



Islamabad POST

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Detailed News On Page-06

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Detailed News On Page-07



30 passengers offloaded at Karachi airport

Pressure mounts on Pakistan to check human trafficking

The government faces the dual challenge of addressing systemic corruption and ensuring that law enforcement agencies are both effective and transparent in their operations

ANSAR MAHMOOD BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistani authorities have intensified their crackdown on human smugglers in response to mounting international pressure, particularly from European nations. Sources reveal that several European countries have formally lodged strong protests with the Pakistani government, urging the establishment of a comprehensive and foolproof mechanism to curb this pervasive issue at its roots. These countries contend that such illegal activities are unlikely to occur without the complicity or negligence of security officials tasked with preventing them. In light of these concerns, the Pakistani government recently dismissed approximately 36 officials from the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) over their alleged involvement in human trafficking. However, insiders claim that a significant number of officials remain complicit in these operations, highlighting the scale of the challenge. Reports suggest that human smugglers often evade accountability due to their connections with influential figures, including politicians. These traffickers allegedly finance the political campaigns of certain candidates, who, once elected to parliament, provide protection and legal cover to their benefactors. This

nexus between human traffickers and political elites has made it exceedingly difficult to dismantle the network, even when culprits are apprehended or face legal scrutiny. International stakeholders continue to push for stricter action, emphasizing that unchecked human trafficking tarnishes Pakistan's global image and undermines regional security. The government faces the dual challenge of addressing systemic corruption and ensuring that law enforcement agencies are both effective and transparent in their operations.

In a related development, at least 30 passengers set for travel to different countries were offloaded from planes at the Jinnah International Airport in Karachi late on Saturday night over suspicion of human smuggling, sources from the immigration department told. Immigration officials said that most of the offloaded individuals were going to fall victim to human smuggling. The officials said most of the detained individuals had been transferred to the Anti-Human Smuggling Circle for further investigation, while multiple people were allowed to go back home. Officials reported that the offloaded passengers were questioned for various reasons. Abid Ali, a passenger bound for Saudi Arabia, was flagged on the Integrated Border Manage-

ment System (IBMS) list. Similarly, Salman Riaz, a public servant traveling to the Gulf on an employment visa, lacked the required no-objection certificate (NOC).

Several passengers heading to Saudi Arabia – Aftab Ahmed, Mohammad Khalil, Mohammad Riaz, and Ahmed Khan – were found to have incomplete documents. Another passenger, Faiz, holding a visit visa, lacked sufficient funds for travel expenses and hotel bookings. Officials also suspected Umrah passengers Iqbal, Imran, Mujahid, another Imran, and Ijaz of being involved in human trafficking.

In another case, Oman-bound passenger Shaukat was found without sufficient funds in his bank account for travel expenses and hotel bookings. Babar Khalil and Hamza Javed, also traveling to Oman, were offloaded due to incomplete work visa documentation. Records showed that Aminullah, another Oman-bound passenger, held two passports issued under his name.

Dubai-bound passenger Saira Bano failed to provide adequate details regarding her travel expenses, accommodation, and purpose of visit. Furthermore, Nigerian nationals Daniel Saqib and Syed Bilal Hussain were traveling without work visas, while Tanzanian-bound passengers Sadaf Mustafa and Muhammad Ijaz lacked hotel bookings and sufficient travel funds.



RAHIM YAR KHAN: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif meets the President of U.A.E., His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, in Rahim Yar Khan. – DNA

PM meets MBZ

Pakistan, UAE commit to expand economic coop

Sheikh Mohammed highlights UAE's keen interest in collaborating with Pakistan in diverse sectors

STAFF REPORT

RAHIM YAR KHAN: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met the United Arab Emirates President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan who landed in Rahim Yar Khan on Sunday as both leaders expressed their shared commitment to deepening economic, political, and cultural ties. The UAE president was welcomed at Rahim Yar Khan's airport by PM Shehbaz, Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif, Information Minister Attallah Tarar, and others. During the meeting, they discussed a wide range of issues, including economic collaboration, regional stability, climate change, and the promotion of mutual interests on the global stage, the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement. PM Shehbaz praised the UAE's visionary leadership and its role as a key partner for Pakistan in development and investment.

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Uzbekistan plans 'direct flights' to Karachi

Ambassador Alisher Tukhtaev announces plans for "Made in Uzbekistan" industrial exhibition in Karachi

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: In an effort to strengthen bilateral ties with Pakistan, the Uzbekistan government is mulling to introduce a new direct flight route between its country and Karachi this year, Ambassador Alisher Tukhtaev announced on Sunday. During his official visit to Karachi from January 2-4,

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Briefs

'Section 144' imposed in Kurram

The development came on the heels of firing incident that left the DC seriously injured

DNA

KURRAM: In response to the deteriorating law and order situation, Section 144 has been enforced in Kurram district for a period of two months. The development came on the heels of a firing incident that left the deputy commissioner seriously injured. A case had been registered at the CTD police station against the suspects involved in the attack on the deputy commissioner. First Information Report (FIR), filed on the complaint of Additional SHO Ahmadi Shama, includes provisions related to terrorism and attempted murder. The district administration confirmed that Section 144 would prohibit the public display of weapons, aerial firing, and gatherings of more than five individuals. Officials stated that these measures aim to prevent any potential exploitation of the situation by miscreants and to restore public order.

Musk to launch Starlink service in Pakistan

DNA

WASHINGTON: Tech billionaire Elon Musk confirmed on Saturday that Starlink applied to launch internet services in Pakistan but was "waiting for approval from the government." Musk responded to a post on X by a Pakistani user, who said Starlink internet services could "leap" Pakistan "into the future, where every citizen has the chance to connect and grow". "Please, let Starlink be our bridge to tomorrow," the user urged the billionaire, who owns X and the electric vehicle company Tesla.

Over lack of consultation

PPP threatens to withdraw support from federal govt

PPP and Sindh govt kept in dark about establishment of PMSPA, says PPP spokesperson Shazia Marri

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) has issued a warning to PML-N-led government at the Centre for not taking it on board in the decision-making process, saying the "federal government will collapse the day PPP withdraws support". "The PML-N is constantly taking such decision wherein the PPP is not being taking into confidence. Perhaps the PML-N is not aware of the [seriousness of the matter]," said PPP spokesperson Shazia Marri in a statement issued on Sunday. She said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif-led government kept the PPP and the Sindh government in dark about the establishment of the Pakistan Maritime & Sea Port Authority (PMSPA). The PPP spokesperson also said they had long been demanding to convene a meeting of the Council of Common

Continued on Page 06

AC 'defers' £190m case verdict again

Sources say lawyers to be apprised of the new date tomorrow

COURT REPORT

RAWALPINDI: An accountability court in Rawalpindi has "deferred" the verdict of £190 million case against Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi for the third time. The announcement of the verdict was scheduled for Monday (today). The accountability court had reserved the verdict on Dec 18,

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Hanif Abbasi likely to get Railways ministry

The new cabinet ministers are likely to take oath either on January 9 or 10

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Senior PML N leader Hanif Abbasi is likely to get Railways ministry, sources confided to this agency on Sunday. Sources say Hanif Abbasi has been offered three choices Railways Ministry, Overseas and Communication ministries. Sources claim Hanif is interested in the Railways ministry. The new cabinet ministers are likely to take oath either on January 9 or 10. Other ministerial candidates include Tala Chaudhry, Tariq Fazal Chaudhry and some dissident of the PTI.

PTI 'seeks Imran's release via executive order' in talks

Hamid Raza denies govt's claim saying they only want end to "political victimisation, negative tactics by prosecution"

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The first and foremost demand of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in the high-stakes talks with the government remains to be the release of its founder Imran Khan, a Pakistani newspaper reported citing a member of the committee from the ruling side. This committee member also confirmed that the former ruling party has continued to push for the former prime minister's freedom in both rounds of talks, instead of the option of house arrest. "PTI made Khan's release its first demand during the December 23 meeting," said a member of the committee speaking on the condition of anonymity. "Even in the January 2 meeting, they started by insisting on the release of Khan and others, showing how central this demand is for them." When asked if the PTI wanted Khan released from Adiala jail or placed under house arrest in Banigala, the source clarified that PTI is demanding his release through an executive order. They are not asking for house arrest but seeking his complete freedom from custody, he added. To a question about PTI's public stance that the deposed

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Govt expresses surprise over PTI's new demands

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The government on Sunday expressed concerns about new demands made by PTI leader Asad Qaiser, namely the inclusion of an establishment representative in the ongoing negotiations, as well as the party's reluctance to present a formal charter of demands. While speaking on a private news channel program, Qaiser had said that the party would not continue negotiations with the government to bring down the political temperature unless it was granted "uninterrupted access" to ex-premier and party founder Imran Khan for consultation, saying that only he could make any final decisions.

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Nourian calls for unity among Muslim Ummah

The Consul General of the Islamic Republic of Iran said that Israel has committed the worst war crimes. More than 50,000 people have been martyred in Israel and 100,000 people have been injured, "Israel considers the areas of Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria and other countries to be its part and wants to occupy these areas too"

DNA

KARACHI: The Consul General of the Islamic Republic of Iran, posted in Karachi, Hasan Nourian has said that Muslims can fight Israel or the Zionist powers only by uniting, the enemy wants Muslims not to unite, so that their ambitions can be fulfilled, speaking at the seminar on the anniversary of General Qasim Soleimani and the day of the international protest movement. JUP chief Sahibzada Abul Khair Muhammad Zubair, Sheikh Shabir Hasan Mohsami, Ayatollah Ghulam Abbas, Allama Baqir Abbas Zaidi, Maulana Azad Jameel, Shah Feroze Rahmani and others also addressed the seminar, on this occasion, Sheikh Muhammad Hassan Salahuddin offered prayers. Hassan Nourian further said that Israel has committed the worst war crimes. More than 50,000 people have been martyred in Israel

and 100,000 people have been injured, "Israel considers the areas of Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria and other countries to be its part and wants to occupy these areas too". He said that the movement that has started for the freedom of Bait-ul-Maqdis is not only a movement of individuals, but it has become a movement of the Islamic world. "The countries that shout on human rights are the countries with most in-human actions", that the day is not far when the Palestinians will get their right and Israel and its followers will have to eat what the sow. He said that Iran and Pakistan have always supported the Palestinians. Sahibzada Abul Khair Muhammad Zubair said that all the martyrs, including Qasim Soleimani, have died on the right path and have given a clear message to Israel that it will face humiliation and disgrace at all levels. He said that Qasem Soleimani was such a popular figure

that America celebrated his martyrdom, a section wants to create disunity among Muslims, we have to understand this. Baqir Abbas Zaidi said that this is a struggle that has given a clear message to the world that people cannot be suppressed by force, Israel is not fighting a war, but is killing innocent children.

Asadullah Bhutto said that the great virtue of Iran is that it has made Muslim countries united against atrocities, today there is an effective voice against Israel in the entire Islamic world, the time is not far when Israel will also be divided. Feroze Rahmani said that it is necessary for 57 Islamic countries to make the United Nations of Muslims, when so many countries speak together, a message of solidarity will be sent. Azad Jameel said that instead of verbal accumulation, boycott the products of America and Israel, so that the money that America and Israel get will cut off.



PESHAWAR: Accountant General of Pakistan Ahmar Elahi with NBP Senior Executives Gul Bahar, Anjum Naseer, Saima Rahim and Umeed Ayaz inaugurating ATM machine at AGPR office.—DNA

Call for implementing 1949 resolution to resolve Kashmir dispute

LAHORE: Experts and Kashmiri people on Sunday have reiterated their unwavering commitment to the struggle for self-determination and urged the United Nations to play a key role in implementing the historic 5th January 1949 resolution to resolve the Kashmir dispute once and for all. In Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJ&K), leaders and organizations of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) have also demanded the UN to settle Kashmir issue, in accordance with its approved resolution. On January 5, 1949, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) had passed a resolution affirming Kashmiris' right to self-determination for their future through a UN-sponsored plebiscite. Kashmiris every year observe this day as the Right to Self-Determination Day. Talking to media in connection with Right to Self-Determination Day, experts said that the main impediment in resolving the Kashmir issue and providing the right to self-determination to the Kashmiris is India's expansionist designs and its stubbornness. They said the failure to implement the resolution passed by the United Nations Security Council on January 5, 1949, is a big question mark on the existence of the international body to settle this dispute between the two nuclear states.—APP

100,000 homes to get free solar panels in Punjab

DNA

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has announced that more than 100,000 homes in the province will receive free solar panels at a cost of Rs 10 billion. The registration deadline for the Chief Minister's free solar panel scheme is today, January 5. In a statement issued on Sunday, the CM said homes

consuming an average of 200 units of electricity on a single meter will be eligible for solar systems, which come in 550-watt and 1100-watt variants. The CM clarified that solar systems will be provided through a balloting process in June 2025 for consumers using up to 200 units of electricity. Successful applicants will have solar panels installed in their homes. CM Maryam Nawaz also emphasized the convenience of registration, which can be

done via the official portal at cmsolarscheme.punjab.gov.pk or by sending the bill reference number and National Identity Card number via SMS to 8800. Alternatively, citizens can contact the official helpline at 990302024. The CM stated that the provision of solar panels will offer significant relief to the public by reducing electricity bills. She further emphasized that Punjab is poised to become a hub for renewable energy.

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto remembered on his 97th birth anniversary

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The 97th birth anniversary of Pakistan's former prime minister and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) founder, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, is being commemorated on Sunday. Bhutto was born on this day in 1928 in Larkana. He completed his early education at Bombay's Cathedral High School. He joined the University of Southern California in 1947 and later the University of California at Berkeley in June 1949. After completing his degree with honors in Political Science at Berkeley in June 1950, he was admitted to Oxford. Bhutto was then called to the Bar at Lincoln's Inn in 1953. On his return to Pakistan, Bhutto started practicing law at Dingomah's. In 1958, he joined President Iskander Mirza's Cabinet as commerce minister. He was the youngest minister in Ayub Khan's cabinet. In 1963, he took over the post of Foreign Minister from Muhammad Ali Bogra. His first major achievement was concluding the Sino-Pakistan boundary agreement on March 2, 1963. In mid-1964, Bhutto helped convince Ayub of the wisdom of establishing closer economic and diplomatic links with Turkey and Iran. He laid the foundation of the Pakistan People's Party on November 30, 1967. Bhutto also made the country's defense impregnable by starting a nuclear program. He served as president of Pakistan from 1971 to 1973 and prime minister of Pakistan from 1973 to 1977.

Peace in KP vital for Pakistan's prosperity: Muqam

SWAT: Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Gilgit Baltistan and Kashmir Affairs, Engr Amir Muqam said here Sunday that peace in the province was vital for the sustainable progress and prosperity of Pakistan. Addressing a function hosted in the honour of Rana Masood Ahmad Khan, Chairman Prime Minister's Youth Programme here at Malam Jabba, Engr Amir Muqam said that people of KP had rendered great sacrifices for the country and special focus should be made on socioeconomic empowerment of its youth imperative for lasting peace and economic prosperity of the province. He said the country's overall stability and prosperity was linked with the peace of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Engr Amir Muqam said that terrorism was one of the major challenges confronted to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and collective efforts were required to wipe out this menace completely. He said that Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has accorded highest priority to socioeconomic empowerment of youth and Uran Pakistan has provided an excellent opportunity to youth to contribute in the country's development progress.

Engr Amir Muqam said that people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was eagerly awaiting the visits of PMLN central leadership to the province. He said that whenever difficult situation came on Pakistan the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa stood like a solid record for defense of its country. Engr Amir Muqam said that due to sacrifices of people of Swat, terrorism has been defeated in Malakand Division and the national flag was hoisted on top here. The Federal Minister said that he also faced several terror attacks in the past with steadfastness and always raised voices against terrorism. He said that when a then Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif was disqualified the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa staged big protest rallies to express solidarity with PMLN Quaid Nawaz Sharif. He said that PMLN leadership faced all cases in courts and later acquitted after allegations against them proved incorrect. He said courts

would decide the cases of PTI founder rather by the negotiation committee. He said that in 2024 General Election, PMLN had emerged as the second largest political party in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and his party enjoys an important position of opposition leader in KP Assembly today. He said that people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had also voted during referendum in favour of Pakistan in 1947. Engr Amir Muqam said that on the other hands, the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were deceived on the name of so called change for third time by PTI where problems of masses increased significantly due to poor governance, ramage of corruption and the use of financial resources on agitation politics. He said that it would have been made better if the share of NFC award given to KP was used on the people welfare, strengthening of counter terrorism department and police in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa rather than launching attacks on Islamabad. He said that PTI agenda was not welfare of masses rather person-specific.—DNA

Social safety nets to protect vulnerable segments of society

PESHAWAR: In recent years, Pakistan has been grappling with mounting challenges on economic fronts resulting into an increase in poverty and unemployment in the country. The country's most vulnerable segments including laborers, farmers, elderly, women, children, and people with disabilities have borne the brunt of socioeconomic imbalances and societal vulnerabilities due to huge debt burdens. To mitigate these great hardships, the government and civil society organizations have increasingly turned to social safety nets for socioeconomic emancipation of the downtrodden. These social safety nets are designed to provide a buffer against economic shocks, promote social inclusion, and ensure a more equitable distribution of financial resources in Pakistan. Like other socioeconomic sectors, social safety nets in Pakistan have evolved significantly over the last few decades. Initially, these were limited to emergency aid and small-scale welfare programs. However, in recent years, the government has expanded its social protection landscape, focusing on multi-dimensional poverty alleviation and resilience building for vulnerable groups. One of the most notable programs is the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), launched in 2008 has grown into the country's flagship cash transfer initiative of the modern era. "The basic aim of BISP is to provide direct financial support to the poorest households, particularly female-headed families under a transparent mechanism. BISP has made significant strides in reducing poverty by offering quarterly stipends which provided the much needed relief to underprivileged households," said Ms Javaria, BISP KP spokeswoman while talking to APP. She said the Federal Government has started major initiatives for socioeconomic empowerment of poor households and has recently signed an agreement with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Karandaaz Pakistan to further simplify and enhance the efficiency besides transparency of its funds transfer mechanism. Under the agreement, she said Karandaaz Pakistan will facilitate easy and transparent payment of funds to about 9.3 million beneficiaries in targeted districts of the country through the RAAST payment system.—DNA

Punjab governor urges nation to play role for stronger Pakistan

MUMTAZ AHMED BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: The recent meeting between Malik Azhar Shafi, CEO of Stallion Construction Group of Companies Canada, and Malik Manzar Shafi, Director General (New York), with Punjab Governor Sardar Saleem Haider at the Governor House marks a significant step in fostering development projects in Punjab and Pakistan. The discussions revolved around various ongoing and future initiatives, with the Governor affirming his full support for these efforts. Malik Azhar Shafi highlighted the company's ambition to expand its footprint in the UAE and Pakistan, emphasizing the importance of such collaborations for regional development. He described his visit as highly productive, bolstered by the Governor's assurances of cooperation. Governor Sardar Saleem Haider echoed these sentiments, stressing the collective responsibility to contribute to Pakistan's growth and prosperity. This meeting

underscores the importance of public-private partnerships in driving development and showcases the commitment of both government and private entities to work together for a brighter future.



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For further information please contact the following.

Maj (r) Sabih Ur Rehman
Mobile: 0300 8553342

National Days and Armed Forces Days

JANUARY

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

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Emergency

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A 100pc hike in FPCCI fees termed unfair

Mirza Abdul Rehman called upon all the chambers of commerce and trade associations to protest the move, as it was not in their best interests

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Former Vice President of the Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) and founder President of Attock Chamber of Commerce Mirza Abdul Rehman criticized FPCCI leadership on Sunday for increasing the mem-

bership fee for trade associations. He added that a one-hundred percent increase in the FPCCI fee structure is not acceptable as it would put an additional burden on trade associations and members of the business community. He said that resources are being wasted in the FPCCI. Instead of plugging leakages, income is increased by burdening trade bodies

and businessmen. In a statement issued here today, he said that United Business Group (UBG) had resumed power in FPCCI after a gap of five years as the voters had rejected it due to poor performance. He added that the UBG leaders are now silent over resource waste and illegal appointments in the FPCCI, for which the president of the FPCCI is directly responsible. Mirza

Abdul Rehman called upon all the chambers of commerce and trade associations to protest the move, as it was not in their best interests. He said that the Businessman Panel reduced the annual fees when it came to power, but the UBG is doing otherwise, which is not tolerable. The business leader said the fees for business councils, standing committees, visa recommenda-

tions, and SAARC visa processing have been doubled. This is not justified and should be reversed without delay. He said that most trade bodies are resolving their issues without the help of FPCCI, as its leaders are fully focused on self-projection and rewarding un-elected favorites by wasting millions of rupees, which should be stopped immediately.



ISLAMABAD: Butchers preparing chicken meat for customers at his shop in the Federal Capital.

PIAF wants steps as economy faces low growth, high domestic debt

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Industrial & Traders Association Front (PIAF) has said that the economy is stuck in low growth trap with poor human development outcome and increasing poverty, as economic conditions leave Pakistan highly vulnerable to climate shocks with insufficient public resources to finance development and that international experience suggests that domestic debt re-profiling did not always work unless associated with sharp and sustained structural reforms identified over four decades ago but remain pending to this day. PIAF Chairman Faheemur Rehman Saigol in a joint statement along with senior vice chairman Nasrullah Mughal and vice chairman Tahir Manzoor Chaudhary, while referring to a report, observed that business community has long been urging the government to reform the power sector, since decades ago when circular debt was in millions of rupees which today is a whoop trillions of rupees, to reform the tax structure that continues to rely heavily on indirect taxes whose incidence on the poor is greater than on the rich, a major contributory factor in poverty levels reaching a high of 40 percent today, to continuing the policy of steadily raising the budgeted current expenditure, thereby shrinking the available fiscal space annually and, last but not least, warning the government of an impending water scarcity decades ago that went unheeded resulting in the country's current status of a water-stressed country. Nasrullah Mughal advised the government to look at the bigger picture while cautioning domestic stakeholders that creation of a new institution that envisages billions of dollars of investment inflows backed by pledges may not provide a quick fix of the economy. This is not to undermine the concerted ongoing efforts to make Pakistan an attractive destination for foreign investment but to emphasise the fact that basic economic theory dictates that foreign investment would flow into those countries where the economy is strong, growth is projected to rise and key macroeconomic fundamentals, including foreign exchange reserves, are more than sufficient to forestall the possibility of inability to meet the import bill, which includes basic inputs/essentials for industry as well as the householder. Tahir Manzoor Chaudhary said that structural reforms are therefore the way forward and until and unless the administration supplements its crackdown with these reforms that are minutely identified in reports but continue gathering dust in all relevant ministries, the situation is unlikely to lead to sustainable long-term improvement.—DNA

Citizens advised to check status of Housing Societies before investment

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) has advised the citizens to check the status of the housing societies before investment at website www.rda.gov.pk. According to the Director General (DG), RDA, Kinza Murtaza, RDA was taking strict action in accordance with the law against the rules violators and issued 149 notices to illegal/fake housing schemes, as part of the Authority's ongoing efforts to protect the general public from exploitation and financial losses. RDA had warned the public against investing in 149 housing schemes in the district that have not obtained the necessary NoCs or approvals from the authority, she added. She informed that RDA had intensified its action against illegal/unapproved housing schemes which were misleading the citizens. The illegal schemes, which have been operating under false pretenses, have caused substantial financial loss by promising ownership of homes that only existed on paper, often limited to mere maps and advertisements. "RDA is committed to ensuring that the general public is protected from the harmful effects of these illegal schemes and utilizing all available resources to take strict action against illegal projects," said DG Kinza Murtaza. She urged the citizens to always verify the legality of any housing scheme before investments. "We advise everyone to consult with RDA to ensure that the scheme they are interested in is legally approved, and their investment is secure," she added. The DG said the RDA had also stopped the approval of new housing schemes. A comprehensive survey was conducted, categorizing these schemes into three groups based on their legal status. On the directives of the Divisional Intelligence Committee, RDA Task Force was regularly conducting its operations against illegal housing schemes. The RDA enforcement squad while conducting operations against illegal housing schemes took action against various rules violators including Top View City (D-17) Project of Orbit International, Al-Baraqa Garden, Kohsar Extension (F-Block) and Nabeel Block (Near Kohsar Extension), Ring Road Enclave (A Project of Jawahir City Pvt. Ltd.), Hurlus Floare, Countree Farmhouse and Resorts, Gilgit City, Mehmood Town, Top View City, Wanni in Tehsil Taxila, and others and demolished road infrastructure, security offices, sewerage lines, containers and removed advertisement boards, panaflexes besides sealing the site offices. — DNA

8 busted, weapons seized by ICT

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police apprehended eight outlaws involved in different criminal activities including possessing illegal weapons recovered weapons from their possession, on Sunday. A police spokesperson told media that the Shalimar police station teams took legal action against accused involved in possessing illegal weapons and arrested two accused. He said police teams recovered a pistol and MP5 rifle with ammunition from their possession. Moreover, six absconders were also arrested from various areas of the city during the last 24 hours. Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operation Muhammad Arslan Shah Zaib said that the ICT 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. — DNA

DIG Islamabad holds khuli katchery

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Islamabad Syed Ali Raza reaffirmed the Islamabad Police's commitment to addressing public grievances on priority during a Khuli Katchery (open court) held on Sunday. A public relations officer told media that the DIG Raza expressed these views while listening to complaints and issues raised by both citizens and police officers during the session. He said during the Khuli Kachehri, DIG listened to the complaints of the citizens and marked their applications to the concerned officers for timely action on merit.

Raza also directed them to send reports to his offices in the given time frame. DIG Raza further said that strict action will be taken against officers involved in bribery or corruption and a zero-tolerance policy will be adopted in this regard. DIG emphasized that Islamabad Police would not leave any stone unturned to secure the lives and property of the citizens. "Such interaction would be continued in future to provide maximum relief to the citizens," he added. — DNA

Police conducts search operation in Tarnol, Sangjani

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police conducted a grand search and combing operation at the Tarnol and Sangjani police stations jurisdiction, on Sunday. An official told media that under the supervision of SP Sadar zone Khan Zeb, a grand search and combing operation was conducted in different areas of Tarnol and Sangjani police station by ICT Police and lady police teams. He said during the search operation 632 suspicious persons, 266 houses, shops, hotels, 34 motorbikes and 11 vehicles were thoroughly checked, while five bikes were impounded and 44 suspicious individuals were also shifted to the police station for further verification. Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Syed Ali Raza said that the search and combing operations were conducted to heighten the security in the federal capital. All zonal officers were directed to continue these operations in their respective areas. — DNA

Excise dept extends vehicle tax deadline

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Excise and Taxation Department has extended the deadline for vehicle token tax payments by 15 days to facilitate vehicle owners, providing them with more time to clear their dues and avoid legal penalties. The department announced strict measures against token tax defaulters. Vehicle registrations would be canceled for non-payment, and defaulters could face penalties of up to 200% of the unpaid amount, according to a spokesman for the excise department. To simplify the process, smart card users can pay their token tax online via the Islamabad City App, which is available 24/7. Meanwhile, excise counters will remain open until 8 PM to accommodate more taxpayers during the extended period. The spokesman urged vehicle owners who have not paid token taxes for years to clear their dues immediately to avoid penalties or registration cancellation. However, Director Excise and Taxation, Bilal Azam Khan, has requested citizens to act promptly to comply with the law and avoid inconvenience. The extended deadline provides an opportunity for all taxpayers to fulfill their obligations.—APP

Jan. 6 last date to submit forms for FJWU admissions

RAWALPINDI: last date to submit forms for Fatima Jinnah Women University (FJWU) Rawalpindi admissions for the spring 2025 semester. FJWU opening admissions for Spring 2025 semester had invited the female students to apply for a wide range of Bachelor's, M.Phil., and Ph.D. programs at its City Campus (Rawalpindi) and Chakri Campus. The deadline for submission of the applications is January 6, and the merit list will be published on the university website in the second week of January 2025. Under the visionary leadership of Vice Chancellor Dr. Bushra Mirza T.I., FJWU continues to provide a world-class education with a highly qualified faculty, many of whom hold foreign degrees. Both campuses offer a dynamic academic environment, equipping students with the skills and knowledge to thrive in today's rapidly changing professional landscape.—APP

Tahir Shiekh promoted as Executive Director General PEMRA

ISLAMABAD: Muhammad Tahir Sheikh promoted as Executive Director General in PS 21. Chairman PEMRA Muhammad Saleem promoted him on the basis of extra ordinary performance as Director General. Mr. Tahir joined PEMRA in 2003 and became part of the pioneer team who established the regulatory framework for electronic media in private sector. He had served in various positions and departments in the Authority, Licensing, Admin, Enforcement/ Operations and Public Relations. He is official spokesperson of the Authority and had represented Authority at various national and international forums.—DNA



Rising production cost real threat to small businesses

ISLAMABAD - The All Pakistan Business Forum (APBF) has said that ever-increasing cost of production in the country is the real threat to small-scale businesses (SMEs), as frequent upward revisions in policy rate and continuous fluctuations in rupee against dollar are posing further threat to the economy. APBF President Syed Maaz Mahmood observed that the aggressive economic measures, high borrowing rates, inflation, oppressive taxation and unstable currency have been negatively affecting running businesses, many of which have closed their operations, while the remaining are struggling for survival. With a view to deal with fiscal challenges, he asked the upcoming elected government to work on the three-way strategy by implementing short-term goals that will help to keep generating resources for smooth fiscal operations, medium-term goals where the government should focus on financial inclusion, documenting the economy by designing a system where all businesses can be registered and properly document their income including collection of sales tax, initiating the process of privatization as well as improving governance by introducing reforms in each sector. As a long-term goal, the country must focus on improving its human capital, and revamping IT sectors by extending facilities and providing all the requisite supports.—APP

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Briefs

AIUO hosts training workshop on lexicography

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University's Center for English Language and Translation Studies organized a one-day training workshop on lexicography to preserve Pakistan's endangered languages. On this occasion, resource person Ameer Haider highlighted the intricate process of compiling dictionaries. The workshop provided specialized training to scholars for preparing dictionaries for various languages, with a particular focus on those at risk of extinction. Participants, including Ph.D. scholars and other experts, were introduced to the modern FLEx software, designed to assist in linguistic documentation and dictionary compilation. Dr. Ghulam Ali, Director, Center for Language and Translation Studies, welcomed the participants and emphasized the significance of this workshop in safeguarding linguistic heritage.

Death anniversary of poet, lyricist Tufail Hoshiarpuri observed

ISLAMABAD: The 32nd death anniversary of renowned poet and lyricist Tufail Hoshiarpuri was observed on Saturday. Muhammad Tufail was born on July 14, 1914, near Gauran Gate, Sheesh Mahal Bazar, in Hoshiarpur, Punjab, British India. His name later was changed to Tufail Hoshiarpuri as his professional name. After the partition in 1947, he migrated to Lahore, Pakistan, and started his career as a journalist there. He later joined Radio Pakistan, Lahore, in 1952. His famous patriotic song was 'Ai Mard e Mujahid Jaag Zara'. He was awarded the Pride of Performance Award by the President of Pakistan in 1994. Tufail Hoshiarpuri died on January 4, 1993, and was buried in the Model Town, Lahore graveyard in Pakistan.—APP

ICCI- media collaboration vital to unlock country's economic potential

Chaudhry stressed that the business community currently faces numerous challenges, including bureaucratic hurdles, regulatory inefficiencies, and economic barriers that hinder the ease of doing business

ISLAMABAD: The role of media in shaping society by informing the public, analyzing events, and holding authorities accountable was underscored by Nasir Mehmood Chaudhry, Acting Senior Vice President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), during an interactive session with media personnel at the Chamber House in Islamabad. He highlighted that through investigative reporting, journalists have the ability to uncover hidden truths, ignite public debate, and drive legal and social reforms that benefit society at large. Chaudhry stressed that the business community currently faces numerous challenges, including bureaucratic hurdles, regulatory inefficiencies, and economic barriers that hinder the ease of doing business. These challenges are not only stifling business growth but are also adversely affecting the national economy. He urged the media to consistently spotlight these issues, ensuring that policymakers are aware of the difficulties and can take swift action to resolve them. He stressed the need for improved coordination between the media and the ICCI to more effectively address these issues. Zafar Bakhtawari, former President of ICCI and Secretary General of the United Business Group, expressed



optimism regarding the government's ongoing economic initiatives. He emphasized that these efforts will enhance the nation's economic stability. Bakhtawari also advocated for the need to highlight the success stories of business leaders, inspiring the youth to consider entrepreneurship and become job providers rather than job seekers. Chaudhry Nadeem Ahmed, acting Vice President of ICCI, also

spoke on the critical role of the media in ensuring accountability. He pointed out the importance of media in addressing instances of power misuse, especially within government institutions, which can have a far-reaching impact on both public trust and the economy. He further discussed the obstacles faced by local industries that impede business growth, urging the media to bring attention to these issues for the greater

economic good. Naeem Siddiqui, Special Advisor to the ICCI President, raised concerns about the inefficiencies within the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and its tendency to make decisions without engaging with business leaders. He criticized this approach, claiming that it harms businesses and creates barriers to their development. In his welcome address, Ghulam Murata Siddiqui, Secretary General of the ICCI, praised the media for its

vital role as a pillar of the state. He acknowledged the global recognition of the media's contribution to uncovering real issues and fostering nation-building. The session concluded with a renewed commitment to strengthen the collaboration between the media and the ICCI. Both sides recognized the importance of working together to address the barriers to business expansion and contribute to the economic growth and prosperity of the country.

CTP introduce modern driving simulator to train learners

RAWALPINDI: City Traffic Police (CTP) Rawalpindi have introduced modern driving simulator for the first time in CTP Headquarters to train the learners. According to a CTP spokesman, a modern driving simulator with necessary components such as gear, clutch, accelerator, steering wheel and brake was introduced for the first time in the driving training school of CTP Rawalpindi. The simulator allows the learners to immerse themselves in a complete road-driving experience. This initiative is the result of the special interest of City Traffic Officer, Rawalpindi Beenish Fatima, he said and informed that the CTO was trying to ensure the use of modern technology to provide the best driving training to the citizens. Through, the driving simulator, those learning to drive will be able to practice driving in different situations without any danger, he said adding, this modern simulator will not only provide awareness of traffic rules but will also provide training on correct response in difficult and emergency situations. The CTO during a visit to the driving training school inspected the performance of the simulator. On this occasion, she directed the staff to provide all possible facilities to the citizens so that they could become safe and expert drivers. The spokesman said that this initiative will not only be helpful in preventing traffic accidents but will also help in providing a safe travel environment to the public and through modern training, the citizens will be able to drive according to international standards. This initiative of CTP Rawalpindi will prove to be an important milestone in promoting obedience to traffic rules and awareness of safe driving among the public. This use of modern technology will help transform the citizens into safe and confident drivers, he added.—DNA

COMSTECH, University of Lahore launch fellowship program

ISLAMABAD: In a landmark initiative aimed at strengthening academic and research collaboration, COMSTECH (The Ministerial Standing Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation of the OIC) and the University of Lahore have announced a joint fellowship program for Bangladeshi scholars and students. This program underscores a shared commitment to fostering talent, innovation, and academic exchange among member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The fellowship program seeks to provide exceptional opportunities for Bangladeshi students and researchers to pursue higher education and engage in cutting-edge research across a variety of disciplines, including Allied health sciences, engineering & technology, pharmacy, management sciences, social sciences, and the humanities. The initiative also includes training for technical personnel working for science & technology and engineering laboratories. Prof. Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Choudhary Coordinator General COMSTECH emphasized the importance of the initiative, stating, "This fellowship program is a testament to our commitment to bridging gaps in education and research across the Muslim world. By investing in Bangladeshi scholars and students, we aim to cultivate a generation of innovators and leaders who will address the challenges of our time." This partnership highlights UOL's global reputation, as reflected in the QS World University Rankings: Sustainability 2025, where it is ranked among the top 500 universities worldwide. UOL is recognized for its market-driven curriculum, high-quality teaching, learning, and impactful research. This program underscores the commitment of leadership of COMSTECH and the University of Lahore, especially Chairman Board of Governors Awaiz Raouf, to foster educational and professional growth across the Muslim world. The program is open to Bangladeshi nationals aged 22 to 45, residing in any country of the world, with outstanding academic achievements and a demonstrated commitment to contributing to their communities. It covers tuition fee waiver, round-trip airfare, honorarium, and free accommodation. The eligible candidates can apply through the official websites of COMSTECH and the University of Lahore. The applications are open until 1st March 2025.—DNA

ANF recovers over 101 kg drugs in six operations

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting six operations across the country managed to arrest seven accused and recovered over 101 kg drugs worth Rs 24.4 million, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Saturday. He informed that over 2 kg ice was recovered from the trolley bag of a passenger going to Bahrain at Islamabad International Airport. 1060 grams heroin was recovered from the possession of a passenger leaving for Jeddah at Karachi International Airport. 25 kg opium and 7 kg heroin were recovered from an uninhabited area of Hub District in Balochistan. In fourth operation, 24 kg hashish was recovered from a vehicle intercepted opposite the 'Tablighi Markaz' on Srinagar Highway, Islamabad, and two suspects were arrested during the operation. 24 kg hashish tactfully concealed in a vehicle was recovered near G.T. Road, Islamabad. In sixth operation, 18 kg hashish hidden in a vehicle was recovered near Ring Road, Peshawar. Cases have been registered against the arrested drug dealers under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.—APP

Death anniversary of musician Master Nazir Ali observed

ISLAMABAD: The twenty-second death anniversary of musician Master Nazir Ali was observed on Sunday. He was born in 1945 in Gujranwala. He started his music career as an assistant musician for M. Ashraf in 1961. Nazir Ali received his music education from Ustad Akhtar Hussain and acquired expertise in composing film music from an early age. He gained a chance as a solo music director with a film, "Paidagir," that was released in 1966. 'Lal Meri Pat Rakhio Bala Jhole Lalan' brought Nazir Ali to the ranks of the great musicians of the film industry. His other Dhamaals, which received public acclaim, include 'Hussaini Lal Qalandar' and 'Shahbaz Kare Parwaaz'. He composed 123 songs for 39 Urdu films and 435 songs for 115 Punjabi films during his career. He also won two Nigar Awards for his masterwork, Master Nazir Ali passed away on January 5 in 2003.—APP

December most polluted month in Capital's history

ISLAMABAD: With smog and air pollution rising in federal capital, December had been the most polluted month in terms of particulate matter 2.5 microns since this phenomenon first time started occurring in Islamabad in 2018. Hazardous smog spells in winters with clout of dust, smoke, particulate matter and fog soared to new levels of ambient air pollution on December 22, 2024 after the AQI spiked up to 250 making air quality unhealthy. Inhabited next to Margalla Hills, the capital, couple of decades back, was an attraction for visitors, tourists and travelers due to its cleaner roads, serene and calm evenings and above all natural environment. But, rising human and vehicular population, unruly development of housing societies and smoke emitting industries continued marring its beauty and ambience. Just during past decade over a million vehicles were registered with Islamabad's Excise and Taxation Department and besides these, not less than half a million vehicles regularly enter the metropolis emitting various gases and smoke. "Dust is the main particle adding to air pollution with addition of smoke and particulate matter of 2.5 microns," said Director Labs and National Environmental Quality Standards (NEQS), Dr. Zaigham Abbas. "Temperature inversion and fog caused after suspension of dew drops in atmosphere

due to drop in mercury during winters also leave a misty and vague ambience." Mentioning to some infrastructure projects executed during last year that added to rise in dust particles, Dr Zaigham also described brick kilns operating in capital's periphery and steel manufacturing units in its industrial areas as real nuisance and cause of dark smoke and air pollution. "But, by now 30 kilns have been converted to zigzag technology and Pak-EPA after concerted efforts and intervention of the Supreme Court has introduced an indigenous dry scrubber technology to sequester dark carbon and help spew white smoke without hazardous black carbon." "We shall also be offering Punjab government this technology to control dark smoke in Lahore emitted by different industrial units as it is cost effective and can help chip many blocks together," Zaigham said. Air Quality Index (AQI) data maintained by Pak-EPA's fixed and mobile air quality monitors revealed that November and December remained the most polluted months with November hosting two very unhealthy days and December a total of five very unhealthy days including December 22, the most polluted day bearing 250 AQI and over 200 micrograms per cubic meter PM 2.5 emissions. Pak-EPA records ozone (O3), carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen dioxide (NO2) and Sulphur dioxide (SO2) besides PM2.5 as main ambient pollutants in the air. Interestingly, all of remaining pollutants remained

below permissible levels except PM2.5 that persistently surged obviously due to increasing vehicular emissions, construction activities, garbage or compost burning and cross-boundary pollution. "We are planning a massive onsite air quality monitoring activity with the support of third party organizations registered with Pak-EPA," Dr Zaigham said. "This time it will be beyond urban and repeatedly monitored areas and new housing societies grown around federal capital will be targeted to assess their share in air pollution." "It will help EPA devise better strategy and punitive measures to contain air pollution," he said and also mentioned to imposing section 144 in the capital banning all sorts of waste, stubble, dead leaves and compost burning. As Pak-EPA actively involves in curtailing air pollution, Dr. Zaigham also mentioned to occasionally checking and imposing fines on vehicles exceeding NEQS emission levels. In November 2024, Islamabad authorities imposed a ban on entry of smoke-emitting vehicles into city limits to combat smog and environmental pollution. This prohibition extends to all types of vehicles including private, government and commercial ones. Meanwhile, Dr. Zia Ul Haq, a senior pulmonologist at Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS), has observed a notable increase in respiratory ailments among residents of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, attributing this surge to heightened air pollution and persistent dry weather. "Exposure to dry and cold air can cause breach-

es in the lining of respiratory tract, leading to infections and damage to normal secretions within the breathing organs," he said. To mitigate these health risks, Dr. Haq advises individuals, especially those above 50 or with chronic heart, kidney or lung conditions, to receive flu vaccinations during peak winter months. "Such people should avoid unnecessary outdoor activities during mornings and evenings, wear face masks, cover themselves when outside and consume hot drinks to protect respiratory tract during poor air quality." Dr. Ejaz Ahmed, Senior Program Fellow at Institute of Urbanism also sees smog and air pollution in Islamabad as a direct consequence of rapid urbanization and increased vehicular emissions. "We need sustainable urban transportation systems and collaborative efforts by all stakeholders to mitigate these environmental challenges," he said. "Transportation sector significantly contributes to energy consumption and environmental degradation, accounting for 22.3% of services sector of GDP, 6% of employment, and 30% of total energy use in Pakistan." Dr. Ahmed suggested implementing distance-based fares, park and ride facilities, bicycle sharing, electric and hybrid buses and transit-oriented development to ensure sustainable urban transportation systems and cleaner environment. "Without immediate and coordinated action, quality of environment and human health would remain under threat," he remarked.



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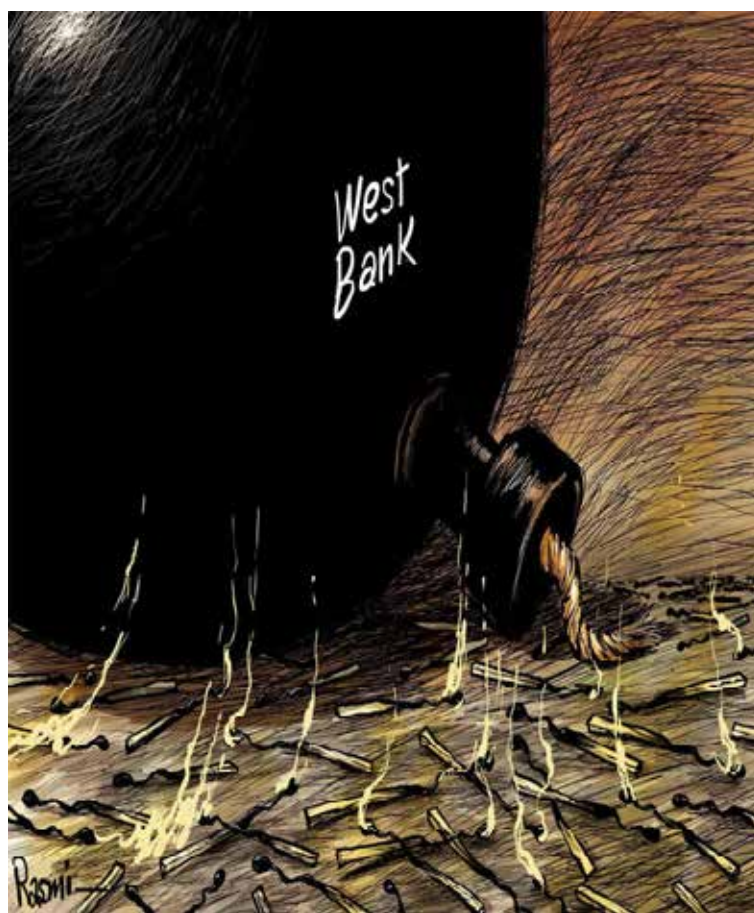
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Pak-China friendship

SINCE the launch of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a vital part of China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, China and Pakistan have proudly declared themselves "all weather" friends. Over the years, however, both nations have faced internal, economic and geopolitical challenges that tested their relationship. Despite seismic events like the Covid-19 pandemic and shifting regional dynamics, the partnership remains central for both countries' strategic outlooks. How did this "friendship" play out in 2024? To begin with, the year showed the endurance of Sino-Pakistan relations. Despite geopolitical chaos, security threats and economic uncertainties, the bilateral partnership displayed resilience. The fostering of economic collaboration and people-to-people ties stood out as defining achievements. Key milestones in the year included an upgrade of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the inauguration of the Beijing-funded Gwadar international airport, Islamabad's hosting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit and the setting up of a "China Corner" at the library of the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, the first such section to be established at a think tank in Pakistan. These initiatives underscore a shared commitment to long-term cooperation. Furthermore, the year marked two significant anniversaries: 73 years of diplomatic relations and 11 years of the comprehensive strategic partnership. The first quarter of the year proved turbulent for bilateral ties. In March, Pakistan experienced three suicide bomb attacks that were widely seen as targeting Chinese interests and personnel in the country. Among the dead were five Chinese nationals working on a Chinese-funded hydro-power project. Despite the shock and gravity of these events, both governments agreed to stay optimistic about their belt and road projects, which include the multibillion-dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor initiative. Massive blast in Karachi kills 2 Chinese nationals as separatist group claims responsibility. Soon after, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesman said: "No attempt to sabotage China-Pakistan cooperation will ever succeed." This determination was practically proven when months later, both countries decided to upgrade the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The first phase of the initiative, launched in 2015, primarily focused on infrastructure development, addressing energy shortages and expanding road networks across Pakistan. This phase successfully delivered 38 completed projects worth US\$25.2 billion, with 26 ongoing projects valued at US\$26.8 billion. The second phase, dubbed CPEC 2.0, is expected to take a more holistic approach, emphasising five strategic corridors. These are named the innovation corridor, green corridor, livelihood-enhancing corridor, growth corridor and opening-up/regional connectivity corridor. These projects, which broadly align with the UN sustainable development goals, have the potential to transform the traditional market into a digital market system while eradicating unemployment through enhanced job opportunities. Last September, Pakistan concluded its 22nd agreement with the International Monetary Fund for multi-year economic assistance. The securing of a US\$7 billion loan to avoid bankruptcy would not have been possible without the support of China, its biggest debtor. The IMF loan was conditional on the rolling over of the US\$12 billion that Pakistan altogether owes China, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.



Israel spreading chaos in Gaza

AMONG the qualitative objectives of the Israeli occupation in its ongoing aggression against the Gaza Strip for the past 15 months is to spread chaos and security breakdown in all areas and cities. This is achieved through the direct targeting of Palestinian security forces on one hand, and by supporting criminal gangs that rob humanitarian aid on the other. In this way, Israel seeks to replace security and stability with chaos, coinciding with its daily massacres and the blockade and starvation of all residents of the Strip. The commander of the police in Gaza, Major General Mahmoud Salah Abu Salah, and his deputy, Major General Hossam Mustafa Shahwan, were martyred due to an Israeli bombing of tents for displaced citizens in the Mawasi of Khan Yunis in the besieged Strip On Thursday. This was part of an Israeli crime that resulted in the deaths of 11 martyrs, including women and children, in addition to 15 injured. According to information gathered by the Palestinian Center for Human Rights in Khan Yunis, at 1:15 AM on Thursday, January 2, 2025, the occupation's planes attacked the tents of displaced persons with no less than five missiles in two areas approximately 200 meters apart in the Ihsan camp in the Attar area, southwest of the Mawasi of Khan Yunis, leading to the deaths of Major General Mahmoud Salah and his assistant, Major General Hossam Shahwan. The Ministry of Interior and National Security in Gaza announced the assassination of Abu Salah and Shahwan on Thursday morning while "they were performing their humanitarian and national duty in serving our Palestinian people amid the catastrophic conditions caused by the Israeli aggression, which also led to the martyrdom of several citizens due to the airstrike." The statement said: "Major General Mahmoud Salah ascends as a martyr in the field of serving our people, crowning his life with the medal of martyrdom after 30 years of work in the Palestinian police force since its establishment, moving through various responsibilities until reaching his role as head of the police for the past six years." For its part, the Government Media Office (GMO) in the Gaza Strip confirmed that the escalation of the Israeli occupation's targeting of security forces and aid security personnel in the Strip is part of a clear plan aimed at creating an administrative and governmental vacuum, spreading chaos and security breakdown in the Gaza Strip, in an attempt to undermine the resilience of the people and destabilize them. The GMO said that the number of martyrs among aid security personnel has risen to 736, reflecting the scale of the crimes committed by the occupation army, which targets anyone trying to provide assistance and relief to those affected in Gaza, emphasizing that they continue to serve the Palestinian people and will not retreat from performing their national duty. "We will continue to confront all attempts by the occupation to create chaos, breakdown, and destabilize security in Gaza." The Palestinian Center for Human Rights condemned in the strongest terms the crime of assassinating martyrs Abu Salah and Shahwan, affirming that the continued targeting of elements and leadership of the civil police by the occupying forces during the ongoing genocide against Gaza for nearly 15 months, at the orders of the highest political and military levels, aims to instill chaos, spread organized crime, exacerbate humanitarian suffering, and undermine any effort to achieve even the minimum level of security, which is an integral part of the crime of genocide.

Trump's agenda 47

Qamar Bashir



Trump's foreign policy on Palestine, Syria, and Iran emphasizes a mix of disengagement and assertive measures. He aims to resolve the Gaza conflict and weaken Hamas by targeting Iran's support network. In Syria, he opposes U.S. military involvement, maintaining it is not America's fight, even as opposition forces gain ground. Toward Iran, he is likely to revive his "maximum pressure" campaign with stringent sanctions to curb its nuclear ambitions and regional influence

AFTER the nationwide abhorrent terrorist attacks in the USA, President-elect Donald Trump painted a grim picture of the country. He stated, "Our country is a disaster, a laughingstock all over the world! This is what happens when you have OPEN BORDERS, with weak, ineffective, and virtually nonexistent leadership." He blamed the United States Department of Justice and the FBI for their failure to ensure the safety and security of the American people, criticizing them for not fulfilling their responsibilities of enforcing U.S. laws, overseeing law enforcement, and representing the nation in legal matters, as well as administering justice at a federal level. Trump then added a third culprit to complete the triangle: the "Democrats." He accused the Democrats of incompetence and corruption, claiming they spent all their time unlawfully attacking their political opponents instead of protecting Americans from violent elements that, according to him, have infiltrated every aspect of the government and the nation itself. He further stated that the Democrats should be ashamed of themselves for allowing such a situation to arise in the country. Trump warned the CIA to intervene immediately, saying, "NOW, before it is too late." He concluded his statement by declaring that the USA is breaking down, suffering from "a violent erosion of safety, national security, and democracy" nationwide. He asserted that only strength and powerful leadership could stop this decline, ending with a pledge: "See you on January 20th. MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!" The big question remains: how does Trump plan to make America great again? In his victory speech after his historic 2024 election win, Trump outlined his ambitious "Agenda 47." While his policies appear promising on the surface, they carry both anticipated and unforeseen repercussions, not only for the U.S. but also for the rest of the world. Trump's top priority is improving the U.S. economy, recognizing that in today's interconnected world, no country can act alone without risking adverse consequences. He pledged to impose universal tariffs of 10%-20% to protect U.S. industries and address trade imbalances, particularly with China, which accounted for \$537 billion in imports to the U.S. in 2022. Tariffs could boost domestic manufacturing by reducing foreign competition but may raise consumer prices, disrupt supply chains, and exacerbate inflation. On energy policy, Trump pledged to achieve energy independence by rolling

back petroleum production regulations, exiting the Paris Agreement, and expediting oil infrastructure projects. This could drive economic growth, create jobs, and enhance energy security, strengthening the U.S. as a major energy exporter. However, it may increase carbon emissions, environmental harm, and weaken global climate leadership. Trump's tax reforms include extending the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, eliminating federal taxes on tips and Social Security income, and making car loan interest fully tax-deductible. These measures aim to boost disposable income, support retirees, and stimulate industries like automotive and hospitality. However, they risk widening the federal deficit, which already exceeds \$33 trillion, without corresponding spending cuts or revenue increases. On immigration, Trump pledged mass deportations of undocumented immigrants, completing the Mexico border wall, reinstating the "Remain in Mexico" policy, and ending birthright citizenship for children of undocumented immigrants. These measures aim to deter illegal immigration but could cause labor shortages, legal challenges under the 14th Amendment, humanitarian concerns, and strained U.S.-Mexico relations. Trump's foreign policy priorities include resolving the Ukraine-Russia conflict within 24 hours, reducing involvement in "endless wars," prioritizing U.S. interests in trade agreements, and pressuring NATO allies to increase defense spending. While these policies could strengthen military readiness and reduce long-term entanglements, critics warn they may alienate allies, destabilize alliances, and oversimplify complex geopolitical issues. Trump's foreign policy on Palestine, Syria, and Iran emphasizes a mix of disengagement and assertive measures. He aims to resolve the Gaza conflict and weaken Hamas by targeting Iran's support network. In Syria, he opposes U.S. military involvement, maintaining it is not America's fight, even as opposition forces gain ground. Toward Iran, he is likely to revive his "maximum pressure" campaign with stringent sanctions to curb its nuclear ambitions and regional influence. The upside is that it could reduce U.S. military entanglements, weaken adversarial groups like Hamas, and apply economic and diplomatic pressure to contain Iran's influence. The downside is that the potential destabilization in the region, humanitarian crises from inaction in Syria, and the risk of further isolating the U.S. from diplomatic solutions, potentially exacerbating ten-

sions without resolving underlying conflicts. He pledged to obliterate the Deep State, downsize bureaucracy, and cut expenditure. The upside is that reducing bureaucratic red tape and government spending could streamline operations, enhance efficiency, and return power to citizens by limiting overreach. Cutting unnecessary expenditures may lower the national debt and improve fiscal responsibility. The downside is that drastic downsizing could lead to the loss of experienced personnel, reduced oversight, and disruption of essential services. Efforts to dismantle the "Deep State" might politicize government institutions, erode trust in public administration, and create instability in critical governance functions. His other domestic policies are even more sweeping. He pledged a patriotic curriculum and school choice to promote national unity and empower parents with educational options. The downside is that centralized credentialing and removing federal oversight may create disparities in educational quality across states. He promised harsh penalties for serious crimes and structured facilities for homelessness could improve public safety and order. The downside is that these measures may oversimplify complex issues, neglect rehabilitation, and raise ethical concerns. He pledges to improve infrastructure and Urban Development by creating "Freedom Cities" and cultural initiatives to spur innovation, economic growth, and national pride. The downside is that these projects may face high costs, feasibility challenges, and potential public resistance to large-scale federal developments. When America sneezes, the world catches a cold. The election of Donald Trump has sparked both hope and nervousness within the American nation and across the globe. The entire world waits with bated breath, fingers crossed, to see whether his promises will make America great again or lead to unforeseen consequences. Americans and global observers alike are anxiously anticipating the roller-coaster ride under Trump's unpredictable, mercurial, and impulsive leadership. This time, he is flanked by figures like Elon Musk, Vivek Ramaswamy, and Kash Patel—business leaders and technocrats with proven records of success and remarkable achievements. Let us hope his presidency not only revitalizes the United States but also creates a better world for everyone.

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

South Korea's quest for nuclear deterrence

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



In practical terms, South Korea's path to nuclearization would not require an arsenal comparable to those of great powers like the United States or Russia. A modest stockpile of approximately 100 warheads, coupled with existing delivery systems such as fighter jets and submarines, would suffice to establish credible deterrence against North Korea. This limited capability would address the immediate security challenges without escalating regional tensions...

SOUTH Korea's reliance on the United States to counter the nuclear threat posed by North Korea has been a cornerstone of its national security strategy for decades. The alliance between Seoul and Washington, solidified by the 1953 defense pact following the Korean War armistice, has long provided South Korea with a sense of security under the American nuclear umbrella. However, this assurance is increasingly being called into question due to both North Korea's expanding capabilities and shifting dynamics in U.S. foreign policy. North Korea's nuclear ambitions date back to the Cold War era, culminating in its first successful nuclear test in 2006. Since then, Pyongyang has not only advanced its nuclear arsenal but also developed intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) technology capable of reaching American cities. This development raises significant doubts about whether the United States would risk nuclear retaliation to defend South Korea in the event of a conflict. North Korea's growing capabilities have introduced a new level of uncertainty into the U.S.-South Korea alliance, as the potential costs of American intervention now include direct threats to U.S. soil. Compounding these concerns is the potential return of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency. During his first term, Trump openly criticized the U.S.-South Korea alliance, framing it in transactional terms and suggesting that the United States bore an undue burden in the partnership. His statements and actions during that time, including private remarks about dismantling the alliance, have fueled apprehension in Seoul about the reliability of American commitments under his leadership. Trump's approach underscores broader concerns about the United States' willingness to honor its defense obligations, especially in the face of existential nuclear threats from Pyongyang. These developments have driven South Korea to reconsider its longstanding reliance on the U.S. nuclear umbrella. The increasing fragility of this arrangement has led to growing support within South Korea for developing an independent nuclear arsenal. Public opinion surveys reveal a significant shift in attitudes: a 2021 poll by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs found that 71% of South Koreans favor nuclearization, a notable increase from 56% in 2010. This growing public support reflects deep-seated concerns about the reliability of U.S. commitments and the pressing need to address the asymmetric nuclear threat posed by

North Korea. Despite the domestic momentum behind nuclearization, the primary obstacle remains international opposition, particularly from the United States. Washington has consistently opposed nuclear proliferation, even among its allies, and has worked to dissuade Seoul from pursuing an independent nuclear capability. The Biden administration, for instance, has sought to reassure South Korea by reaffirming its security commitments through joint declarations and increased military presence in the region. However, these measures fall short of addressing the core issue: whether the United States would truly risk nuclear retaliation to defend its ally. The debate over South Korea's nuclearization highlights the limitations of extended deterrence in the current geopolitical context. During the Cold War, similar doubts were expressed by U.S. allies in Europe, who questioned whether Washington would "trade New York for Paris" in a nuclear standoff. Today, South Koreans face a comparable dilemma, exacerbated by the unprecedented nature of the North Korean threat. Unlike other nuclear-armed states, Pyongyang's regime is uniquely vulnerable to conventional military defeat, making it more likely to resort to nuclear weapons in a conflict. This heightened risk underscores the need for South Korea to reassess its security strategy. Proponents of South Korean nuclearization argue that an independent arsenal would enhance regional stability by creating nuclear parity on the Korean Peninsula. A self-reliant South Korea would be better positioned to deter North Korean aggression without relying on potentially unreliable American guarantees. Moreover, a nuclear South Korea could free the United States to focus on its broader strategic priorities in East Asia, particularly its competition with China. Historical precedents, such as U.S. alliances with nuclear-armed Britain and France, demonstrate that Washington can maintain strong ties with allied nations that possess independent nuclear capabilities. Critics of South Korean nuclearization, however, caution against its potential consequences for the international nonproliferation regime. They argue that South Korea's withdrawal from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) could set a dangerous precedent, encouraging other countries to follow suit. Nonetheless, advocates counter that the unique circumstances of the Korean Peninsula, marked by the acute and asymmetric threat from North Korea, justify an exception. Further-

more, they contend that South Korea's democratic governance and responsible stewardship of advanced technologies make it a trustworthy nuclear power. In practical terms, South Korea's path to nuclearization would not require an arsenal comparable to those of great powers like the United States or Russia. A modest stockpile of approximately 100 warheads, coupled with existing delivery systems such as fighter jets and submarines, would suffice to establish credible deterrence against North Korea. This limited capability would address the immediate security challenges without escalating regional tensions unnecessarily. The urgency of this debate is underscored by North Korea's rapid advancements in nuclear and missile technologies. Under Kim Jong Un's leadership, Pyongyang has conducted multiple nuclear tests and developed a range of delivery systems, including short-, medium-, and long-range missiles. The regime's recent efforts to miniaturize nuclear warheads, pursue hypersonic missile technology, and deploy submarine-launched ballistic missiles further exacerbate the security dilemma faced by South Korea. These developments, combined with North Korea's increasingly aggressive rhetoric, underscore the inadequacy of existing deterrence mechanisms. The Washington Declaration of 2023, which established a U.S.-South Korean Nuclear Consultative Group, represents a step toward addressing Seoul's security concerns. However, its provisions fall short of resolving the fundamental issue of extended deterrence. The declaration's emphasis on rotational deployments and consultation mechanisms does little to mitigate the underlying doubts about U.S. willingness to risk nuclear retaliation for South Korea's defense. As long as these doubts persist, the debate over South Korea's nuclearization will remain a central issue in the country's national security discourse. The evolving security landscape on the Korean Peninsula demands a re-examination of South Korea's defense strategy. The combination of North Korea's expanding nuclear capabilities and uncertainties about U.S. commitments has created a pressing need for South Korea to explore alternative security arrangements. While the prospect of nuclearization raises complex challenges, it also offers a potential solution to the asymmetry that currently destabilizes the region. For South Korea, achieving greater self-reliance in its national defense may be the only viable path to ensuring its long-term security in an increasingly uncertain world.

Briefs

PTI 'seeks
Imran's
release via
executive...'

FROM PAGE 01
premier has only demanded the release of party workers and leaders, the source disputed this, saying: "In both meetings, PTI's first demand was the release of Imran Khan, followed by others." The others include Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Dr Yasmin Rashid, Senator Ijaz Chaudhry, and party workers," he said, adding that this highlights Khan's release as PTI's top priority in the ongoing negotiations. During the meeting, government committee members questioned PTI leaders about their demand for Khan's release through an executive order. "How many political prisoners were released this way? During Khan's tenure, Rana Sanaullah, Shehbaz Sharif, Irfan Siddiqui, Khawaja Asif and others from the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) were arrested. When they were released through executive orders?" the source said. According to the source, the PTI team had no answers to this question. The source further claims that the Khan-founded party wants his release without any written agreement to avoid embarrassment. However, the source added: "Even if Khan is to be released, PTI should submit some written demands because the government needs to consult its legal team to discuss legal options for the release." "It seems the PTI team either lacks confidence or does not have the mandate to decide without Khan's approval. On every issue discussed during the talks, PTI's response is that they need to ask and consult Khan first," he added. Separately, Senator Irfan Siddiqui said that it was agreed during the first meeting that PTI would submit a written charter of demands on January 2. However, they didn't bring it in written form during the second meeting either. When the committee asked the reason, they replied that they needed to discuss the demands with Khan first. Once he approves them, they will be presented in a written form." When asked if the PTI committee had been given access to Khan to discuss the charter of demands, Senator Siddiqui said: "It was decided in the first meeting that PTI would bring the charter of demands in written form, and the government would facilitate a meeting with Khan to discuss the talking points with him. The government has fulfilled its promise and helped them meet Khan. Now, they want the government to arrange a separate meeting room where no one can listen to their conversation." Siddiqui added that the government has complied with all the previous agreements.

AC 'defers'
£190m case
verdict again

FROM PAGE 01
following the conclusion of arguments and had fixed Dec 23 to announce the judgment. However, the verdict was rescheduled for Jan 6, 2025. The sources said that lawyers would be apprised of the new date today. The development comes amid ongoing negotiations between the Imran Khan-founded party and the federal government, with both sides expected to hold third round of talks next week. The government has asked the former ruling party to present its "charter of demands" in writing, with the PTI demanding release of "political prisoners" including party chief Imran Khan and the judicial probe into May 9, 2023 events and November 26 crackdown. Pointing towards the expected verdict in £190m case, PTI spokesperson Sheikh Waqas Akram said in a statement that the ongoing negotiation process would not be affected even if the party founder is sentenced in the case. Also known as the Al-Qadir Trust case, the former prime minister along with his wife, Bushra and others have been accused by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) of causing a loss of £190 million to the national exchequer via a settlement between the PTI government and a property tycoon.

Sialkot win Quaid-e-Azam
Trophy after dramatic chase

Sialkot lifts the Quaid-e-Azam Trophy title for the third time

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Sialkot Region defeated Peshawar by one-wicket to claim their third Quaid-e-Azam Trophy title at the UBL Sports Complex on the fourth day of the five-day final. With this win, Sialkot completed an unbeaten campaign, securing five wins and three draws in their eight matches. Chasing a target of 173, Sialkot's pursuit appeared daunting at the start of the day, with the team reeling at 59-5 after 15 overs. However, the skipper Amad Butt played a match-winning knock, anchoring the chase with a composed 65 runs off 94 balls, including nine fours and one six. His valuable innings, along with Shahzaib Bhatti's steady 32 not out, steered Sialkot to victory in 46.2 overs. The pivotal partnership came between Amad and Shahzaib, who combined for an essential 48-run stand for the seventh wicket. Despite the loss of wicket keeper-batter Afzal Manzoor at 69-6, Amad and Shahzaib kept their composure, with the latter hitting the winning boundary. The match was sealed in the 47th over after Shoaib Akhtar Jr departed with just one run required. Niaz Khan led the charge for Peshawar with a stunning 4-wicket haul, while Mohammad Amir Khan picked up three wickets. Israrullah and Sajid Khan



claimed one wicket each. Amad Butt of Sialkot was named Player of the Match for his outstanding all-round performance, taking 4 wickets for 51 runs and 2 wickets for 66 runs, while also contributing with the bat by scoring 10 and 65 runs. In the tournament awards, Azan Awais of Sialkot was recognised as the Best Batter, amassing an impressive 844 runs in 8 matches.

The Best Bowler award went to Musa Khan of Islamabad, who claimed a remarkable 38 wickets in just 5 matches. Afzal Manzoor of Sialkot was honoured as the Best Wicket-keeper, with 39 dismissals in 8 matches. Niaz Khan of Peshawar was named Player of the Tournament for his exceptional bowling performance, taking 39 wickets in 8 matches.

Final - Day 4 of 5 - Sialkot Region beat Peshawar Region by one wicket at UBL Sports Complex, Karachi
Sialkot:
• 1st Innings: 258 all out (80.1 overs)
• 2nd Innings: 159 all out (59.5 overs)
Peshawar:
• 1st Innings: 245 all out (85 overs)
• 2nd Innings: 176-9 (46.2 overs)

Coco Gauff beats Swiatek
as US win United Cup

World number one Aryna Sabalenka geared up for her Australian Open title defence with victory over Russian qualifier Polina Kudermetova in the final of the Brisbane International

WEB DESK

SYDNEY: Taylor Fritz got the better of Poland's Hubert Hurkacz in a third-set tie-break to clinch victory for the United States in the United Cup final in Sydney. The 6-4 5-7 7-6 (7-4) success for the world number four followed a straight-set win for Coco Gauff over Iga Swiatek in the opening women's singles match. It is the second win for the US in the mixed team event after they took the inaugural title in 2023. Gauff, the world number three, claimed a second successive win over Swiatek after beating the former world number one on her way to the WTA Finals title in Riyadh in November. The



Pole, who is now world number two, took a medical timeout at 5-4 down in the second set to have strapping put on her left thigh, which has bothered her all week, and after the 6-4 6-4 defeat she left the court in tears, walking gingerly. Meanwhile, World number one Aryna Sabalenka geared up for her Australian Open title defence with victory over Russian qualifier Polina

Kudermetova in the final of the Brisbane International. The 26-year-old from Belarus recovered from dropping her serve twice on her way to losing the opening set to come through 4-6 6-3 6-2 against the world number 107. Sabalenka lost in last year's Brisbane final to Elena Rybakina before going on to triumph in the Australian Open for the second time in a row. The opening

Grand Slam of the year begins at Melbourne Park on Sunday, 12 January. After a less than impressive opening set, Sabalenka began the second set strongly and Kudermetova had to save break points in her opening service game. The pressure eventually told, with a drop shot giving Sabalenka the break and a 3-2 lead and she dominated the remainder of the set to force the decider. A break early in the third set left her in control and on the way to her first title of the year. The win continued a perfect week for Gauff, 20, who had won all six of her previous singles and doubles matches at the event as she continues her preparations for the Australian Open, which begins on 12 January in Melbourne.

NBP, Customs
advance to hockey
c'hip semifinals

AFZAL JAVED

ISLAMABAD: NBP, Customs, Mari Petroleum and PAF have moved into the semifinals of the ongoing 68th DHA National Seniors Men Hockey Championship after beating their rivals in the quarterfinals here at the Abdul Sattar Edhi Hockey Stadium Karachi. In the first quarterfinal NBP defeated Rangers 5-2. Dilber and Aziz scored two goals each. From Rangers Farhan and Abdullah scored one goal each. Aziz was declared man of the match. In the second quarterfinal Customs defeated NAVY 8-7 in a thrilling shootout stage. Hamza, Bilal Aslam and Shahzeb scored one goal each. From NAVY Wasim Saifullah scored one goal each. Awais Rasheed of Customs was declared man of the match. In the third quarterfinal Mari Petroleum defeated WAPDA in the shootout stage after a 2-2 draw. From WAPDA Rana Waheed and from Mari Petroleum Rana Waheed scored goals. Abdullah Ishtiaq, the goalkeeper of Mari Petroleum, was declared man of the match. In the fourth quarterfinal the PAF defeated ARMY in the sudden death stage after drawing 2-2. Mohsin and Shehbaz scored from PAF and Hammad and Saifullah from scored goals. Ali Raza was declared man of the match. The CEO of Nelson Paints Mohammed Siraj and the CEO Hamdard, were the chief guests. On the occasion the PHF Secretary General Rana Mujahid, President Punjab Hockey Association Olympian Asif Bajwa, Tournament Director Olympians Qamar Ibrahim, Kamran Ashraf, Anjum Saad, Assistant Tournament Director Azmat Pasha, Aslam Niazi and other officials were also present.

Naqvi announces
treatment for
Saim Ayub

Saim suffered ankle fracture during second Test against South Africa

DNA

LAHORE: Chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Mohsin Naqvi announced on Sunday that the talented batter Saim Ayub will be sent to London for immediate medical treatment. This decision follows consultations with medical experts to ensure that Ayub's injury is properly diagnosed and treated. Naqvi personally reached out to Saim Ayub to inquire about his condition, offering his best wishes for a speedy recovery. He expressed the importance of providing the necessary care, emphasising that Ayub will be examined by renowned orthopaedic specialists in London. An appointment has already been arranged at one of the leading hospitals to ensure the best possible treatment for the young cricketer. Dr. Mamreze, who has been overseeing the left-handed batter's treatment in Pakistan, has sent the cricketer's medical reports to London for further evaluation. Naqvi praised his dedication and reiterated that the PCB would provide all the necessary resources to support Ayub's recovery. "Saim Ayub is a stylish and outstanding batter, and an asset to Pakistan cricket," Naqvi said. "We are doing everything possible to ensure his full recovery. He will be sent on the next available flight from Cape Town to London, with Assistant Coach Azhar Mahmood accompanying him to ensure his well-being," he added.

NZ thump SL in ODI series opener

Henry bags the player of the match award for his economical bowling performance

WELLINGTON: Matt Henry's four-wicket haul, followed by Will Young's unbeaten 90-run knock, propelled New Zealand to a resounding nine-wicket victory in the opening ODI of the three-match series against Sri Lanka here at the Basin Reserve on Sunday. Put into bat first, the touring side could accumulate 178 runs before getting bundled out in the 44th over. Sri Lanka got off to a dismal start to their innings as they had been reduced to 23/4 in 9.5 overs. Following the early debacle, opening batter Avishka Fernando then joined forces with Janith Liyanage and launched recovery. The duo added an important 87 runs to the total until both set batters perished in quick succession, leaving Sri Lanka reeling at 110/6 in 26.4 overs. Fernando remained the top-scorer for Sri Lanka with a 63-ball 56, laced with six fours and a six, while Liyanage made a 54-ball 36. Experienced all-rounder Wanindu Hasaranga then shared an important 48-run partnership with Chamidu Wickramasinghe to give a slight push to Sri Lanka's total. Hasaranga made 35 off 33 deliveries, while Wick-

ramasinghe scored 22 from 42 balls. Henry spearheaded New Zealand's bowling charge with 4/19 in his 10 overs, followed by Jacob Duffy and Nathan Smith, who picked two wickets each. For his sensational bowling performance, Henry was adjudged the player of the match. Chasing a modest 179-run target, the touring side comfortably knocked the winning runs for the loss of just one wicket and 142 balls to spare.



Leading the way for the home side was opening batter Will Young, who top-scored with an unbeaten 90 off 86 balls, studded with 12 boundaries. His opening partner Rachin Ravindra also made important contribution with his 36-ball 45, while Mark Chapman made 29 not out from 36 deliveries. For Sri Lanka, Wickramasinghe picked the solitary wicket. The nine-wicket victory gave New Zealand a 1-0 lead in the three-match series, with the second ODI scheduled to take place on Wednesday in Hamilton. - Agencies

Govt
expresses
surprise...

FROM PAGE 01

He added that there needed to be uninterrupted access to other incarcerated party leaders for political consultations. However, Qaiser, though not naming the establishment, said that the PTI had asked the government to include "the stakeholder" in the dialogue because "the thinking of those who have the real decision-making powers is yet to be seen". On the same programme, PPP leader Raja Pervez Ashraf said, "They (the establishment) are a part of the government, of course, the committee will talk with them as and where it is needed," in response to a question about bringing an establishment representative on board for negotiations.

PPP
threatens to
withdraw...

FROM PAGE 01

Interests (CCI) as well, but no meeting of the CCI was convened in the last 11 months. She alleged that the Constitution was "continuously and openly being violated". This not a first time that the PPP has voiced concerns over not being consulted on the key national issues by the PML-N-led government. Earlier in December, PPP Chairman Bilawal-Bhutto Zardari stated PM Shehbaz-led administration does not have mandate to take unilateral decisions. Stressing the need for making consensus decisions, the PPP chairman had said: "We are the only political party that can proudly say that we are neither selected nor Form-47 beneficiaries." PM Shehbaz had also constituted a committee to resolve the issues between PML-N and PPP days after PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari had expressed dissatisfaction with the government in November 2024. As per the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the committee comprised Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Ishaq Dar, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif, Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar, and Minister for Economic Affairs Ahmad Khan Cheema.

Uzbekistan
plans 'direct
flights' to...

FROM PAGE 01

Ambassador Tukhtaev addressed the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP), Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), and members of the business community in the metropolis. He highlighted the historic and brotherly relations between Uzbekistan and Pakistan, underpinned by shared cultural and religious affinities. "Our two nations are closer than ever, thanks to the realisation of the long-awaited vision of regional connectivity," the ambassador said, emphasising the ongoing efforts to enhance economic cooperation and strategic collaboration. Ambassador Tukhtaev shared that Uzbekistan implemented a soft visa regime for Pakistani citizens in September 2023, facilitating business and tourist travel.

Pakistan,
UAE commit
to expand...

FROM PAGE 01

He underscored Pakistan's readiness to expand cooperation in sectors such as renewable energy, technology, trade, infrastructure and skill development. Sheikh Mohammed highlighted the UAE's keen interest in collaborating with Pakistan in the mining, minerals, and agriculture sectors. He expressed admiration for how Pakistan's economy has stabilised and is moving in the right direction under the leadership of Premier Shehbaz. The president also emphasised that this renewed economic vigour has created prospects for enhanced bilateral investment and collaboration. In his remarks, the visiting president also reiterated the UAE's commitment to enhancing its longstanding partnership with Pakistan, stressing the importance of people-to-people connections and shared prosperity.

Babar, Shan lead Pakistan fightback against SA

Babar and Shan reduce Pakistan's deficit to 341 runs

WEB DESK

CAPE TOWN: Pakistan captain Shan Masood and star batter Babar Azam fought hard in after South Africa enforced follow-on during the third day of the second Test here at the Newlands on Sunday. The duo batted sensibly in the second innings to take their team's total to 80 without a loss at the Tea on day three, reducing the touring side's deficit to 341 runs. At the conclusion of the second session, Babar was unbeaten on 34 from 51 deliveries with the help of four boundaries, while Masood had made 37 off 54 deliveries. The hosts enjoyed yet another dominant session in the ongoing fixture as they picked Pakistan's remaining three wickets by conceding just 39 runs. Ace pacer Kagiso Rabada gave the home side first success in just the fifth over of the second session by dismissing Aamir Jamal (15) with a fierce bouncer. Tailenders Mir Hamza (13) and Khurram Shahzad (14) then offered some resilience before being dismissed by Keshav Maharaj

and Kwena Maphaka, respectively. At the conclusion of the opening session of the day, the touring side were reeling at 155/6 with all-rounder Aamir Jamal and Khurram Shahzad on the crease. The visitors had a decent start to the day as

Babar and Rizwan stretched their overnight fourth-wicket partnership to 88 runs before the former fell victim to debutant Maphaka after a gutsy half-century. Babar scored 58 off 127 deliveries with the help of seven boundaries.



Rizwan, on the other hand, then put together a brief 26-run partnership with Salman Ali Agha before both perished in quick succession, bringing the total down to 155/6. The wicketkeeper was cleaned up by Mulder while going for a wild slog, whereas Agha was stumped off Maharaj's sharp spinning delivery in the 44th over. Rizwan scored 46 off 82 deliveries, while Agha made a 22-ball 19. Aamir and Khurram will resume Pakistan's first innings from 155/6 in the second session as the visitors still trail by 460 runs. For South Africa, Kagiso Rabada has taken two, while Marco Jansen, Maphaka, Mulder and Maharaj have picked one apiece. **Playing XI:** Pakistan: Shan Masood (captain), Saim Ayub, Babar Azam, Kamran Ghulam, Saud Shakeel, Mohammad Rizwan (wk), Salman Agha, Aamer Jamal, Khurram Shahzad, Mohammad Abbas, Mir Hamza. South Africa: Aiden Markram, Ryan Rickelton, Wiaan Mulder, Tristan Stubbs, Temba Bavuma (captain), David Bedingham, Kyle Verreyne (wk), Marco Jansen, Keshav Maharaj, Kagiso Rabada, Kwena Maphaka.

Briefs

**Austria's
chancellor
to step down
after coalition
talks collapse**

VIENNA :Austria's conservative Chancellor Karl Nehammer said Saturday he would step down in the "coming days" after breaking off coalition talks with the Social Democrats over disagreements on key issues. The surprise move might lead to snap polls being called in the Alpine EU member country - or the conservatives might negotiate with the far right that won national elections in September. Nehammer announced in a video message on X that he would step down "both as chancellor and party chairman of the People's Party (OeVP) in the coming days and enable an orderly transition". The development comes just one day after Austria's liberal party withdrew from three-party coalition talks to form a centrist government. The aim had been to sideline the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) that won September elections with 29 percent but was unable to find partners to form a national government in the Alpine EU member state. Nehammer said on Saturday that he had wanted to be "the force of the political centre in order to build a bulwark against the radicals" who "only live by describing problems" rather than solving them. --APP

**Poland bars
Hungarian
envoy from
EU presidency
opening**

WARSAW: Poland said it barred Hungary's ambassador from the opening gala of its EU presidency because of a diplomatic spat over a former minister, a decision Hungary called branded "childish". The row over a Polish lawmaker who fled to Hungary to escape corruption charges cast a shadow over the event to mark the handing of stewardship of the bloc from Hungary's nationalist government to Poland's pro-European leadership. In December, Hungary gave refugee status to Polish lawmaker Marcin Romanowski who had served as deputy justice minister in the previous right-wing government led by the Law and Justice (PiS) party. Facing corruption charges and an arrest warrant, Romanowski had fled Poland for Hungary, which is governed by PiS ally Viktor Orban, and was granted political asylum there. Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski called that move a "hostile act". "Following the situation around Romanowski, Minister Sikorski sent a note to the Hungarian ambassador saying he was not a welcome guest" at the gala to launch Warsaw's presidency of the European Union, Poland's deputy European affairs minister Magdalena Sobkowiak-Czarnecka told the state broadcaster TVP. --APP

**Secretary
UBG for
providing
Braille books
to blinds**

ISLAMABAD: Secretary General UBG, Federation Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) Zafar Bakhtawari emphasized that providing Braille books to visually impaired individuals in Pakistan is not enough and equipping them with IT training. Secretary General UBG, FPCCI Zafar Bakhtawari stressed the need for providing Braille books to visually impaired individuals in Pakistan is not enough; equipping them with IT training to meet modern demands and making them productive citizens is the need of the hour. On the occasion of World Braille Day, Zafar Bakhtawari stated that Braille is not merely a written language for the visually impaired but a vital tool for their self-reliance, dignity, and a respected place in society, said a release issued here. He highlighted that this day serves as a reminder of our collective responsibility to reduce the challenges faced by special individuals. --APP



ISLAMABAD: Picnickers enjoying pleasant weather at old side of Monal restaurant at Peer Sohawa area, in the Federal Capital

**Blinken wades into political
crisis with stop in South Korea**

Yoon had once been a darling of the Biden administration with his bold moves to turn the page on friction with Japan and his eye on a greater role for South Korea on global issues

SEOUL: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrives late Sunday in crisis-riven South Korea where he will seek delicately to encourage continuity with the policies, but not tactics, of the impeached president. Blinken will hold talks with counterpart Cho Tae-yul on Monday, the same day a warrant expires to arrest suspended President Yoon Suk Yeol who unsuccessfully tried to impose martial law on December 3. Seoul is the first stop on what will likely be Blinken's final trip as the top US diplomat as he seeks to highlight President Joe Biden's record rallying democratic allies before the return of the more mercurial Donald Trump. Blinken will head afterwards to Tokyo, making it crucial in the eyes of his advisors not to snub South Korea, which has

a fraught and often competitive relationship with Japan, a fellow US ally also home to thousands of American troops. Yoon had once been a darling of the Biden administration with his bold moves to turn the page on friction with Japan and his eye on a greater role for South Korea on global issues. Yoon joined Biden for a landmark three-way summit with Japan's prime minister and - months before declaring martial law - was picked to lead a global democracy summit, a signature initiative for the outgoing US administration. Yoon also memorably charmed his hosts on a state visit by belting out "American Pie" at a White House dinner. Blinken may face some criticism from the South Korean left for the visit but should be able to navigate the political crisis, said Syd-

ney Seiler, a former US intelligence officer focused on Korea now at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Blinken has a high enough profile to be above the fray, and can keep the focus on challenges such as China and North Korea, he said. Blinken can dodge a lot of these domestic South Korean landmines relatively easily and contextualise it not as trying to help the ruling party or artificially create a sense of normalcy where it otherwise isn't, Seiler said. In a statement, the State Department did not directly mention the political crisis but said Blinken would seek to preserve trilateral cooperation with Japan, which has included enhanced intelligence sharing on North Korea. Blinken's visit comes at a time of change for both countries, with Trump return-

ing to the White House on January 20. Paradoxically, while Biden worked closely with the conservative Yoon, Trump in his first term enjoyed a warm relationship with then progressive president Moon Jae-in, who encouraged the US president's groundbreaking personal diplomacy with North Korea. The Biden administration has stressed since the crisis that it is reaching out to South Korean politicians across the divide, amid the uncertainties on who will lead Asia's fourth-largest economy. Progressive opposition leader Lee Jae-myung - who himself faces election disqualification in a court case - supports diplomacy with North Korea. But the former labour activist has also taken stances that differ from those of both Biden and Trump. Lee has criticised deployment of

US-made THAAD missile defences, which Washington says are meant to protect against North Korea but which China sees as a provocation. South Korea's left has long championed a harder stance on Japan over its brutal 1910-1945 occupation of the Korean peninsula. US officials said they had no warning of Yoon's imposition of martial law, which brought masses of protesters to the streets. Blinken, addressing reporters last month, said the crisis showed the strength of South Korea's institutions built in the three decades since it embraced democracy. "I think Korea is one of the most powerful stories in the world about the emergence of democracy and democratic resilience, and we'll continue to look to Korea to set that example," Blinken said. --Agencies

**Bezos's
Blue origin
poised for
first orbital
launch**

CAPE CANAVERAL: Amazon founder Jeff Bezos's company Blue Origin is poised to launch its first orbital rocket next week, marking a pivotal moment in the commercial space race currently dominated by Elon Musk's SpaceX. Named New Glenn, the rocket is scheduled to lift off from Cape Canaveral Space Station in Florida as soon as Wednesday 1:00 am (0600 GMT), with a backup window on Friday, according to a Federal Aviation Administration advisory. While Blue Origin has not officially confirmed the launch date, excitement has been building since a successful "hotfire" test on December 27. "Next stop launch," Bezos declared on X, sharing a video of the towering rocket's engines roaring to life. The NG-1 mission will carry a prototype of Blue Ring, a Defense Department-funded spacecraft envisioned as a versatile satellite deployment platform, which will remain on board the rocket's second stage for the duration of the six-hour test flight. It will mark Blue Origin's long-awaited entry into the lucrative orbital launch market after years of suborbital flights with its smaller New Shepard rocket, which carries passengers and payloads on brief trips to the edge of space. --APP

**BMP for
encompassing
long-term
vision for
sustained
progress**

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry's Businessmen Panel (BMP) has asked the government that its strategies should not only focus on short-term gains but also encompass a long-term vision for sustained progress, focusing the national economic agenda, giving priority to address the issues of trade and industry in consultation with the business community which is the key stakeholder. FPCCI former president and BMP Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar observed emphasized that such transparency is crucial for instilling confidence in the business community and investors, as Pakistan, with all its resources and opportunities, cannot afford to continue to muddle through economically due to political polarization. FPCCI former president observed that Pakistan requires a political consensus on economic policy. Freeing the country from its economic calamities should not be a matter of party affiliation, but a common task for all political actors who want to see Pakistan flourish. He observed that the country has had trouble raising enough money to cover its expenses. --DNA

**Indian forces
clash with Maoist
rebels, five dead**

NEW DELHI: Indian security forces on Sunday battled with Maoist rebels in their forested heartland, police said, with at least four guerillas and one policeman killed. More than 10,000 people have died in the decades-long insurgency waged by Naxalite rebels, who say they are fighting for the rights of marginalized indigenous people in India's resource-rich central regions. Government forces stepped up efforts last year to crush the long-running armed conflict, with some 287 rebels killed in 2024, according to government figures. Clashes broke out late Saturday in Abujmahar district of Chhattisgarh state, a key battleground in the insurgency. "Four bodies of Maoists, who were in their battle uniform, have been recovered after an encounter with police forces," police inspector general P. Sunderraj said, adding one police constable had also been killed. "Action is still on," he said. Around 1,000 suspected Naxalites were arrested and 837 surrendered during 2024. Amit Shah, India's interior minister, warned the Maoist rebels in September to surrender or face an "all-out" assault, saying the government expected to quash the insurgency by early 2026. The insurgency has been drastically restricted in area in recent years. The Naxalites, named after the district where their armed campaign began in 1967, were inspired by the Chinese revolutionary leader Mao Zedong. --Agencies

**MAGA civil war sparks fears of
chaotic Trump White House**

WASHINGTON: With Donald Trump's allies in open warfare ahead of his inauguration, analysts see the latest hostilities between his billionaire backers and working-class base as a preview of tensions that threaten to shatter his fragile coalition. The furor over whether to welcome skilled foreign workers has exposed deep fault lines between the hardcore immigration hawks who have been with Trump from the start and the "tech bros" who spent a fortune getting the Republican re-elected. Threatening to grow into an irreparable schism, the row has prompted leading lights in Trump's "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) crusade to highlight what they see as the absurdity of a supposedly populist movement where the mega-rich call the shots. "I think this most recent war of words between traditional MAGA and big-tech MAGA was an opening salvo in a long-running battle over the future of the MAGA movement," political analyst Flavio Hickel told AFP. Leading the Silicon Valley faction is Elon Musk, the South African-born SpaceX and Tesla boss, who shelled out at least \$250 million to bankroll the Trump campaign, even as the candidate pushed scare stories about a migrant-led crime wave that never was. Musk's money was a boon, but the world's richest man found himself a target of MAGA after supporting visas for skilled foreigners, apparently unaware that his new allies' anti-immigrant animus extends to his own employment practices. Hickel characterized Musk, Vivek Ramaswamy and several other tech tycoons Trump has tapped in advisory roles as "ideologically libertarian" and favoring traditional conservative priorities like balanced budgets and expansive legal immigration. "Traditional MAGA seems to care little about the budget and found Trump's nativism to be the most appealing feature of his candidacies," the politics professor, who teaches at Maryland liberal arts school Washington College, told AFP. In MAGA's first internal conflagration since November's election - dubbed "Oligarchs vs. Nativists" by the US media - Musk called his critics among the Trumpist base "contemptible fools" who should be rooted out. Steve Bannon, an ex-White House strategist and MAGA media star, retaliated with a threat on his War Room podcast to "rip (Musk's) face off" on New Year's Eve, warning the tycoon not to "go to the pulpit in your first week here and start lecturing people." Echoing concerns that Trump's billionaire supporters have never really understood his appeal to blue-collar voters, Bannon told Musk and other "recent converts" to "sit back and study" MAGA's stance on keeping US jobs for Americans. Bannon and others have demanded "reparations" from Silicon Valley for cutting Americans out of jobs. The MAGA rabble-rouser said the visa issue is "central to the way they gutted the middle class in this country. --APP

**Top fruit, vegetable exporter pioneering
Mushroom business**

Shahid said that in the existing scenario, a number of modern or commercial farms are producing mushroom, SunGold farm is the biggest farm in the country with its own spawn production lab and equipped with modern facilities. "We have an annual production capacity of 2000-2500 tons and producing 3-4 tons daily"

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's top fruit and vegetable exporter, Shahid Suntan has now pioneered the 'Mushroom business, as he started the mushroom industrial production in Pakistan by investing \$6 million to promote the mushroom business in Pakistan. "I started this business to promote 'Made in Pakistan' in global market and said that in the existing scenario a number of modern or commercial farms are producing mushroom, our SunGold Mushrooms farm is the biggest

farm in the country with its own spawn" he told APP here. Shahid said that in the existing scenario, a number of modern or commercial farms are producing mushroom, SunGold farm is the biggest farm in the country with its own spawn production lab and equipped with modern facilities. "We have an annual production capacity of 2000-2500 tons and producing 3-4 tons daily." In previous year 2024, the size of the mushroom market in the world is \$66.53 billion, in which Pakistan's share is negligible, he said. Replying to a question on Mushroom market size in

last year 2024, he said that the mushroom market size has grown strongly in recent years, and it has grown from \$61.33 billion in 2023 to \$66.53 billion in 2024 at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8.5%. CEO SunGold Mushrooms farms said that 'Made in Pakistan and export substitution have always been my priority and in mushrooms, he intends to reduce the country's mushroom imports by increasing his exports. He said that when people in Pakistan are talking about the decline of business and industry, "We are playing our role in

increasing the country's economy by investing in new sectors like Mushrooms," Sultan said that Mushroom locally known as "Khumbi", in Pakistan, this is among the emerging agricultural business in the world and "We have started this business for exporting this to the international market." Cultivation of mushroom in Pakistan is in its preliminary stage and its pace of development is slow due to inadequate private and public segment support because it involves a high infrastructure, he said. Meanwhile talking to media, Chairman Indonesia and Pa-

kistan, Business Council (IPBC) and top industrial player of Palm oil industry, Ahmed Sultan said that Mushroom business has huge potential in future market of global economy and Pakistan can achieve the huge foreign exchange from this sector. He said that Pakistan need diversity in export and items level and for diversification in commodities and items, "Mushrooms" market to play vital role for increasing Pakistan exports. Chairman, IPPBC said that Pakistan can achieve the revival in the industrial sector through this potential sector of Mushrooms in coming years.

Briefs

4.7 magnitude earthquake jolts Kalat

DNA
ISLAMABAD: The 4.7 magnitude earthquake tremors were felt in Kalat city and its surrounding areas in Balochistan on Sunday. According to the Seismological Center, the earthquake with its depth measured at 18 kilometers beneath the Earth's surface, a private news channel reported. The epicenter was located 22 kilometers from Sibi, a city in Balochistan. Despite the intensity of the earthquake, there have been no reports of casualties or damage to property from any part of the capital or its neighboring regions.

Greek reformist ex-PM dies at 88

ATHENS: Costas Simitis, the reformist prime minister whose governments oversaw Greece's eurozone entry, helped Cyprus join the EU and planned for the Athens 2004 Olympics, died Sunday at the age of 88. The Greek government announced on Sunday a four-day national mourning. Current Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, in a statement, expressed his sadness at the passing of Costas Simitis and his respect for "a worthy and noble political opponent who accompanied Greece on its great national steps: the accession to the Eurozone and the Euro and the entry of Cyprus into Europe". Mitsotakis said Simitis was "a personality who, undoubtedly, leaves his own imprint on the development of the country, throughout the last decades." Mitsotakis concluded his tribute by saying Simitis's legacy "still runs through the demands of our country today. Something that marks Costas Simitis' contribution to it. Allowing him, from now on, to maintain a special place in memory and history. My most sincere condolences to his wife Daphne, his daughters and his family." Simitis studied law in Germany and was a resistance fighter during Greece's seven-year dictatorship, fleeing the country in 1969 to avoid arrest. The former law professor was a founding member of the PASOK party formed in 1974 by socialist firebrand Andreas Papandreu, and a key cadre in the party's three terms in government after 1981. As minister for economy and later industry, the austerity-minded Simitis repeatedly clashed with Papandreu's free-wheeling policies. But when Papandreu lay near death in 1996, he was picked internally by the party to replace him as prime minister. - Agencies

Sarkozy beset by legal woes

PARIS: Nicolas Sarkozy, who ruled France as a tough-talking right-wing president from 2007 to 2012, is seen by supporters as a dynamic saviour of his country but by detractors as a vulgar populist mired in corruption. The pugnacious politician on Monday goes on trial on charges he used illegal campaign financing from Libyan dictator MoamerKadhafi to fund his victorious 2007 presidential election campaign, accusations he vehemently denies. The trial is just the latest legal headache for Sarkozy who in December was definitively condemned by France on influence-peddling charges after his final appeal was rejected by the Court of Cassation. He was sentenced to one year in prison, the first time a former French head of state has been given such a sanction, although he is due to serve the time wearing an electronic bracelet outside of jail. Defiant as ever, Sarkozy said he was "not ready to accept the profound injustice that is being done to me" and added he would use to the sole remaining legal path - the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg - to prove his innocence. Last year, a Paris appeals court confirmed a conviction against Sarkozy in another illegal campaign financing case, ruling said he should serve six months prison, with another six months suspended. - APP

Israel-Hamas talks resume as violence shows no let-up

A total of 96 Israeli hostages remain in Gaza, including 34 the Israeli military says are dead

NEWS DESK

GAZA STRIP: Israel confirmed on Saturday that negotiations for a Gaza ceasefire and hostage release deal had resumed in Qatar, as rescuers said more than 30 people had been killed in fresh bombardment of the territory. The civil defense agency said a dawn air strike on the home of the Al-Ghoulia family in Gaza City killed 11 people, seven of them children. AFP images from the neighborhood of Shujaiya showed residents combing through smoking rubble. Bodies including those of small children were lined up on the ground, shrouded in white sheets. The Israeli military claims that it had struck more than 100 "terror targets" in Gaza over the past two days, while rescuers in the Palestinian territory reported dozens of people killed in Israeli strikes. As the violence raged, Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz confirmed that indirect negotiations with Hamas had resumed in Qatar for the release of hostages seized in the October 2023 attacks. The minister told relatives of one of the hostages, woman soldier Liri Albag, that "efforts are under way to free the hostages, notably the Israeli delegation which left yesterday (Friday) for negotiations in Qatar," his office said. Katz said that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had given "detailed instructions for the continued negotiations." He was speak-

Syrian FM visits Qatar

DOHA: Syria's new foreign minister met with his Qatari counterpart and Qatar's prime minister in Doha on Sunday, as Syria's new de facto authorities under Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham establish diplomatic ties with regional and global governments. Foreign Minister Asaad Al-Shibani posted on X that he's also set to visit Jordan and the United Arab Emirates to develop strategic partnerships, and support Syria's security and economic recovery. Al-Shibani met with his Saudi counterpart in Riyadh on Thursday. And he also welcomed the foreign ministers of Germany and France in Damascus on Friday. HTS led a lightning insurgency that ousted President Bashar Assad on Dec. 8 and ended his family's decades-long rule. From 2011 until Assad's downfall, Syria's uprising and civil war killed an estimated 500,000 people. Much of the world ended diplomatic relations with Assad because of his crackdown on protesters, and sanctioned him and his Russian and Iranian associates. Now, Syrian authorities hope to reestablish those ties and lift sanctions slapped on HTS and leader Ahmad Al-Sharaa to help make Syria's battered economy viable again. Assad was backed by Russia, Iran and Lebanese militant group Hezbollah. HTS now hopes Syria can strengthen ties with Arab countries in the region. "We conveyed to Doha our concerns about the challenges related to the economic sanctions imposed on the Syrian people, and we renew our call on the United States to lift those sanctions," Syrian radio station Sham FM quoted Al-Shibani as saying. Around 90 percent of Syrians live in poverty, while more than half of the population doesn't know where their next meal will come from, according to the United Nations. Al-Sharaa has said he will hold a national dialogue summit that includes different groups across Syria to agree upon a new political road map leading to a new constitution and an election. He vowed to dissolve HTS during the summit and has said in an interview with Saudi television network Al Arabiya that the de facto rulers are all of the same political background during this transitional phase for the sake of efficiency in running the country. Still, it's unclear whether Washington will lift sanctions anytime soon. Europe, meanwhile, appears hesitant because of fears over how religious minorities and women will be treated. - Agencies

ing after Hamas's armed wing, the Ezzedine Al-Qassam Brigades, released a video of Albag in captivity in Gaza. In the undated, three-and-half-minute recording that AFP has not been able to verify, the 19-year-old conscript called in Hebrew for the Israeli government to secure her release. In response, her family issued an appeal to Netanyahu, saying: "It's time to take decisions as if it were your own children there." A total of 96 Israeli hostages remain in Gaza, including 34 the Israeli military says are dead. Campaign group the Hostages and Missing Families Forum said the latest video was "firm and incontestable proof of the urgency of bringing the hostages home." Hamas had said late on Friday that the negotiations were poised to resume. The militant group, whose October 7, 2023, attack on Israel triggered the Gaza war, said they would "focus on ensuring the agreement leads to a complete cessation of hostilities (and) the withdrawal of occupation forces." Mediators Qatar, Egypt and the United States have been engaged in months of effort that have failed to end nearly 15 months of war. In December, Qatar expressed optimism that "momentum" was returning to the talks following the US election of Donald Trump, who takes office in 16 days. But Hamas and Israel then accused each other of setting new conditions and obstacles.

Indian forces clash with Maoists, 5 dead

NEW DELHI: Indian security forces on Sunday battled with Maoist rebels in their forested heartland, police said, with at least four guerrillas and one policeman killed. More than 10,000 people have died in the decades-long insurgency waged by Naxalite rebels, who say they are fighting for the rights of marginalized indigenous people in India's resource-rich central regions. Government forces stepped up efforts last year to crush the long-running armed conflict, with some 287 rebels killed in 2024, according to government figures. Clashes broke out late Saturday in Abujmahar district of Chhattisgarh state, a key battleground in the insurgency. "Four bodies of Maoists, who were in their battle uniform, have been recovered after an encounter with police forces," police inspector general P. Sunderraj said, adding one police constable had also been killed. "Action is still on," he said. Around 1,000 suspected Naxalites were arrested and 837 surrendered during 2024. Amit Shah, India's interior minister, warned the Maoist rebels in September to surrender or face an "all-out" assault, saying the government expected to quash the insurgency by early 2026. - Agencies



CAPE TOWN: Pakistan captain Shan Masood went on to score his sixth Test century and remained unbeaten on 102 at the day end. - DNA

Aid convoy's departure subject to security clearance: KP govt

"I do not consider yesterday's incident in Kurram a major setback," says Barrister Saif

BUREAU REPORT

PESHAWAR, PARACHINAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister's Adviser on Information Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif on Sunday said that the aid convoy, supposed to depart for Kurram on Saturday, would now leave for the restive region following security clearance. "I do not consider yesterday's Kurram incident a major setback. The [aid] convoy will leave as soon as [we] receive the security clearance," said the KP government's spokesperson while speaking to Geo News. His remarks come as the relief convoy containing essential goods for the crisis-hit Kurram district remains held up with vehicles parked at Tal due to the closure of Parachinar-Tal road following yesterday's gun attack on Kurram Deputy Commissioner Javedullah Mehsud on Saturday. Meanwhile, the provincial government has appointed Ashfaq Khan as Deputy

Commissioner Kurram following the attack on Javedullah Mehsud. The district administration has confirmed that the 80-vehicle convoy has not yet left for the affected areas and will be dispatched as soon as the road is cleared. The vehicles loaded with vital items including medicines and other essential commodities of daily use were bound for the violence-marred region but were held back following the latest attack. The uncertainty surrounding the relief convoy continues against the backdrop of an acute shortage of essential items in the district. The Parachinar-Tal road was supposed to reopen a day earlier after three months following a peace agreement on Wednesday signed by the warring tribes whose clashes have resulted in over 200 fatalities since July 2024. However, the hopes of 600,000 Kurram residents of getting much-needed supplies were shattered after gunmen opened fire injuring DC Mehsud and six others including a Frontier Constabulary personnel, a policeman, and four civilians.

Russia 'getting what it deserves,' Ukraine says

The Ukrainian military first launched an incursion into Kursk in August and has held much of the territory it took, despite efforts by Russian and recently deployed North Korean troops

FOREIGN DESK

MOSCOW: Ukraine has launched a counterattack in the southern Russian border region of Kursk, warning that Russia is "getting what it deserves." Andrii Kovalenko, the head of the Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation, an official body, said Ukrainian forces had launched surprise attacks against Russian forces in several locations across Kursk, months after launching its incursion in the region. In a short Telegram post Sunday, the head of the Ukrainian Presidential Office, Andriy Yermak, said: "Kursk region, good news, Russia is getting what it deserves." The Ukrainian military first launched an incursion into Kursk in August and has held much of the territory it took, despite efforts by Russian and recently deployed North Korean troops to drive Ukrainian units back across the border. The Russian Defense Ministry said Sunday that the Ukrainians had launched counterattacks to stop a Russian offensive, according to the official TASS news agency. It said that both had been repelled, adding that a Ukrainian assault including two tanks and seven armored vehicles had been defeated near the village of Berdin, some 15 kilometers (9 miles) from the border. The Kursk offensive - the first ground invasion of Russia by a foreign power since

World War II - took Russia and Ukraine's allies by surprise when it was launched. Kyiv's troops advanced quickly, though Russia eventually began to push their forces back; the line of control has not changed dramatically in recent months. On Saturday, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said that in battles near the village of Makhnovka, the Russian army lost up to a battalion of North Korean soldiers and Russian paratroopers. A battalion is normally several hundred troops. Unofficial Russian military blogs, which often provide reliable reporting on the Ukraine conflict, acknowledged the fighting on Sunday. One said that the Ukrainians were pushing north towards Berdin. "The enemy has thrown reserves into the offensive in Kursk region," said one blog Sunday. "For the breakthrough, the AFU covered the area with powerful radio electronic warfare systems, hampering the work of our UAVs [drones]," the blog said. "There are small arms battles, our artillery and tanks are actively working against the enemy." A second blog carried a similar account, saying the offensive had begun from the Sudzha area, but the Ukrainians had also landed paratroopers and intensified fighting in other directions. "In this offensive the enemy uses mine clearance trawls, tanks and other armored vehicles," the blog said, adding that frosty ground was enabling the attack, but that was not expected to last.

110 terrorists killed in Dera region during 2024

SHAMIM SHAHID

DERA ISMAIL KHAN: As many as 110 terrorists were killed while 57 others were arrested in different operations conducted by the Dera Ismail Khan Region police and other security forces during last year of 2024. It was stated by Dera Range police spokesman Waheed Ashar while sharing the annual performance report of the Dera Range police. He informed that 39 policemen were also martyred and 54 others got injured during these operations. In 2024, he informed, a total of 10,641 First Information Reports (FIRs) were registered for various crimes, leading to the arrest of 10,443 suspects. The police also recovered about 1470 illegal weapons and 47273 cartridges of different bores from the arrested accused. Under the campaign against the menace of drugs, the police also recovered 593 kilograms of hashish, 86 kilograms of heroin, 145 kilograms of Ice, 2.5 kilograms of opium, two kilograms of marijuana and 360 bottles of alcohol. Under the National Action Plan, 909 search and strike operations were conducted to maintain public peace and order. These operations resulted in the arrest of 6,111 suspects and the recovery of 647 weapons of various calibers and 13,351 rounds of ammunition. Additionally, 17,459 snap checkpoints were set up, where 34,032 suspects were apprehended, and 694 weapons along with 30,364 cartridges were seized. Over the last year, 894 proclaimed offenders were arrested, the spokesman informed. The traffic police education team conducted awareness sessions in various schools, colleges, and universities to educate students about traffic rules, he said and added that thousands of pamphlets and helmets were distributed among the public.

100 killed in HTS, SDF clashes

DAMASCUS: More than 100 militants have been killed over the last two days in northern Syria in fighting between Turkish-backed groups and US-backed Kurdish forces, a London-based war monitor says. Since Friday evening, clashes in several villages around the city of Manbij have left 101 dead, the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. The fatalities included 85 members of pro-Turkish groups and 16 from SDF militants, it added. In a statement, the SDF claimed it had repelled "all the attacks from Turkey's mercenaries supported by Turkish drones and aviation." Backed by US forces, the SDF controls vast areas of Syria's northeast and parts of Dayr al-Zawr province in the east following the withdrawal of government forces during the war that began in 2011. The group, which is regarded a US proxy, took control of much of the current territory, including Raqqa, after Daesh terrorists were evicted from the area. - Agencies

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