a new agent to fulfil his desire to quit Old Trafford. A report this week said England forward Rashford had met with a leading sports agency in a bid to engineer a move. The United youth academy graduate was omitted from four successive matchday squads last month, starting with the derby against Manchester City, before being an unused substitute for Monday's defeat by Newcastle. He has struggled badly over the last two seasons, netting just four times in the Premier League this term. Paris Saint-Germain and Chelsea are among the club linked with Rashford recently. But Rashford, who is currently represented by his brother Dwaine Maynard, responded to the latest claims about his future by insisting he had not changed agent. "Been a lot of false stories written over the past few weeks, but guys this is getting ridiculous - never met with any agency and don't have

any plans to..." he wrote on Instagram. Notably, Marcus Rashford had said last month "ready for a new challenge" amid the speculations of him being involved in a move away from England's Premier League. This led to media reports that United were looking to sell the England forward, who has been at United since the age of seven, and the 27-year-old spoke on the subject while visiting his old school to hand out Christmas presents. "For me, personally, I think I'm ready for a new challenge and the next steps," Rashford told football writer Henry Winter when asked if he was staying or leaving United. "When I leave it's going to be 'no hard feelings'. You're not going to have any negative comments from me about Manchester United. That's me as a person. "If I know that a situation is already bad I'm not going to make it worse. I've seen how other players have left in the past and I don't want to be that person. "When I leave I'll make a statement and it will be from me." - Agencies

Amad puts Sialkot on top in QEAT Final against Peshawar

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Skipper Amad Butt registered brilliant bowling figures of 4/51 to help Sialkot dismiss Peshawar for a modest total on the opening day of the Quaid-e-Azam Trophy (QEAT) final here at the UBL Sports Complex on Thursday. Put into bat first, Peshawar's batting unit unfolded on a mere 258 runs despite Zubair Khan's 47-run knock in the middle. The Sajid Khan-led side got off to a shaky start to their innings as Amad and Ali Raza dismantled their top order to reduce them to 70/3. Coming out to bat at number four, Nabi Gul offered some resistance against a ruthless Sialkot's bowling unit with an anchoring 44-run knock until falling victim to Shoaib Akhtar Jr in the second over after Lunch. Middle-order batters Mehran Ibrahim and Zubair then put together a cautious 39-run partnership for the fifth wicket, which culminated when Ali cleaned up the former on 31. Zubair then took the reins of Peshawar's batting expedition and put together brief partnerships with Abuzar Tariq and skipper Sajid before Ali got him caught behind in the final session.



The right-handed batter remained the top-scorer for Peshawar with a gutsy 47 off 126 deliveries, including six boundaries. Sajid and Niaz Khan then shared a 25-run partnership for the eighth wicket and added crucial runs to Peshawar's total. Their stand concluded with Sajid's dismissal off Shoaib in the 76th over after scoring a brisk 23 off 26 deliveries. Peshawar then lost another wicket in the next over as Amad bowled number 10 bat-

ter Mohammad Amir Khan for a four-ball duck. Niaz, on the other hand, frustrated Sialkot's bowlers with his cameo and pushed Peshawar's total past the 250-run mark until eventually falling victim to Amad after scoring a run-a-ball 31 with the help of five fours. Amad Butt led the bowling charge for Sialkot with four wickets, followed by Ali with three, while Shoaib bagged two. Ahsan Raza Bhatti chipped in with one scalp.

FO expresses concern over Indian...

FROM PAGE 01
like to continue dialogue with the neighbouring country on all aspects of bilateral relations including the issues related to security and border management. She said Pakistan is fully capable of defending its national security and sovereignty against any internal or external threat. Responding to a question, the spokesperson said Gwadar port, developed with the support of China, is for the development of Pakistan. She categorically stated Pakistan has no designs whatsoever to offer military bases to any foreign government or entity.

Siddiqui supports...

FROM PAGE 01
willingness to facilitate. "We hope they will bring written demands to the next session," Siddiqui added. He described the continuation of talks as a significant step forward, noting that the decision to extend negotiations by a week was made at the PTT's request, not the government's. "We have not made any demands of the PTT members," he clarified, adding that no discussions regarding elections or the 26th Amendment took place during the talks. Commenting on the legal cases, Senator Siddiqui stated that they are filed based on the nature of crimes. "Incidents occurred on November 26, and cases were subsequently registered. However, no guarantees can be provided that no cases will be filed against anyone," he explained.

Pardon 19 'not a...

FROM PAGE 01
many as 19 convicts have been pardoned "purely on humanitarian grounds" after they appealed for mercy. Noting that the remaining mercy petitions will be decided in due course of time, following the legal process, the military's media wing said that the 19 individuals, whose appeals have been accepted, shall be released after the completion of procedural formalities. Referring to the release of 20 convicts on humanitarian grounds in April 2024, the statement underscored the "strength of the due process and fairness, which ensures that justice is served while also taking into account the principles of compassion and mercy". The military court had first punished 25 individuals and a few days later, handed down punishments to 60 people.

Constitutional...

FROM PAGE 01
Election Commission of Pakistan will be held on January 7, 2025. Pleas against missing persons case will be heard on January 8. The constitutional bench will hear PML-N MNA Hamza Shahbaz's review application against the Deputy Speaker's ruling on January 9, 2025. The hearing of the case against the discretionary powers of the Chief Justices of the High Courts will be held on January 10 while petition seeking ban on student organizations will be held on January 10, 2025.

19 convicts pardoned...

FROM PAGE 01
11. Asher Butt s/o Muhammad Arshad Butt
12. Muhammad Waqas s/o Malik Muhammad Khalil
13. Sufayan Idrees s/o Idrees Ahmed
14. Muneeb Ahmed s/o Naveed Ahmed Butt
15. Muhammad Ahmed s/o Muhammad Nazir
16. Muhammad Nawaz s/o Abdul Samad
17. Muhammad Ali s/o Muhammad Boota
18. Muhammad Bilawal s/o Manzoor Hussain
19. Muhammad Ilyas s/o Muhammad Fazal Haleem
They all shall be released after completion of procedural formalities. All those convicted retain the right of appeal and other legal remedies as per the law and the constitution. The remission of punishments is a testament to the strength of the due process and fairness, which ensures that justice is served while also taking into account the principles of compassion and mercy.

Djokovic and Sabalenka through to Brisbane quarters

Ukraine's Anhelina Kalinina beat China's Yue Yuan 6-1 6-4 to set-up a last-eight match against Australia's Kimberly Birrell, while world number 64 Ashlyn Krueger will take on Russia's Polina Kudermetova

WEB DESK

BRISBANE: Novak Djokovic kept his hopes of winning a 100th career ATP title alive with a straightforward 6-3 6-3 win against Gael Monfils in the Brisbane International last 16. The Serb, 37, will face Reilly Opelka in the last eight after the American's 7-6 (11-9) 7-6 (7-4) victory against Italy's Matteo Arnaldi. Djokovic took his only break point opportunity in the first set, helping him to race into a 4-1 lead and to take the set within 36 minutes. Monfils, 38, missed a simple forehand on serve at 1-1 and the Frenchman failed to take a point in the remainder of the game as Djokovic broke early in the second set. Djokovic held serve three times from there and broke Monfils again at 5-3 to wrap up his 20th career win against the Frenchman. Opelka awaits Djokovic in the quarter-finals,



when the pair will play each other for the first time. The 24-time Grand Slam



winner says he will have to tailor his game to face the big-serving American,

who hit 25 aces against Arnaldi. "Opelka has been injured and he struggled a lot for a couple of years," said Djokovic. "My gosh, I'm going to have to probably step back a few steps for that first serve." World number one Aryna Sabalenka will face Marie Bouzkova in the quarter-finals after breezing past Yulia Putintseva. The Belarusian beat Putintseva 6-4 7-6 (7-2) as she aims to win her 18th career title in Australia. The 26-year-old will face world number 44 Bouzkova, who beat former world number one Victoria Azarenka, 6-4 6-4 earlier in the day. Ukraine's Anhelina Kalinina beat China's Yue Yuan 6-1 6-4 to set-up a last-eight match against Australia's Kimberly Birrell, while world number 64 Ashlyn Krueger will take on Russia's Polina Kudermetova. Former world number two Ons Jabeur will play Russia's Mirra Andreeva in the final quarter-final fixture.

Briefs

PIJ says Israeli hostage tried to take own life

DUBAI: An Israeli hostage held by Gaza's Islamic Jihad militant group has tried to take his own life, the spokesperson for the movement's armed wing said in a video posted on Telegram on Thursday. One of the group's medical teams intervened and prevented him from dying, the Al Quds Brigades spokesperson added, without going into any more detail on the hostage's identity or current condition. Israeli authorities did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Militants led by Gaza's ruling Hamas movement killed 1,200 people and took 251 others hostage in an attack in southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, according to Israeli tallies. Hamas ally Islamic Jihad also took part in the assault. The military campaign that Israel launched in response has killed more than 45,500 Palestinians, according to health officials in the coastal enclave. Islamic Jihad spokesman Abu Hamza said the hostage had tried to take his own life three days ago due to his psychological state, without going into more details. Abu Hamza accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government of setting new conditions that had led to "the failure and delay" of negotiations for the hostage's release. The man had been scheduled to be released with other hostages under the conditions of the first stage of an exchange deal with Israel. Abu Hamza said. He did not specify when the man had been scheduled to be released or under which deal. Arab mediators' efforts, backed by the United States, have so far failed to conclude a ceasefire in Gaza, under a possible deal that would also see the release of Israeli hostages in return for the freedom of Palestinians in Israeli prisons. Islamic Jihad's armed wing had issued a decision to tighten the security and safety measures for the hostages, Abu Hamza added. In July, Islamic Jihad's armed wing said some Israeli hostages had tried to kill themselves after it started treating them in what it said was the same way that Israel treated Palestinian prisoners. "We will keep treating Israeli hostages the same way Israel treats our prisoners," Abu Hamza said at that time. Israel has dismissed accusations that it mistreats Palestinian prisoners.—Agencies

Vote threshold for presidential candidates not legally binding: Court

JAKARTA: Indonesia's Constitutional Court on Thursday said a law setting a minimum vote level before political parties could nominate a presidential candidate was not legally binding, which could potentially lead to a wider slate of nominees running in 2029. The current law requires parties to win 20 percent of the vote, whether individually or through a coalition, at a legislative election to put forward a presidential candidate. It was challenged by a group of university students who argued it limited the rights of voters and smaller parties. Chief Justice Suharto granted the petition, saying the threshold "had no binding legal power," but the ruling did not specify if the requirement should be abolished or lowered. All political parties should be allowed to nominate a candidate, judge Saldi Isra said. Rifiq Nizamy Karsayuda, the head of the parliamentary commission overseeing elections, told local media that lawmakers would take action following the ruling, calling it "final and binding." Indonesia's law minister did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the ruling. Arya Fernandes, political analyst at Center for Strategic and International Studies, welcomed the ruling as it allowed smaller parties to nominate a candidate and lessened their dependence on bigger parties. Arya said lawmakers could still make revisions to the law that would limit the ruling's impact as the court did not abolish the vote threshold. Indonesia's presidential elections are held every five years.—APP

27 migrants die off Tunisia, 83 rescued in shipwrecks

Since the beginning of the year, the Tunisian human rights group FTDES has counted "between 600 and 700" migrants killed or missing in shipwrecks off Tunisia. More than 1,300 migrants died or disappeared in 2023

TUNIS: Twenty-seven migrants, including women and children, died after two boats capsized off central Tunisia, with 83 people rescued, a civil defense official told AFP on Thursday. The rescued and dead passengers, who were found off the Kerkennah Islands off central

Tunisia, were aiming to reach Europe and were all from sub-Saharan African countries, said Zied Sdiri, head of civil defense in the city of Sfax. Searches were still underway for other possible missing passengers, according to the Tunisian National Guard, which oversees the coast guard.

Tunisia is a key departure point for irregular migrants seeking to reach Europe with Italy, whose island of Lampedusa is only 150 kilometers (90 miles) from Tunisia, often their first port of call. Each year, tens of thousands of people attempt the perilous Mediterranean crossing, which

has seen a spate of recent shipwrecks, with the dangers exacerbated by bad weather. On December 18, at least 20 migrants from sub-Saharan Africa died in a shipwreck off the city of Sfax, with five others missing. Earlier on December 12, the coast guard rescued 27 African migrants near Jebenia-

na, north of Sfax, but 15 were reported dead or missing. Since the beginning of the year, the Tunisian human rights group FTDES has counted "between 600 and 700" migrants killed or missing in shipwrecks off Tunisia. More than 1,300 migrants died or disappeared in 2023.—Agencies

Iranians commemorate 5th martyrdom anniversary of Soleimani

TEHRAN: Tens of thousands of Iranian people have flocked to the southeastern province of Kerman to pay homage to top anti-terror commander General Qasem Soleimani. General Soleimani's hometown and burial site hosted a deluge of the legendary commander's lovers and followers from all walks of life and various social strata on Thursday in a cold snowy weather on his fifth martyrdom anniversary. Commemorations and special events to remember General Soleimani were also held in several other cities, including the capital Tehran. "In an era when warfare relies on weapons, the mass of bombs, and the number of piles of dead, he became known as the 'Commander of Hearts' because great commanders are not the conquerors of geographically known lands; they are the conquerors of hearts, and that is why their conquests remain forever," Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei wrote on X. "On the anniversary of the martyrdom of the brave commander of Islam, the pride of the resistance, the soldier of the homeland, and the great hero in the fight against terrorism, Hajj



Qasem Soleimani, we honor his memory and salute the souls of all the martyrs who defended the Iranian nation and resisted aggression, terrorism, and occupation," he added. General Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), and their

companions were assassinated in a US drone strike authorized by then-US President Donald Trump near the Iraqi capital Baghdad's International Airport on January 3, 2020. Both commanders were highly revered across West Asia because of their key role in fighting the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in the region, particularly in Iraq and Syria. In less than a week after the attack, Iraqi lawmakers

approved a bill that required the government to expel all US-led foreign forces from the country. The IRGC also targeted the US-run Ain al-Asad base in Iraq's western province of Anbar with a wave of missile attacks in retaliation for the assassination of General Soleimani. Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on Wednesday praised as "unique" the sacrifices of Iran's top anti-terror commander. "Martyr Soleimani's constant strategy was to revive the Resistance Front. He always tried to revitalize the resistance," the Leader said. An Iranian court in December ruled that the United States government and a number of individuals and entities should pay nearly \$50 billion in compensation for their roles in the assassination of General Soleimani.—DNA

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China slaps sanctions on US firms over Taiwan arms sales

BEIJING: China sanctioned 10 US defence firms on Thursday over arms sales to Taiwan, its second round of measures against American companies over the issue in less than a week. Subsidiaries of Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics, and Raytheon that had "participated in selling arms to Taiwan" were added to China's "Unreliable Entities List", the country's Ministry of Commerce announced on Thursday. They will be prohibited from import and export activities or making new investments in China, while their senior managers will be banned from entering the country, the ministry said. Last Friday China announced sanctions on seven US military-industrial companies, including Boeing subsidiary Insitu, also over US military assistance to Taiwan. The self-ruled island is a key point of contention between Beijing and Washington. China claims Taiwan as part of its territory and has said it will not renounce the use of force to bring it under its control. Washington does not recognise the democratic island diplomatically but is its strategic ally and largest supplier of weapons. In December, US President Joe Biden agreed to provide \$571.3 million in defence support to Taiwan. The actions "interfere in China's internal affairs, and undermine China's sovereignty and territorial integrity", a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson said at a regular press conference last Friday.—DNA

S Korea police raid Jeju Air, Muan airport over fatal plane crash

SEOUL: South Korean police said on Thursday they had raided Jeju Air and Muan International Airport as part of its investigation into a passenger jet crash that killed 179 people on Sunday. A Jeju Air spokesperson said it is checking the situation. South Korea's acting President Choi Sang-mok said on Thursday immediate action must be taken if a special inspection of all Boeing 737-800 aircraft operated in the country finds any issues as authorities ramp up a probe into Sunday's deadly air crash. The conversion of data from the Jeju Air 7C2216 cockpit voice recorder to audio file should be completed by Friday, Choi told a disaster management meeting, which could provide critical information on the final minutes of the doomed flight. All 175 passengers and four of six crew members were killed on Sunday when the Jeju Air jet belly-landed at Muan International Airport in the country's southwest and slammed into an earth-and-concrete embankment, bursting into flames. Two crew members, located near the tail of the Boeing 737-800, survived. "As there's great public concern about the same aircraft model involved in the accident, the transport ministry and relevant organizations must conduct a thorough inspection of operation maintenance, education, and training," Choi said. Choi's comments at the start of the meeting were provided by his office. Questions by air safety experts on what led to the deadly explosion have focused on the embankment designed to prop up navigation equipment that they said may have been built too close to the end of the runway. The aircraft's flight data recorder, which sustained some damage, is being taken to the United States for analysis in cooperation with the US National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). Investigators from the NTSB, US Federation Aviation Administration and the maker of the aircraft, Boeing, are in South Korea to help probe the worst air disaster in the country. Choi asked no effort be spared in helping the families of the victims as the remains of those killed are handed over them. He also asked the police to take action against anyone posting "malicious" messages and fake news on social media related to the disaster.—APP

Türkiye affirms continued fight against terrorists in Syria

Defense ministry sources said on Thursday that Syria, in a new era, had no room for terrorist groups and neither Ankara nor new rulers of neighboring countries would not allow them, referring to PKK/YPG and Daesh

ANKARA: "Less words, more action" is the motto of the Turkish army in Syria, defense ministry sources said on Thursday. They were referring to action against terrorist groups, namely PKK/YPG, as Syria reels from the impact of the civil war that ended with the collapse of the Baathist regime. Sources reaffirmed Ankara's stance on opposition to terrorist groups in Syria in the new era. "Neither the new Syrian administration nor Türkiye will tolerate it," sources said. PKK/YPG found itself cornered after anti-regime forces toppled the decades-long regime in December. It sought to exploit the situation by attempting to

capture new areas. Still, the Syrian National Army (SNA) stopped the group's advance and, moreover, captured Tal Rifaat and Manbij, two PKK bastions, last month. The terrorist group, backed by the United States under the guise of a joint fight against Daesh, sought Washington's assistance in the face of the SNA offensive and later reached out to the new administration. It seeks integration into the new Syrian army but reportedly rejects dissolving itself. PKK/YPG terrorists have been launching attacks since Dec. 20 around the Tishrin Dam on the Euphrates River, located on the outskirts of Manbij. SNA forces are re-

sponding to these attacks. Sources said Defense Ministry officials were in talks with their counterparts in Syria to establish cooperation in various fields and strategic relations, pledging assistance to Syria. Sources added that defense and security cooperation between the two countries was essential both for reinforcing countries' security and for regional peace and calm. "Turkish Armed Forces will continue standing with the people of Syria and support them in this transition process," sources said. On the question of whether Türkiye would shut down or reduce the number of observation points in Idlib, sources

said authorities were following developments in "a dynamic area" and updating plans based on developments. "Measures are being taken for the possibility of relocation of units," sources said. In 2017, Türkiye started establishing observation points in Idlib, which was a flashpoint town in clashes between the regime and anti-regime forces, in a bid to protect civilians and establish a de-escalation zone. A total of 12 points were established under a 2018 deal with Russia, the main backer of the now-defunct Assad regime. Separately, Defense Ministry spokesperson Brigadier Admiral Zeki Aktürk said the ministry was exploring co-

operation with the new administration in Syria. At a weekly news briefing in the capital, Ankara, on Thursday, Aktürk said Türkiye permanently attached importance to Syria's unity, territorial integrity and counterterrorism efforts. PKK/YPG carved out a self-styled autonomous region for itself in Syria's northeast amid a security vacuum in the war-torn country. Aktürk said they were preparing to boost Syria's security and defense capacity. "In addition, our military units are taking measures to ensure the prevalence of stability in the region. We will continue to adhere to measures to annihilate and prevent terrorist groups," Aktürk stated.—Agencies

Russian bomb attack kills one in S Ukraine

KYIV: A Russian bomb attack on Ukraine's southern Zaporizhzhia region has killed one person, local authorities said Thursday. Moscow's forces are trying to seize full control of the frontline region, which it claimed to have annexed in 2022, months after invading. Russia fired 11 guided aerial bombs on the village of Stepanogorsk, just a few kilometers from the front line, late on Wednesday. "A five-story building was destroyed. A man was killed. Rescuers removed his body from under the rubble," Zaporizhzhia's Ukrainian governor Ivan Fedorov said on Telegram. The strike comes amid an escalation in aerial attacks, including Russian drone strikes on the center of Kyiv that killed two people in the early hours of New Year's Day. Ukraine is fearing a possible renewed Russian offensive toward the regional capital of Zaporizhzhia, around 35 kilometers (22 miles) from the front line and still under Ukrainian control.—APP

Bangladesh court again rejects bail for Hindu leader who led rallies

DHAKA: A court in southeastern Bangladesh on Thursday rejected a plea for bail by a jailed Hindu leader who led large rallies in the Muslim-majority country demanding better security for minority groups. Krishna Das Prabhu faces charges of sedition after he led huge rallies in the southeastern city of Chattogram. Hindu groups say there have been thousands of attacks against Hindus since early August, when the secular government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was overthrown. Authorities did not produce Prabhu at the hearing during which Chattogram Metropolitan Sessions Judge Saiful Islam rejected the bail plea, according to Public Prosecutor Mofizul Haque Bhuiyan. Security was tight, with police and soldiers guarding the court. Apurba Kumar Bhattacharjee, a lawyer representing Prabhu, said they would appeal the decision. The court rejected an earlier request for bail made while Prabhu did not have lawyers. Lawyers who sought to represent him at that hearing said they were threatened or intimidated, and many of them are facing charges related to the death of a Muslim lawyer when Prabhu was arrested in Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka, in November.—APP

UK plans tough laws to fight people smugglers

LONDON: Suspected people smugglers will face severe curbs under new laws in Britain, the government said on Thursday, as it steps up efforts to fight illegal migration and strengthen border security. Those suspected will face travel bans, social media blackouts and restrictions on phone usage to help the government "dismantle organized immigration crime networks," the statement added. "We will give law enforcement stronger powers they need to pursue and stop more of these vile gang networks," interior minister Yvette Cooper said, describing border security as one of the foundations of the government's recently laid out 'plan for change'. Prime Minister Keir Starmer, elected to office in July, has prioritized tackling illegal migration by cracking down on the gangs who smuggle people across the English Channel, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, into Britain from France. Over 36,800 people made the dangerous crossings to arrive in Britain in 2024, a 25 percent year-on-year surge, according to government data. Several dozen have died attempting to do so, with the Refugee Council charity terming it the deadliest year on record for such crossings. The planned interim serious crime prevention orders (SCPO) will allow immediate action to disrupt and deter suspected serious criminality, including organized immigration crime, the statement said.—APP

Uzbek envoy, TDAP chief executive discuss bilateral trade

DNA

KARACHI: The Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Pakistan Alisher Tukhtaev and Trade Counsellor Bakrom Yusupov called on Trade Development Authority Chief Executive Zubair Motiwala and Sheryar Taj here at TDAP Headquarters on Thursday. Various issues related to enhancement of bilateral trade between the two countries were discussed during the meeting. A brief presentation was given by the Ambassador of Uzbekistan followed by a video on investment opportunities and trade potential in Uzbekistan. The Chief Executive TDAP also briefed the Uzbek Envoy on working and functioning of TDAP. He also emphasized the importance of TDAP's official web portal, PTP. The two sides also agreed to participate in more than the existing number exhibitions in the respective countries and exchange trade delegations simultaneously. The Secretary TDAP apprised and invited Uzbek Ambassador to attend upcoming mega events of TDAP like Healthcare and Engineering Show at Lahore and Food Agri Manufacturing Exhibition, Lahore.

Briefs

12 people killed in Montenegro shooting spree

FOREIGN DESK

LONDON: A gunman has killed 12 people, including two children, in a series of shootings in southern Montenegro. Authorities said the man - later identified as Aco Martinovic, 45 - had been drinking heavily all day when got into an altercation with another guest at a restaurant in the Cetinje area around 17.30 (16.30 GMT) on New Year's Day. After the argument, Martinovic went home to retrieve a weapon, then returned to the restaurant and began his rampage, killing several customers. Martinovic then drove to five other locations and shot several more people, including members of his immediate and extended family. The restaurant owner and his children, aged 10 and 13, were also killed. Police tracked Martinovic down after an hours-long manhunt. When they ordered him to drop his weapon during a stand-off, he fatally injured himself and died as he was being transported to hospital. The government has declared three days of national mourning from Thursday, with Prime Minister Milojko Spajic saying the shooting had "shrouded our country in black". Interior Minister Danilo Saranovic called the incident a "consequence of disturbed interpersonal relations", according to AFP news agency.

Changes to Syria's school curriculum spark outrage

DAMASCUS: Syria's new government is facing backlash after announcing changes to the school curriculum, including introducing what some critics say is an Islamist slant to teaching. The changes, published in a list of amendments on the education ministry's official Facebook page, include changing the phrases "path of goodness" to "Islamic path," and "those who have been damned and have gone astray" to "Jews and Christians" - which pertains to an ultra-conservative interpretation of a verse in Islam's holy book, the Quran. The modifications also redefine the word "martyr," from someone who died for the homeland to someone who sacrificed themselves "for the sake of God." Some chapters were removed entirely, the list shows, including a chapter on "the origins and evolution of life." It is not clear yet whether the amendments have yet been rolled out, but they would apply to all students from ages 6 to 18. While some changes renouncing former President Bashar al-Assad's regime were welcome to those reacting online, the religious chapter modifications sparked outrage on social media. - Agencies

Aurangzeb meets Pak envoy to US to discuss economic ties

Meeting also decided to ensure regular updates on macroeconomic data with stakeholders and the diaspora in the United States to encourage investment in Pakistan's growing economy

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb met with Mr. Rizwan Saeed Sheikh, Ambassador of Pakistan to the United States of America, who called on the Minister at Finance Division today. The meeting focused on strengthening the Pakistan-US bilateral relationship, particularly in the areas of trade, investment, and economic cooperation. During the meeting, the importance of the Pakistan-US partnership, and the acknowledgment of the US as Pakistan's largest trading partner and export destination was reiterated and it was decided to further enhance economic diplomacy and explore new opportunities for joint business ventures and economic collaborations between the two countries. Given the positive macroeconomic developments in Pakistan, including improvements in key economic indicators and enhanced macroeconomic stability, both the Minister and the Ambassador agreed to capitalize on these openings by actively promoting investment opportunities in Pakistan, with a focus on engaging the Pakistani diaspora. The meeting also decided to ensure regular updates on macroeconomic data with stakeholders and the diaspora in the US to encourage investment in Pakistan's growing economy. Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue chairs 3rd meeting of REMIT Steering Committee Meanwhile, Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb chaired the 3rd meeting of Revenue Mobilisation, Investment and Trade Programme (REMIT) Steering Committee here today to review



the status and progress on the implementation of decisions taken by the Committee in its earlier meetings with regard to revenue mobilization, investment climate, trade and macro-economy. British High Commissioner to Pakistan, Ms Jane Marriott and senior leadership from key government ministries, including Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Industries and Production, Board of Investment, FBR and REMIT's implementing partners - World Bank, GCSI and ASI were also present. The committee discussed the progress made by stakeholders across various sectors, focusing on strengthening macroeconomic stability and creating conditions conducive to high and sustained inclusive growth. Areas reviewed included revenue mobilization, trade, investment climate, and macroeconomic governance, with a particular emphasis on addressing climate change challenges. Senator Muhammad

Aurangzeb commended the overall progress of the Programme and called for a more proactive and coordinated approach among implementing partners. He urged the effective use of management and monitoring tools to ensure the successful completion of the Programme's objectives. The Minister also emphasized his personal commitment to overseeing the progress of activities and deliverables, ensuring that the Programme stays on track.

Omar opposes civilians' trial in military courts

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Opposition Leader Omar Ayub Khan expressed strong opposition to the trial of civilians in military courts, terming the process fundamentally inadequate. "Civilians cannot be kept in military custody," he remarked. Speaking to journalists at the Parliament House, Khan dismissed concerns over the legal fees paid by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for its lawyers. "Why should anyone else be bothered by this? It's none of their problems," he said. He clarified that only one or two professional lawyers had been compensated for their services, while others, including Salman Akram Raja, were representing the party pro bono. Khan further mentioned that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur would also participate in the negotiations.

Gaza police chief killed in Israeli attack

GAZA CITY: An Israeli airstrike on a tent camp sheltering displaced families in the southern part of the Gaza Strip has killed the chief of police force in the coastal territory Mahmoud Salah along with his deputy Hussam Shahwan and several others, including children. The Palestinian Hamas resistance movement said on Thursday that they lost their lives in the attack on the al-Mawasi "humanitarian zone" west of the city of Khan Younis. Medics said 11 people, including three children and two women, were killed in the Israeli air attack, and that 15 others were wounded. The Gaza Interior Ministry condemned the killing of the two police officers, saying "they were performing their humanitarian and national duty in serving our people". "By committing the assassination, the occupation continues to spread chaos in the Strip and deepen the human suffering of citizens. The police force is a civil protection force that works to provide services to citizens," it said. The ministry noted that Salah spent 30 years in the police and was appointed its chief six years ago. - Agencies

CAA seeks end of UK ban after PIA resumes Europe flights

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: After the resumption of Pakistan International Airlines' direct flights to Europe, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has become active in efforts to lift the ban imposed on the airline's operations to the UK. According to sources at the CAA, a delegation from the UK's Department for Transport (DFT) will visit Pakistan in mid-January. PIA's direct flight operations to the UK are expected to resume in February. The UK Civil Aviation team will arrive in Karachi between January 15 and 17, 2025, Express News reported. The CAA has contacted British aviation authorities to request an exemption in the security audit process. The UK DFT has shown a willingness to grant this exemption and expressed confidence in CAA's manual report. The British aviation team will formally conduct a safety audit of both CAA and PIA. The British aviation team has already conducted an audit of PIA and CAA, with successful results. CAA Director-General Nader Shafi Dar is personally leading safety and security teams to ensure the timely resumption of direct flights to the UK. The CAA will brief the DFT delegation during their visit. There is strong hope

that the ban on PIA's direct flights to the UK will be lifted by February. PIA is ready to resume its operations to the UK, with direct flights to Manchester initially, followed by London and other cities in the second phase. PIA will operate its Boeing 777 aircraft for flights to Europe and the UK. Earlier, Air Vice Marshal Amir Hayat was reappointed as the CEO of PIA, according to a notification issued by the Pakistani government. Hayat will serve as the acting CEO until a permanent appointment is made. Previously, according to a PIA spokesperson, with the expansion of its network and the potential resumption of flights to the UK and Europe, the national air carrier is in the process of rejuvenating its aircraft that had been in storage for a long time, bringing them back into the operational fleet. According to the management's plan, the operational fleet of Boeing 777 will reach eight aircraft. Similarly, the management has planned to increase the number of A-320 aircraft to 12 and ATR planes to two. "This fleet requirement is in line with the aggressive operational plan that PIA has set for itself for the year 2025," the airline official said. Director General CAA Nadir Shafi Dar announced plans on Wednesday to export trained Pakistani pilots to meet the demand of international airlines.

Digital Nation Pak Bill postponed

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly's Standing Committee on IT and Telecommunications, chaired by Federal Minister Aminul Haq on Thursday again postponed the Digital Nation Pakistan Bill. During the meeting, committee members raised concerns over Pakistan's inadequate internet infrastructure. Chairman PTA revealed that three out of seven submarine cables had been damaged earlier this year, significantly disrupting services. These cables were restored in October, yet internet performance remains below global standards. He emphasized the urgent need for laying fiber-optic cables and developing digital highways to address these issues. The PTA chairman further disclosed that Pakistan has not added a single submarine cable in the past decade, which has hindered the country's digital growth. While the Ookla report indicates improvements in internet services since October, platforms like WhatsApp continue to report technical issues, highlighting unresolved problems in the network. In response to concerns about internet shutdowns, the chairman clarified that under the PECA Act, the PTA acts on government directives to block or restore social media platforms. However, he stressed that the PTA does not have the technical ability to throttle internet speeds and can only execute complete shutdowns when ordered. Minister of State Shaza Fatima defended the government's efforts, stating that misinformation is being spread about their intentions. - DNA

Toshakhana 2.0 case hearing adjourned till January 6

The hearing has been postponed after the defence lawyer failed to appear in court

FAISAL SHEIKH

RAWALPINDI: The hearing for the Toshakhana case 2.0 involving Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife, former first lady Bushra Bibi, was delayed today due to the absence of Bushra Bibi's defence lawyer. The case, being heard at Adiala Jail, could not proceed as planned due to the illness of Bushra Bibi's lawyer, Arshad Tabrez, who was unable to appear in court, Express News reported. As a result, the cross-examination of a key witness, Benjamin, could not be completed. Special Public

Prosecutor Zulfiqar Abbas Naqvi urged Imran Khan's lawyer, Qausain Mufti, to proceed with the cross-examination. However, Khan's lawyer insisted that the cross-examination of the witness be completed by Bushra Bibi's lawyer before proceeding with his own. The court, presided over by Special Judge Central Shahrulh Arjumand, instructed the lawyers to complete the cross-examination at the next hearing. The case was adjourned until Monday, January 6, 2025. The court also warned that if the cross-examination is not completed during the next hearing, it will take disciplinary action. In the last hearing, a list of 108 gifts received by former Prime Minister Imran Khan during his time in office was presented in the Toshakhana 2.0 case. The case was heard by Judge Shahrulh Arjumand in a special court at Adiala Jail. Imran Khan appeared in court for the hearing, accompanied by his legal team, including Bushra Bibi, Salman Akram Raja, Barrister Gohar, and Faisal Chaudhry. A key witness from the Cabinet Division, representing the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), also testified in court. During the proceedings, the witness was cross-examined by Bushra Bibi's lawyer, Arshad Tabraiz. The cross-examination is expected to continue in the next hearing, with Khan's lawyer, Salman Safdar, also set to question the witness.

Ethiopian envoy hails 'Uraan Pakistan'

Ethiopia and Pakistan can learn from each other experiences and strengthen their trade and investment relations by fostering economic cooperation between the two brotherly countries

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Jemal Beker Abdula, the Special Envoy and Ambassador Extraordinary of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, has commended the "Uraan Pakistan" programme, launched by the Government of Pakistan for achieving higher economic growth and national prosperity. He lauded the initiative during a meeting with H.E. Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister for Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives, at his office on Thursday. During the meeting, both sides discussed matters of mutual interest including trade and investment cooperation between the two brotherly countries. On the occasion, the Ambassador briefed the Minister about the transformational change brought about in Ethiopia by the Prosperity Party which is led by Prime Minister H.E. Dr. Abiy Ahmed who introduced and implemented major reforms in political, economic and social spheres. He highlighted the political and economic liberalization achieved by the FDR Ethiopia which had not only strengthened its democracy but also the national economy which has been in consistent growth with the political, economic, social and legal reforms. The Ambassador said the Home Grown Economic Reforms is also an outcome of these reforms in the country which focused on addressing macroeconomic imbalances, increasing domestic production and attracting the foreign direct investment that led to a major boost in job creation. Ethiopia and Pakistan can learn from each other experiences and strengthen their trade and investment relations by fostering economic cooperation between the two brotherly countries, the Ambassador remarked. The Ambassador also invited the Minister to grace the Single Country Exhibition of Pakistan scheduled for May 2025 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. On the other hand, the Minister said he looked forward to visit the FDR Ethiopia which enjoyed brotherly relations with the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. He noted the growth in the bilateral relations of the two countries with the opening of the Ethiopian Embassy in Islamabad, exchange of official and business



delegation, and the commencement of the Ethiopian Airlines operations in Pakistan. The FDR Ethiopia is one of the success stories in Africa which has turned around the economy through pluralistic economic policies, the Minister remarked while terming Ethiopia a beacon of prosperity in Africa.

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