



Islamabad POST

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EU agrees to tackle Syria sanctions at Riyadh peace summit

Detailed News On Page-08

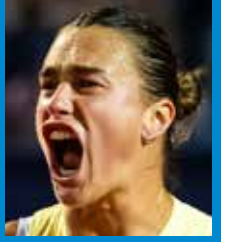
Bangladesh eases visa restrictions for Pakistan: HC

Detailed News On Page-04



Sabalenka begins title with victory

Detailed News On Page-06



Insists on judicial commission

After meeting Imran, PTI ready for 3rd round of talks

Imran Khan-founded party demands impartial commission to probe May 9 and November 26 events

MAHNOOR ANSAR / DNA

RAWALPINDI: Following a much-awaited meeting with incarcerated Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan in a "controlled environment", the former ruling party on Sunday announced that they were ready for third round of talks with the government to defuse the political tensions in the country. Addressing a joint press conference alongside PTI senior leaders Omar Ayub Khan and Asad Qaiser, Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) head Sahibzada Hamid Raza, who also serves as the spokesperson for the negotiation team, urged the government to make progress on their demands during the upcoming round of dialogue. He called on the government to establish an "impartial judicial commission" headed by a senior Supreme Court judge to investigate the events of May 9, 2023, and November 26, 2024. The May 9 riots erupted nationwide following the arrest of the deposed prime minister in the £190 million settlement case, leading to the detention of hundreds of PTI workers and senior leaders for their alleged involvement in violent incidents and attacks on military installations. During the unrest, protesters targeted civil and military sites, including Jinnah House and the General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi. The military condemned May 9 as "Black Day" and announced plans to try those involved under the Army Act. In November, Khan issued a "final call" for protests, demanding the restoration of PTI's "stolen mandate," the reversal of the 26th Amendment, and the release of political prisoners. PTI claims that at least 13 of its workers were killed and 1,000 others arrested during the protests. However, the government has firmly denied the use of live ammunition against demonstrators.

Continued on Page 06

Rule of law essential for prosperity: ex-PM

He made these remarks while talking to participants on the last day of the Think Festival 2025

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: Former premier and head of Awam Pakistan Party (APP) Shahid Khaqan Abbasi says rule of law is an essential component in the development of any country. While talking to the participants on the last day of the Think Festival 2025 on Sunday, former PM Abbasi said elections were stolen in a country so there could not be any political and economic stability. He said that a country cannot make progress sans rule of law. He said, "I admit all the mistakes of the past as I have spent almost twenty five years in this system, constitutional amendments have been made without reading." He said the army would have to stay within the constitutional limits for creating harmony in the system. The former PM said the PPP has been ruling Sindh for 16 years, the PTI has been ruling KP for 11 years and the PML-N has been in

Continued on Page 06

Pak rejects Afghan FM's allegations

Defence Minister Khawaja Asif says over two dozen terror groups are operating in Afghanistan

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has rejected allegations as baseless and concocted levelled by Afghan acting foreign minister against Pakistan. The defence minister said levelling allegations against Pakistan is actually an attempt to hide their failures. Afghanistan has been the centre of hiring Daish militants and facilitating terrorists in 2024.

Continued on Page 06

Senior Journalist Javed Shehzad passes away due to cardiac arrest



President, Prime Minister condole his death

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Senior journalist and Chief Reporter of Daily Ausaf and ABN News, Javed Shehzad, tragically passed away on Sunday following a cardiac arrest. He was widely respected for his contributions to the field of journalism and had a long-standing career in reporting and news coverage.

Continued on Page 06

Pakistan forex assets reach \$18.7 billion

Rise in forex reserves reflects impact of strict import restrictions and successful debt rollovers, says expert

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Pakistan's total foreign exchange assets reached a three-year high of \$18.7 billion as of November 2024 resulting in essential support to the country's

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddique Federal Minister for Professional Education and Training sees off OIC Secretary General Brahim Taha. - DNA

Asks world not to recognize Taliban regime

Highest number of girls out of school in Pakistan: Malala

Says Taliban don't consider women as human beings

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai has called on the international community to tackle the global crisis of girls' education, emphasising the vital role educated women play in building a thriving society. "We should begin by recognising what we are up against, a crisis that holds our economy back by hundreds of billions in lost growth, a crisis harming the health, safety and security of our people," Malala said while speaking on the second day of "International Conference on Girls' Education in Muslim Communities: Challenges and Opportunities" on Sunday. The federal capital hosted the two-day conference that brought together global experts, educators to address issues surrounding girls' education in Muslim countries.

Continued on Page 06

Bureaucracy, feudal lords dominate Pak, says JI's Naeem

Says, "Time will come soon when a system of justice will be established"

DNA

MARDAN: Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan, Hafiz Naeem-ur-Rehman, has stated that bureaucracy, feudal lords, tribal chiefs, and landlords dominate Pakistan. While addressing a Khatme-e-Bukhari Sharif ceremony in Mardan,

Continued on Page 06

Security forces eliminate 9 terrorists in NW IBOs

Two terrorists apprehended and two others wounded in separate IBOs in tribal district, says ISPR

STAFF REPORT

RAWALPINDI: Security forces killed nine terrorists and arrested two others in two separate engagements in Dosalli and Esham areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's North Waziristan district, Inter-Services Public Relations said on Sunday. The intelligence-based operations were conducted by

the security forces on January 11 on the reported presence of terrorists in the areas. The first IBO was conducted in the tribal district's general area Dosalli in which troops effectively engaged the terrorists' location and resultantly, six terrorists were killed and two others were apprehended. Subsequently, three terrorists were

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

GDA, PTI agree to strengthen ties

Pir Pagara conveyed his goodwill and best wishes for former prime minister Imran Khan

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Significant political developments emerged as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Adviser on Information Barrister Dr. Saif, met with Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) Chief Pir Pagara. Senior politician Mohammad Ali Durrani was also present at the meeting. During the meeting, Pir Pagara conveyed his goodwill and best wishes for former prime minister Imran Khan. In return, Barrister Dr. Saif delivered messages of goodwill from Imran Khan and PTI leadership to Pir Pagara and the GDA leadership. The leaders held detailed discussions on the political landscape and future strategies, agreeing to collaborate on addressing the nation's challenges.

Boat tragedy

Two more suspects arrested

Earlier, an investigation committee probing the recent Greece boat tragedy revealed the involvement of 31 officials of the FIA

DNA

GUJRANWALA: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has arrested two more suspects, including a human smuggler, in connection with the Greece boat tragedy. According to the FIA spokesperson, the suspects, identified as Zain Ali and Asif Shah, were apprehended from different locations in Hafizabad and Gujrat. Officials stated that Zain Ali had taken Rs4.5 million from Ahsan, a resident of Jalalpur Jattan, promising to send him to Europe.

In £190m case

'Justice will prevail' against Imran, Bushra

Whatever transpired during PTI government was "unprecedented", alleges defence minister

DNA

SIALKOT: Ahead of the verdict in the high-profile £190 million case against Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif expressed hope that "justice will prevail" as an accountability court was set to announce its judgment tomorrow. Addressing a press conference in Sialkot on Sunday, Asif said that while accusations had been made against past rulers, what transpired during the PTI's government was "unprecedented". Commenting on the £190 million settlement case, also known as the Al-Qadir Trust case, the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) senior leader alleged that Britain's National

Continued on Page 06

PTI to face disappointment on January 20: Vawda

He added that the propaganda about foreign pressure had now ceased

BUREAU REPORT

KARACHI: Former federal minister and Senator Faisal Vawda has said that Imran Khan will not escape punishment in the 190 million pound case. Speaking to the media in Karachi, Senator Faisal Vawda stated that PTI leaders were involved in conspiracies against

Continued on Page 06

What is the likely future of CPEC and Pak-China ties?

COMMENT

ANSAR MAHMOOD BHATTI



THE Pakistani side of ten uses lofty and poetic phrases like "sweeter than honey, deeper than the sea, and taller than the Himalayas" to describe its relationship with China. However, it's worth noting that the Chinese side has never reciprocated with such extravagant language when describing its engagement with Pakistan. Instead, the Chinese approach has consistently been pragmatic and focused on practical and economic outcomes. China views bilateral relations largely through the lens of business and investment considerations, prioritizing the protection of its economic interests above all else. This realistic approach underscores China's preference for clear, measurable objectives over sentiment-driven rhetoric. While this strategy has enabled China to advance its economic agenda effectively, it has also led to unintended consequences. Some analysts argue that in its attempt to foster close ties with specific political parties or factions within Pakistan, China has inadvertently alienated others. This selective engagement risks creating a perception of favoritism, which can generate resentment among

excluded political groups. Over time, such dynamics could undermine China's broader strategic goals, as it may struggle to maintain a balanced and inclusive relationship with Pakistan's diverse political landscape. This situation highlights the challenges inherent in China's interest-driven foreign policy approach. It is widely believed that China has historically shown a stronger affinity toward the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) compared to other political parties like the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). This perception is rooted in China's consistent preference to engage with the PML-N leadership and its long-standing rapport with the Sharif family. Over the years, China's interactions with the PML-N government have been marked by strategic collaboration and personal connections, setting them apart from its dealings with other political entities in Pakistan. During Shehbaz Sharif's tenure as the Chief Minister of Punjab, China frequently invited him to participate in high-level visits and bilateral meetings. These engagements, which often excluded other provincial chief ministers, highlighted China's focus on building ties with the PML-N leadership. This pattern has continued, further reinforcing the perception of a special relationship. For instance, more recently, the current Punjab Chief Minister, Maryam Nawaz, received a special invitation to China, where she was accorded exceptional protocol. This move caused notable discontent among the chief ministers of other provinces, particularly those from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP)

and Sindh, who felt sidelined by this overt display of preference. While it remains uncertain whether the other provincial leaders will be invited for similar engagements at a later stage, the optics of China's selective invitations have underscored its apparent favoritism toward the PML-N. This perceived bias not only underscores China's longstanding association with the PML-N but also highlights its emphasis on maintaining strong ties with the Sharif family, which appears to be a cornerstone of its diplomatic strategy in Pakistan. China paid a significant price for its lopsided approach during the tenure of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government when the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) came to power in 2018. Given the strong rapport between China and the PML-N, the newly formed PTI government, led by Prime Minister Imran Khan, ordered a comprehensive audit of all Chinese projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This step marked a shift in Pakistan's approach towards its strategic partnership with China. The audit uncovered widespread anomalies, including instances of financial mismanagement and corruption. Responding to these revelations, the Chinese government took punitive action against the companies implicated in these irregularities, signaling its zero-tolerance stance on corruption. However, Beijing was deeply displeased with the PTI government's decision to initiate such an audit, as it effectively brought CPEC projects to a standstill. This strained the historically strong Pakistan-China relationship. Prime

Minister Imran Khan, who took office in August 2018, received a congratulatory message from the Chinese leadership only after two months, delivered by the then Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan. Throughout the PTI government's tenure, bilateral relations remained in a state of limbo, with minimal progress on CPEC projects. The fallout from this period continues to linger. Even today, Pakistan-China relations have yet to regain their former momentum, and work on CPEC Phase 2 remains crippled. This impasse has raised concerns about the future of the CPEC initiative and the broader strategic partnership between the two nations. The Chinese efforts to cultivate friendly relations with the Pakistani mainstream media and think tanks appear to have faced significant challenges. A key issue has been their choice of media partners. Instead of engaging with leading media outlets that have wide reach and influence, Chinese investments were directed towards smaller, less prominent media houses. This strategic misstep not only alienated the top-tier media organizations but also failed to achieve the intended outcomes. As a result, a perception has developed that Chinese entities are willing to pay significant amounts to have their materials published, creating a transactional relationship that undermines credibility. Now, major media houses are reportedly reluctant to publish Chinese content without financial incentives, further complicating their media management strategy. Similarly, China's cooperation with Pakistani

think tanks has been suboptimal. Instead of collaborating with well-established and credible institutions, they have largely engaged with lesser-known and under-resourced think tanks, often consisting of only one or two individuals. This approach has limited the ability of Chinese perspectives to reach influential intellectuals and policymakers in Pakistan. However, there has been a recent positive development with the establishment of a "China Corner" at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI). This initiative marks a significant shift towards working with a reputable and genuine think tank, signaling a more strategic and effective approach to fostering intellectual and policy-level cooperation. Despite all ifs and buts, China remains Pakistan's cornerstone ally for economic prosperity and infrastructure advancement, standing firm amid challenges and uncertainties. While Pakistan must pursue a pragmatic and realistic approach to its relationship with China, ensuring mutual trust and long-term collaboration, Beijing too has a critical role to play in fostering a balanced and inclusive strategy. China's engagement in Pakistan should be rooted in accommodating diverse political perspectives, as the current opposition could form the future government. The strategy of selective partnerships and narrow alliances is unlikely to yield sustainable outcomes in Pakistan's dynamic political landscape. Both nations need to strengthen this relationship with a comprehensive, inclusive, and forward-thinking approach to ensure mutual benefits and long-lasting cooperation.

- The writer is newspaper editor

GB's export potential of dry fruits vital for economic growth

SULTAN SHOAB

GILGIT-BALTISTAN, Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) region is blessed with unique climate and fertile soil that enables the production of an impressive variety of dry fruits ranging from apricots and almonds to walnuts and cherries, the region's produce stands out for its taste, quality, and nutritional value. However, despite of its huge potential, the GB's fruit industry remains an underutilized asset in Pakistan's economic portfolio, primarily due to inadequate infrastructure, limited marketing strategies and lack of global exposure. The GB's geography and climate provide the ideal conditions for producing high-quality fruits like apricots, almonds, walnuts, and cherries. Recent reports reveal that the region produces over 3,000 metric tons of dry apricots, an equal quantity of almonds, and a staggering 100,000 metric tons of walnuts annually. In addition, the region's cherries have gained recognition for their distinct flavor and quality, recently making headlines for their successful export to China. In 2024, a significant milestone was achieved when Gilgit-Baltistan's cherry growers exported a large consignment to China, earning both praise and financial returns. The cherries, known for their superior sweetness and organic cultivation were well-received in Chinese markets. This successful venture highlights the immense potential of expanding fruit exports from the region to international markets. One of the standout features of Gilgit-Baltistan's fruits is their ex-

ceptional nutritional value. Packed with vitamins, minerals and antioxidants, they serve as a healthy snack option for consumers worldwide. "Dry fruits from this region are nutritional powerhouses," says Dr. Sara Khan, a nutritionist based in Gilgit. "They are rich in vitamins essential for immune support, skin health, and heart health. For instance, apricots are loaded with vitamin A and C, while almonds and walnuts provide protein and healthy fats essential for overall well-being. Including these in the daily diet can significantly improve health." Beyond their economic significance, the fruits of Gilgit-Baltistan hold cultural and traditional value. "We take great pride in our dry fruits, especially apricots, cherries, and walnuts," says Karim Shah, a dry fruit farmer from Hunza. "These fruits are not just a source of income; they are deeply rooted in our culture and heritage." The organic nature of these fruits adds to their appeal. Grown without pesticides and nurtured using traditional irrigation methods, they align with the increasing global demand for eco-friendly and organic products. This presents an opportunity to market these fruits as premium-quality items in international markets. Despite its potential, the fruit industry in Gilgit-Baltistan faces several challenges. According to Nisar Ahmed, a local marketing expert, lack of infrastructure, limited cold storage facilities and insufficient marketing strategies are major hurdles. "To tap into the global market, we need to invest in packaging and labeling to highlight our products' unique qualities," Ahmed suggests. "Participation in international

food expos, the use of social media for e-marketing, and forging partnerships with global distributors can help expand market reach. Additionally, emphasizing sustainable farming practices can attract eco-conscious consumers." He added "the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have a crucial role in unlocking the export potential of Gilgit-Baltistan's fruit industry". "Establishing cold storage facilities, providing financial support and imparting training to farmers to meet international quality standards are essential steps, he explained. "Furthermore, aligning production cycles with global demand and introducing certification programs can ensure the region's fruits find a place on the shelves of global markets" Nisar said. Retired Director of Agriculture and Livestock Gilgit-Baltistan highlighted the potential economic benefits: "If properly marketed, the region's farmers could earn over \$20 million annually from dry fruit exports, compared to the current earning of just Rs. 50 million." The region is a treasure trove of high-quality fruits, waiting to be discovered by the world. With strategic interventions, robust marketing efforts, and government support, the region can transform into a global hub for premium fruits. Success stories like cherry exports to China demonstrate the untapped potential of this industry. By investing in infrastructure, embracing modern marketing tools, and prioritizing eco-friendly practices, Gilgit-Baltistan's fruit sector can become a significant contributor to Pakistan's economy while uplifting the livelihoods of local communities.



LAHORE: High Commissioner of Bangladesh Mohammad Iqbal Hussain Khan being briefed about history of Lahore Fort during his visit to fort.

Kalam Jeep Rally to promote adventure tourism in KP

ISLAMABAD: A thrilling jeep rally, organized by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA), Upper Swat Development Authority, Frontier 4x4 Club and Pakistan Army, was kicked off in Kalam on Sunday. According to a private news channel, the event featured competitions across four categories: Zero to 2500cc, 2500cc and above, vintage vehicles and a special ladies category. A convoy of over 50 jeeps has already arrived in Kalam, under the supervision of KPCTA and Frontier 4x4 Club, setting the stage for an exciting adventure. Organizers highlighted that the rally aims to boost winter and adventure tourism in the region. They also emphasized the successful organization of past events, including ice hockey, curling, and speed skating competitions at Shandur Top, as part of ongoing efforts to promote the province's natural beauty and cultural richness. Kalam has become a key destination for summer and winter tourism, attracting visitors keen to experience its snowfall and breathtaking scenery. The provincial government's initiatives have significantly increased tourist activity, with over 20 million visitors recorded last year. This year is expected to surpass that milestone, further establishing Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as a hub for tourism and adventure sports.—APP

Buddha stupas: A rich historical heritage

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where every stone speaks about ancient Gandhara civilization, relics and stupas whisper tales of the Buddhists heritage, attracting tourists and followers of Buddhism. The visitors, soon after entering the northern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, are amazed to see abundance of archeological sites and ancient stupas reminding them about the lifestyle of Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. These centuries-old monasteries and stupas had served as a living testament to historical, cultural and religious importance of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where leaders and followers of different faiths

came for propagation of their religions by establishing dynasties in the subcontinent. Varying in size and architectural designs, these Buddha stupas offer a fascinating glimpses into the ancient Buddhists past and take tourists to its history with pleasant memories of Pakistan being a land of heritage tourism, said Bakht Muhammad, Assistant Director, Archeology and Museums Department KP while talking to APP. Highlighting heritage importance of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, he said it was the 26th province of Gandhara civilization in the South Asian region as evident of the Persian inscriptions mentioned by archaeologists

and historians Rigveda and Atharveda in 2nd Millennium BC. He said in 7th century BC, three Chinese historians Fahien, Xiuntsang and Sanune had exclusively talked about 1,000 stupas found in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where monks and archeologists mostly from east southern countries came for performance of religious obligations. "Later, the semi-nomadic Aryans had entered KP from the Afghanistan side, and settled alongside of rivers Swat, Gomal, Kurram, and Kabul where Gandhara civilization gained roots after Persians conquered it and made it one of the provinces of the Achaemenid Empire.—APP

FPCCI delegation's visit to Bangladesh set to boost trade relations

LAHORE: Convener of the Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry's regional committee on Food, Shahid Inman praised the timely decision by FPCCI to send a Pakistani business delegation to Bangladesh, which he believed will enhance the long-awaited trade volume between the two countries. Speaking to a delegation of traders led by Mian Azhar Shoukat, here on Sunday, he highlighted the growing Bangladesh economy and Pakistan's diverse industrial base as key factors for building mutually beneficial trade relations. The delegation's focus will be on showcasing Pakistan's strengths in textiles, surgical instruments, and agriculture, while exploring Bangladesh's strengths in ready-made garments and ICT. Shahid Inman emphasized that the FPCCI delegation's visit, led by FPCCI President Atif Ikram Sheikh, demonstrates the shared commitment of both nations to strengthening economic ties, promoting regional cooperation, and achieving sustainable growth. The outcomes of this visit, he said, would pave the way for stronger trade relations, increased investment, and enhanced economic collaboration between Pakistan and Bangladesh. The delegation will engage in business-to-business (B2B) interactions, explore joint ventures and investment opportunities, and facilitate knowledge exchange on trade policies and regulations.—APP

CM approves 62b for "Apni Chhat, Apna Ghar" program

DNA

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has approved a budget of 62 billion rupees for the "Apni Chhat, Apna Ghar" (Own Roof, Own House) program. Chairing a special meeting on the program here on Sunday, she set a target of disbursing 40,000 loans by May, urging swift completion of the loan distribution process. CM Maryam

Nawaz also instructed the authorities concerned to review the proposal of increasing loan amounts from 1.5 million to 2 million rupees. The program aimed to provide financial assistance to underprivileged families in Punjab to help them own their homes. The chief minister emphasized her desire for every homeless individual to have their own roof, declaring that owning a home is a fundamental right for every citizen.

During the briefing, it was shared that around 5,000 people across Punjab have already availed loans under the program. Moreover, over 4,200 houses are rapidly progressing towards completion under the initiative. Notably, the Ravi Urban Development Authority (RUDA) and Punjab Housing and Urban Development departments are collaborating to provide pre-built homes to deserving families as part of the initiative.

Siddiqui seeks collective efforts to overcome barriers to girls' education

He called for collective action to remove the barriers to girls' education and eliminate the existing inequalities in the education system

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training, Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui emphasized the need for collective action to overcome the barriers to girls' education, underscoring the importance of education in empowering women and strengthening communities. Speaking at the closing ceremony of a two-day global conference on "Girls' Education in Muslim Society: Challenges and Opportunities" on Sunday, the minister reiterated his commitment as education minister to ensure that every child in Pakistan, regardless of gender, socio-economic background, or geographical location, has access to quality education. "Addressing educational disparities remains a top priority for the government as education plays a vital role in empowering girls, in their prosperity, development and well-being," the minister added. Expressing concern over the persistent opposition to girls' education, the minister called on the nation to unite in challenging these entrenched societal norms and attitudes. He stressed that girls' education was not only a moral imperative but also an economic necessity, highlighting that educated girls are better equipped to care for their families and access better job opportunities. Meanwhile, the minister acknowledged the significant challenges facing girls' education, noting that millions of girls are still out of school in Pakistan. Highlighting the significant obstacles girls face in accessing education, he said that the government had launched several initiatives aimed at increasing girls' enrolment and improving the overall quality of education nationwide. The federal minister for education, outlined several key measures aimed at improving the quality of education, including teacher training, the construction of new schools, and the provision of scholarships for female students. He also noted that efforts were underway to enhance school infrastructure, particularly in underserved and rural areas, to ensure better educational opportunities for all students. He stressed the need to create a society where girls have access to quality education that enables them to reach their full potential. The minister also highlighted the vital role of parents, teachers and community leaders in promoting girls' education, urging that their contributions be recognised. He called for collective action to remove the barriers to girls' education and eliminate the existing inequalities in the education system.—APP

Reshaping people's lives through Uraan Pakistan, a way forward

PESHAWAR: Recognized as a beacon of shared prosperity, Uraan Pakistan is widely acclaimed for its wide-ranging goals aimed at reshaping lives of people through coordinated actions. The Pakistan's 13th Five-Year Plan (2024-2029), dubbed as "Uraan Pakistan," aims to chart a new path for the country's sustainable economic growth and societal development. Positioned at a pivotal moment in its history after its launch by Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz, Uraan Pakistan provides an inclusive workable roadmap to address the socioeconomic and environmental challenges besides providing quality education and healthcare services in addition to create jobs opportunities for youth. As Pakistan is determined to learn from the successes and failures of

the previous plans, the 13th plan will help overcoming the long-standing systemic barriers that have hindered its progress. In an interview with APP, Professor Dr. Naeem Khattak, former Chairman of the Economics Department at the University of Peshawar, described Uraan Pakistan as a pivotal initiative designed to strengthen the economy, alleviate poverty and create job opportunities for the youth. Emphasizing the importance of reducing foreign debt dependence and fostering domestic industrial growth for long-term economic stability, he highlighted the critical need for innovation and technology, combining climate change imperative to drive a robust and export-oriented economy. Dr. Khattak also called for transparent financial

resource allocation and effective oversight to ensure the success of the 13th plan. He stressed that the private sector's participation, alongside accelerated infrastructure development and technological innovation, would play a crucial role in achieving the desired outcomes. Investment in renewable energy, digital infrastructure, and vocational training to youth for a dignified employment are also central to the plan's objectives. Reflecting on past strategies, Dr. Khattak cited Dr. Mehboob-ul-Haq's first Five-Year Plan (1983-1988), which focused on human resource development over mere economic expansion. While political instability and governance issues in the past impeded the full realization of Dr. Haq's vision, he noted that

the subsequent plans attempted to address these challenges by focusing on economic growth, infrastructure, and social welfare. However, despite incremental successes, the 11th and 12th Five-Year Plans faced major hurdles due to political turbulence, economic volatility, and gaps in policy implementation. The 12th Plan, for instance, aimed for a 7-8% annual GDP growth but was significantly impacted by external shocks, including the global COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these challenges, the 13th Five-Year Plan—Uraan Pakistan—offers a renewed vision. This plan prioritizes innovation, environmental sustainability, and social infrastructure. He said a key component of the plan is the creation of a knowledge-based economy.—APP

MOST EXPERIENCED MANUFACTURERS & EXPORTERS OF MARTIAL ARTS UNIFORMS IN PAKISTAN

WHERE EACH STITCH IS WATCHED

JUDO
KARATE
BOXING
KICKBOXING
TAIKWONDO

JUDO
KARATE
KUNG-FU
JU-JITSU
TAEKWONDO
UNIFORMS AND
COLOURED BELTS

JUDO
KARATE
BOXING
KICKBOXING
TAIKWONDO

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

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

Hotels & Restaurants



Serena Hotel.....111 133 133
Marriott.....051-2862121
Monal.....0334-5421812



Turkish Airlines.....8494949



Emergency

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

Enquiry

- Edhi Ambulance.....115
PIA Flight Info.....114
PIA Cargo.....9280979
Railway Inquiry.....117
Railway Exchange9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi.....5555489
CAA.....9281092

Hospitals

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

Reforms in the FBR should be accelerated

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, the President of the Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, the President of All Karachi Industrial Alliance, the Chairman of the FCCI Advisory Board, and the President and former provincial minister, Mian Zahid Hussain, said on Saturday that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's decision to reduce ministries, departments, and government jobs is correct. He said the move would reduce the burden on the national exchequer and resolve many problems.

Departments

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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Pak-China relations to continue to grow stronger: Jiang

Chashma Nuclear Power Plant Unit 5, which can create 40,000 jobs directly and indirectly during the peak period of construction, has officially started, showing the huge potential of practical cooperation between the two countries

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of China to Pakistan Jiang Zaidong on Saturday said that Pak-China strategic cooperation would continue to deepen under the leadership of two countries. Addressing the launching ceremony of "Embracing the Chinese New Year 2025", the ambassador said that last month, Khunjerab-Sost Pass realized the all-year-round function, becoming a landmark progress in China-Pakistan relations in the new era, and once again demonstrating the deep foundation of the ironclad friendship. He said that the Chashma Nuclear Power Plant Unit 5, which can create 40,000 jobs directly and

indirectly during the peak period of construction, has officially started, showing the huge potential of practical cooperation between the two countries. Zaidong said, "We stand ready to continue to strengthen the development strategies with Pakistan, deepen mutually beneficial and win-win cooperation, forge an upgraded version of the CPEC construction, and accelerate the building of a closer China-Pakistan community of shared future in the new era, to better benefit the two countries and their peoples." He said that in the past year, President Xi Jinping maintained close communication with the President and Prime Minister of Pakistan and reached an important consensus on promoting Chi-

na-Pakistan all-weather strategic cooperation, especially on forging an upgraded version of CPEC. He said China's economy has continued to stabilize and improve. The annual GDP is expected to exceed 130 trillion yuan. He added total grain output has reached a new level of 1.4 trillion jin for the first time, the annual output of new energy vehicles has exceeded 10 million for the first time, the annual express delivery volume surpassed the 150-billion-parcel mark for the first time, and the annual passenger volume of China's railway network has exceeded 4 billion for the first time. This is the result of joint efforts of people of all groups across China, as well as the positive contributions of

overseas Chinese, including those in Pakistan, he added. Zaidong said, "I hope and firmly believe that everyone will further forge a strong sense of community of the Chinese nation, more actively support the development of China, promote China-Pakistan cooperation, and make new and greater contributions to comprehensively promoting the construction of a strong country and the great cause of national rejuvenation with Chinese modernization." He said that the embassy is the home of our compatriots overseas. "We will provide service with heart and soul so that everyone can feel the warmth of the motherland." The ambassador said, "We stand ready to provide new opportunities

for the world with the new development of Chinese modernization, and first benefit to our iron friend Pakistan." He expressed gratitude to the President and Prime Minister of Pakistan for writing to President Xi Jinping on the earthquake in Dingri county, Xizang. In the letters, they expressed sincere condolences and Pakistan's willingness to provide all possible assistance, he added. "We firmly believe that regardless of sudden natural disasters or complex and severe external environments, we can overcome difficulties and move forward courageously, and continuously push forward the great cause of building a strong country and achieving national rejuvenation."

Bangladesh visa now online

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Bangladesh Ambassador to Pakistan Muhammad Iqbal Khan has said that Pakistanis can now obtain visas for his country online as Dhaka has relaxed visa conditions for the country. BSpeaking during his visit to the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI), the ambassador said that the people of Bangladesh want to have a loving relationship with the people of Pakistan and increasing cooperation between the two countries was the need of the hour. Last month, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met Prof Yunus on the sidelines of the D-8 summit in Cairo and emphasised the need to make joint efforts to explore new avenues of economic cooperation. During the meeting, he had stressed taking advantage of great potential to boost trade in different sectors including chemicals.

African ambassadors call for enhancing trade and investment ties

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: During a high-profile seminar organized jointly by Institute of Regional Studies, Roots MIUC and Foreign Office, ambassadors of Egypt, Morocco, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Rwanda and Somalia underscored the need for a diversified approach to enhance commercial relations. The African envoys in Islamabad felt that only a holistic approach aimed at leveraging opportunities in multiple sectors, including trade and investment, defense, science and technology, tourism, culture and educational exchanges would enable Pakistan to benefit from its historical ties with Africa. Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed in his keynote speech on the occasion emphasized the sacrifices made by Pakistani soldiers in Africa during peacekeeping missions and Pakistan's erstwhile support to African freedom movements. He noted that the peoples of Pakistan and Africa were largely unaware of this remarkable aspect of their bond. To enhance connectivity between the two regions, he advocated travel facilitation from both sides and greater emphasis by the leadership on both sides

Ambassador Jauhar Saleem, President IRS, emphasized that increasing cooperation between Pakistan and 54 African states offered a promising future for both regions as highlighted by the growing trade volume which has exceeded \$ 5.6 billion. He highlighted the need for greater and more diverse engagement across the board, including commercial and defence cooperation, intellectual exchanges, and people-to-people contacts. He also called for promoting knowledge of the opportunities Africa offered among the youth in Pakistan and vice versa, essential for building enduring cooperation and hoped that Pakistan's expanding diplomatic footprints in Africa would facilitate the revival of historical ties.

Advertisement for Pakistan Air Force recruitment. Includes title 'پاکستان ایئر فورس' and 'میں بحیثیت ایئر مین شمولیت اختیار کریں'. Lists various job categories like 'ایروڈیٹرز', 'پی ایف اینڈ ڈی آئی', 'سیکیورٹی', 'ایم-ٹی ڈی', 'فائر فائٹرز', 'سپورٹس مین', 'نوٹ' with their respective eligibility criteria and application details.

Briefs

Dolphin officer dismissed over bribery allegation

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) police have dismissed Dolphin Squad officer Hassan Maqsood over bribery allegations. A police spokesperson told state news agency on Sunday that the decision was taken under the direct supervision of Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Syed Ali Raza. He said the officer faced allegations of accepting a bribe during a vehicle check. Reportedly, Hassan Maqsood allowed a vehicle with tinted windows to proceed after receiving illegal payment. He added that a complaint was initially lodged by a fellow police officer, prompting the immediate suspension of the accused. A comprehensive departmental inquiry followed, which concluded that the officer was guilty of the charges. Consequently, the officer was terminated from service. "There is no place in the department for corrupt officers," DIG Syed Ali Raza stated. He emphasized that such actions undermine public trust and vowed to maintain a strict stance against any personnel found misusing their authority.—APP

IRSA releases 30,000 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Sunday released 30,000 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 40,000 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbella Dam was 1476.47 feet and was 78.47 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 15,900 cusecs and 10,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jehlum at Mangla Dam was 1133.70 feet, which was 83.70 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 4,200 cusecs and 100 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 14,600, 14,500, 1,900 and 5,800 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 13,500 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 6,400 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.—APP

Inayat Bhatti remembered on his birth anniversary

ISLAMABAD: The 96th birth anniversary of the singer, actor, producer, director, scriptwriter, columnist and protagonist of the development of the Punjabi language and literature Inayat Hussain Bhatti was observed on Sunday. Born on January 12, 1928 in Gujrat Bhatti, Bhatti moved to Lahore to pursue further studies. After some time he started singing for Radio Pakistan and subsequently, entered the film industry as a playback singer in 1949 through the Punjabi hit 'Pheray'. He was a multi-talented distinguished singer, actor, director author, social leader and columnist. He has been interested in Sufi poetry since he was a child. Inayat sang for nearly 500 films, in both Urdu and Punjabi. His impressive discography includes 2,500 songs.—APP

Street vending – A boon or a bane

RAWALPINDI: Having its pros and cons on society and economy, street vending has grabbed prominence in the society, at the same time creating important market linkages as well as causing revenue gaps for country's economy. Categorized into moveable and static types, the impactful street vending had always been a vital entrepreneurial arc around the sector markets while subtending central focus on targeted population. The sonarant carts loaded with goods or food items move through streets with melodious calls by the hawkers that reflect an announcement for door step delivery of the goods. On the other hand, static stalls decorated with a range of products that sur-



ISLAMABAD: Visitors taking interest in informative materials displayed on the occasion of Chinese New Year celebrations.—DNA

NUML students seek relaxation in attendance

A student disclosed that a majority of the students of class A2 were facing Damocles sword like situation as the authorities concerned failed to allow the students in time to appear in the examinations

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The students of the German Department of the National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad Campus have sought intervention of the Rector for granting a relaxation in the attendance requirement to 70pc to them. In an email request to the NUML Rector they have pleaded that it is a certificate course not a degree program as allowing them to take the exams would help them continue their course to B1 without

setbacks, reliable sources in the German Department confided to this scribe on Saturday. Copies of the applications which the students addressed to the Head of German Department, made available to this correspondent, state that students of the German Department studying A1+A2 Certificate courses were not allowed by the authorities concerned to appear in the final examinations due to the shortage of attendance. Hence, the educational future of students of German Department has been put at stake by the authorities

concerned for not allowing them to appear in their final examinations to prove their mettle. The students, through applications, had twice requested to the Head of the German Department to allow them to appear in the examinations by taking a lenient view keeping in view time period and heavy tuition and transport fees paid to the university but in vain, the sources claimed. An aggrieved student, on the condition of anonymity, disclosed that unfortunately the Head of Department neither took decision at its own nor forwarded their

applications to next authority i.e. Dean, Registrar or the Director General of the university in order to save students' precious time. Resultantly, the sources divulged, due to the importance of the issue owing to time constraints, the students addressed their plight to the Rector, which is pending for want of a favourable decision. Another student disclosed that a majority of the students of class A2 were facing Damocles sword like situation as the authorities concerned failed to allow the students in time to appear in the examinations. The

sources further divulged that at least three students of Section A whose actual attendance was at 60pc, 63pc and one at less than 60pc were allowed to appear in the A2 examinations whereas other students with below 70pc attendance were not allowed to appear in the A2 examinations at the pretext of short attendance. Yet another student disclosed that many of them were full-time students, coming from diverse backgrounds would be unable to get admission in B1 course unless A2 certificate was issued

Impressive \$17.8b remittances in six months

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: As the remittances to Pakistan have hit a record high in first six months of the current fiscal year the Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) has said that foreign remittances flows are crucial which can support the country's account balance amidst low volumes of foreign direct investment and constant growth of exports. PIAF Chairman Faheemur Rehman Saigol, in a joint statement issued here today along with senior vice chairman Nasrullah Mughal and vice chairman Tahir Manzoor Chaudhry, observed that overseas Pakistanis sent 33 percent more remittances in the first six months of July and Dec the current fiscal year (FY25), compared to the same period of the previous fiscal year. According to experts, workers' remittances recorded a significant inflow of \$3.1 billion during

December 2024, marking a year-on-year growth of 29.3% and a month-on-month increase of 5.6%. Cumulatively, remittances reached an impressive \$17.8 billion during the first half of FY25 (H1FY25), reflecting a 32.8% rise compared to \$13.4 billion received in H1FY24. Faheemur Rehman Saigol said that it is expected that remittances to exceed \$35 billion by the end of this year. The primary sources of remittances in December 2024 were Saudi Arabia at \$770.6 million, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) sending \$631.5 million, the United Kingdom sending \$456.9 million, and the United States of America sending \$284.3 million, according to SBP. He projected a consistent remittance run rate of \$3 billion per month from January to June 2025, potentially driving total inflows to exceed \$35 billion by the end of FY25, an increase of 35% compared to the previous fiscal year, which saw a 29% rise.

that the Special Investment Facilitation Council implemented administrative measures to minimize the difference between the black market and interbank exchange rates, encouraging formal remittance inflows, he said. A stable rupee, with a 1% appreciation against the US dollar in 2024, and the SBP's efforts to build foreign exchange reserves (now standing at \$11.7 billion), reduced speculative activity. By curbing boom-bust cycles, this policy incentivized the diaspora to send remittances through formal channels. The PIAF Chairman added that the PSX emerged as one of the top-performing markets, further boosting investor confidence. He projected a consistent remittance run rate of \$3 billion per month from January to June 2025, potentially driving total inflows to exceed \$35 billion by the end of FY25, an increase of 35% compared to the previous fiscal year, which saw a 29% rise.

CDA cancels lease of a petrol pump in Sector F-6

ISLAMABAD: The Capital Development Authority (CDA) has canceled the lease of a petrol pump in Sector F-6, Islamabad, due to non-payment of dues by PSO and Awan Associates. After the cancellation of the lease, the CDA has taken possession of the petrol pump site. According to the details, PSO and Awan Associates owed more than Rs. 480 million. Despite multiple notices, the companies failed to pay their dues. After serving several notices, the CDA took action and took possession of the petrol pump site. Moreover, several violations were found on the petrol pump site, which were contrary to the agreement. The CDA had also issued notices for the removal of these violations, but they were not complied with. Due to non-compliance, the CDA canceled the lease and took possession of the site. The CDA has decided to allot the petrol pump site through a transparent bidding process. In this regard, advertisements will be published in newspapers, and a committee headed by the DG Admin will be constituted to ensure transparency in the bidding process. It is worth mentioning that the case related to the petrol pump site had been pending in the courts for a long time, but after effective follow-up, all cases have been disposed of.—DNA

Power suspension schedule

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO)'s spokesman, System Maintenance/Development Work is in process. Therefore power supply of below mentioned feeders/areas will be temporary suspended as per given schedule, on 14th January 2025, from 09:00 AM to 02:00 PM, Islamabad Circle, Orchard Scheme, CDA Pump, CDA Flats, New Marvi, Aziz Chowk, Sohan, Khanna East, Alipur, Chhata Bakhtawar, Comstock, Ghori Garden, Azad Shaheed, F-10 Markaz, Karachi Company, I-9/4, I-10/4, G-11/3, F-11/3, Rehara, CM Pak Zong, Kurry, Isolation Hospital, Sunny Bank, Cecil, Nimble, TDCP, PAF, New Mangyal Feeders, Rawalpindi City Circle, Saidpur Road, National Market, Muzammil Town, Khanna-II, Service Road, Airport, Tamsamabad, Iqbal Road-II, Fawara Chowk, Sara-fa Bazaar, Gowalmandi, Subhanuddin, Ali Market, Abu Bakar, Azizabad, Peshawar Road, Miltabad, Ameer Hamza Colony, Bajaniyal, Bajaniyal-II, I-16/4, Ratta, Azizabad Feeders, Rawalpindi Cantt. Circle, Mall Road, Sir Syed Road, Makkah Chowk, NPF-II, Sohan, MSF, Morgah, Lalazar, PGHS, Dhymyal, UC Lakhna, Jhawara, Chahan, New Rawat, Nar, Kambili, Sadiq, Panjar, Pind Jatla, Bengali, Syed Kasran, Gagan, Mandra-II, Shah Jeevan, Quid-e-Azam Colony, Lalkarti, Gulshan Saeed, Cantt, Qasim Base, Major Riaz Manzoor, Emirates, Zari-I & II, Zeta-I, IST, Dhok Awan, Mohra Nagyal, New Rawat Feeders, Attock Circle, Sher Shah Suri, Taxila, HMC Road, Nisar, Shaheed, Museum, D-17, D-18, Kohistan Enclave, Punjab Small Industry, Lal Rukh, Purmiana, Kohsar Valley, Babaraki, Shafi Chauhan, Hameed, Mansar, Kamra Rural, Gondal, Haji Shah, Ghorghashti, Attock Rural.—APP



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Naqvi pays homage to martyred traffic police personnel

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi on Sunday paid homage to Traffic Police personnel Zubair Shah, who was martyred in a firing incident by unidentified assailants in Sector I-9, in the federal capital. In a statement, the minister expressed his heartfelt condolence to the bereaved family, saying, "We stand with the grieving family in this hour of sorrow." He also urged for the immediate arrest of the culprits, directing authorities to bring them to justice swiftly and ensure that Zubair Shah's family receives justice. Furthermore, Mohsin Naqvi assured that the government would take full care of the martyrs' family.—APP

SNGPL urges caution in gas usage during winter

DNA

RAWALPINDI: General Manager of Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) Rawalpindi, Umar Hayat, has urged consumers to exercise caution in using gas during the winter season to prevent potentially fatal incidents. Highlighting the dangers of careless gas usage, Umar Hayat warned that negligence could result in life-threatening accidents. In a statement, he advised against using rubber pipes with gas heaters and stoves due to significant safety risks. He also highlighted the importance of proper ventilation in rooms and kitchens to prevent gas accumulation. "Consumers must ensure that all gas-powered appliances, including stoves, geysers and heaters, are turned off, and the main gas supply valve is closed before going to bed," he added. In case of emergencies, he advised the consumers to contact the SNGPL emergency helpline at 1199 or reach out to the emergency staff at nearby SNGPL offices.—APP

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Israel's expansionist map

AS part of its provocative and extreme policies towards Middle Eastern countries, Israel published a so-called "historical" map on an official account linked to its Foreign Ministry on the platform X. The map claims to include Arab lands, including parts of the occupied Palestinian territories, as well as Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. It also contains racist statements advocating for the annexation of the West Bank and the establishment of Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip. The account accompanied the map with commentary on the Israeli narrative, lacking any data or historical evidence. The maps promoted by Israel depict areas that were once part of historical Palestine or the occupied Palestinian territories, referring to them as part of Israel. This move has sparked a wave of official rejection; countries including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the UAE, Qatar, the Arab League, the Arab Parliament, and the Palestinian Authority led by Mahmoud Abbas condemned it, considering that Israel aims to "entrench its occupation, violate the sovereignty of states, and breach international law." Abdul-Malik Al-Houthi, leader of the Yemeni Ansar Allah movement, said that "everyone in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Palestine must understand that Israel is carrying an aggressive agenda aimed at controlling all these countries." He added in a statement, "The interim map published by the Israeli enemy is provocative. To protect their countries from American and Israeli aggression and to safeguard their land and resources, they (the Arab countries) must be in a position of strength and resilience. The policies adopted by Jordan and Syria now will not change the Israeli policy, nor will it relinquish its ambitions." For its part, the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, said that "the calls from official Zionist accounts and occupation leaders to annex Palestinian and Arab lands confirm their expansionist ambitions," adding that the hostile statements from the occupation demand strong positions from Arab and Islamic governments to confront these ambitions and stop its crimes. The expansionist map published by Israel aligns with the general direction of the far-right government in the occupying entity, which seeks to create a reality that does not stop at drawn borders or signed agreements but transcends all geographical, political limits and international treaties to achieve expansionist goals in many Middle Eastern countries. On November 11, the Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich—leader of the Religious Zionism party—said he had instructed the settlement administration and the civil administration (both under the Ministry of Defense) to begin a comprehensive professional effort to prepare the necessary infrastructure to apply sovereignty over the West Bank. Smotrich pledged that 2025 would be the year of Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank, according to the newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth. The following day, Israel's official broadcasting authority reported that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu intends to include the annexation of the West Bank in his government's agenda after U.S. President Donald Trump assumes office on January 20. Radical Jewish groups and organizations aspire to establish a Greater Israel that includes lands from sovereign Arab countries in Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. The Israeli newspaper Haaretz published an article discussing the expansionist plans for "the State of Israel" to include lands in the Negev Desert.



US exploits hacking allegations

ON Tuesday, Bloomberg reported that "Chinese-state sponsored hackers penetrated the executive branch of the Philippines government and stole sensitive data," as always, according to three anonymous people "familiar with the matter." The report highlighted that "the stolen data included military documents, some of which are related to the China and Philippines' ongoing territorial dispute over the South China Sea." On Wednesday, the Chinese Embassy in the Philippines opposed the "unjustified labeling, groundless accusations, or smears campaign." "It is worth noting that the report links the hacking to the South China Sea issue and mentions that the United States and others have provided technical support and technology to the Philippines. Who is the mastermind behind this hype farce and who is using cyber issues to stir up the regional situation and seek geopolitical interests? The answer is self-evident," Chinese embassy said. The US often relies on spreading misinformation or repeating misleading narratives in the hope that "a lie told a thousand times becomes the truth." The US has developed a formulaic approach to smear China on cyberattack topics: no technical details, no investigative reports, and no credible evidence. According to Bloomberg, anonymous sources claimed that in the attack, "the hackers used stolen usernames and passwords to access computer networks, install malware, and delete evidence of their presence." This raises critical questions: Can the US provide the associated IP addresses of the hackers, explain how the usernames and passwords were stolen, or identify the type of malware used? None of these crucial details are mentioned in the report. Instead, vague and elusive descriptions are presented as though they constitute the "truth." Ding Duo, director of the Research Center for International and Regional Studies at the National Institute for South China Sea Studies, told the Global Times that the so-called hacking incident is fundamentally no different from previous US propaganda. It is merely another US' cognitive warfare strategy and part of the US-Philippines "gray zone" tactics in the South China Sea. Yang Xiao, deputy director of the Institute of Maritime Strategy Studies at the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, said the US has been focusing on the issue of China's alleged cyberattacks primarily to serve its broader anti-China agenda. Now, in order to maintain the momentum of the hype, the US has linked the so-called hacking incident to the South China Sea, aimed at further stoking tensions in the South China Sea and pulling the Philippines deeper into the confrontation. Cyberattacks are becoming a stereotyped tool for the US as well as its allies to target China. Japan on Wednesday linked more than 200 cyberattacks over the past five years targeting the country's national security and high technology data to a Chinese group, according to the Associated Press. Obviously, Japan is playing a supporting role in the US-style political farces. However, the US is the real "expert" in global cyberattacks. Edward Snowden, the whistleblower of the "Prism" scandal, revealed in 2014 that the Philippines is among the countries being secretly monitored by a telecommunications spying program of the US National Security Agency.

America first to America everywhere

Qamar Bashir



President-elect Donald Trump announced plans to rename the Gulf of Mexico as the "Gulf of America," stating, "We're going to be changing the name of the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America, which has a beautiful ring... And it's appropriate." This proposal aligns with Trump's agenda to assert U.S. sovereignty and dominance, particularly in relation to Mexico, citing concerns over immigration and trade imbalances. Implementing President-elect Trump's expansionist policies—annexing Canada, acquiring Greenland, and controlling the Panama Canal—would require a substantial increase in military spending

INTOXICATED by a landslide victory in the presidential elections and securing a majority in the U.S. Congress and Senate, flanked by business magnates and entrepreneurial billionaires, the U.S. President-elect, who is just a week away from taking the oath of office to become one of the most powerful individuals in the modern world, has wasted no time in signaling a dramatic shift in policy. Contrary to his campaign rhetoric of non-interventionism, he has begun to outline bold expansionist policies that, if implemented even partially, could alter the geography and history of the world for generations to come. While he had promised to withdraw the U.S. from foreign wars and conflicts, it now appears his vision was not about reducing global entanglements but rather reshaping them. His policies suggest a pivot from participating in the wars of other nations to initiating conflicts of his own—starting with the immediate neighbors of the U.S. and potentially extending to other parts of the world. This ambition for a "new America" includes a significant expansion of the U.S. defense forces to facilitate territorial acquisitions, the enlargement of federal bureaucracies to manage newly acquired territories, and the bolstering of homeland security forces to address the inevitable backlash of terrorism and unrest resulting from these policies. He is particularly serious about annexation of Canada. In his latest press conference, he said "We have a massive trade deficit with Canada, reaching up to \$250 billion. We don't need their milk, cars, lumber, or energy and other products, yet we provide them with subsidies. Moreover, the USA is responsible for Canada security, Canada has little or no military. They don't pay to NATO as much as they should. I asked Prime Minister Trudeau what would happen if the U.S. withdrew its economic and military support, and he admitted that Canada would face severe challenges and will be obliterated. I told him that we would continue our support, if Canada were a U.S. state, not as a separate country." He further added that the people of Canada loved the idea. His second hot target is Greenland while addressing the preinaugural Press Conference, the President-elect was hawkish. He said acquir-

ing Greenland is an "absolute necessity" for U.S. national and economic security. He emphasized Greenland's strategic importance for global freedom and stated that if Denmark resisted, the U.S. could impose "very high" tariffs or consider other actions, including military measures". According to him, Greenland holds immense strategic importance for the United States. Its location between North America and Europe makes it critical for Arctic defense, monitoring Russian and Chinese activities, and securing emerging Arctic shipping routes as ice melts. The U.S. operates Thule Air Base in Greenland, a vital part of its missile early warning and space surveillance systems, contributing to NATO and NORAD operations. Economically, Greenland is rich in rare earth minerals, oil, gas, and fishing resources, which are essential for reducing reliance on adversaries like China and boosting U.S. energy independence.

In his press conference, he vowed to regain control of the Panama Canal, citing its strategic and economic importance. Historically, the U.S. built and controlled the canal from its opening in 1914 until its transfer to Panama in 1999 under the Panama Canal Treaties signed by President Carter. The canal was a vital asset for U.S. trade and military mobility, particularly during World War II. President-elect Donald Trump announced plans to rename the Gulf of Mexico as the "Gulf of America," stating, "We're going to be changing the name of the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America, which has a beautiful ring... And it's appropriate." This proposal aligns with Trump's agenda to assert U.S. sovereignty and dominance, particularly in relation to Mexico, citing concerns over immigration and trade imbalances. Implementing President-elect Trump's expansionist policies—annexing Canada, acquiring Greenland, and controlling the Panama Canal—would require a substantial increase in military spending. Securing Canada, the second-largest country in the world by landmass, would involve deploying at least 300,000 additional troops for occupation and policing, costing approximately \$100 billion annually. Establishing military infrastructure

in Greenland, such as Arctic bases and radar systems, would add \$50 billion annually. Taking control of the Panama Canal, a region with strategic and economic significance, would involve initial operations costing \$20-30 billion and ongoing expenses of \$10 billion annually. Overall, modernizing and expanding the military for such global ambitions could raise the defense budget by \$500 billion annually. Countering domestic and regional blowback from these expansionist policies would necessitate a dramatic expansion of U.S. homeland security capabilities. The annexation of Canada, Greenland, and Panama would likely provoke resistance movements, terrorism, and unrest, requiring the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to double its workforce by adding 300,000 personnel. This expansion, along with enhanced counter-terrorism and surveillance programs, would cost an estimated \$50-75 billion annually. Additional measures to manage increased immigration control and internal dissent could further raise these costs, creating an immense strain on domestic security resources. To fund this expansionist vision, the U.S. would need to nearly double its current defense and security budget, increasing total spending to \$1.7-1.8 trillion annually. This would impose immense pressure on the U.S. economy, potentially leading to higher taxes or deficits. These expansionist policies would sharply contradict Trump's earlier promises of non-interventionism. While the rhetoric suggests retracting the U.S. from foreign wars, these actions would signify a shift toward starting new conflicts and territorial expansions. Far from avoiding global entanglements, these moves would provoke international resistance, destabilize alliances, and damage relationships with NATO and other partners. Countries like China, Russia, and the EU would likely respond with retaliatory measures, economic sanctions, and military build-ups, leading to heightened tensions and potentially triggering a new era of global conflict.

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

Addressing the crisis in Pakistan's mines

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



The compensation framework for miners who lose their lives remains inadequate across Pakistan. In Balochistan, where much of the mining activity is concentrated, compensation laws exist but are poorly enforced. Families of deceased miners typically receive payments ranging from PKR 500,000 to 1,000,000—an amount that barely addresses...

MINING stands among the most grueling and perilous professions worldwide. Driven by the need to earn a livelihood, miners often face extreme risks, enduring conditions that challenge both their physical strength and mental resilience. These workers labor deep beneath the earth to extract coal and minerals, facing life-threatening dangers daily. In Pakistan, regions such as Balochistan, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Punjab are hubs of mining activity, yet the grim realities faced by the workers in this sector remain deeply troubling. The very nature of mining work is fraught with danger. Miners must navigate narrow shafts, endure exposure to toxic fumes, and operate heavy machinery in dimly lit, poorly ventilated conditions. The threat of mine collapses looms constantly, claiming lives when tunnels cave in and bury workers under massive layers of rock and earth. Those who survive such incidents often sustain debilitating injuries that leave them unable to work. Despite these hardships, miners receive low wages and are offered minimal safety protections. Their contributions to industries that generate substantial profits for mine owners are rarely acknowledged. The root causes of mining accidents are manifold. Poor infrastructure, inadequate ventilation systems, lack of safety equipment, and insufficient training are persistent issues. Methane gas buildup, improper handling of explosives, and negligent maintenance further exacerbate the dangers. In many cases, the indifference of mine owners and contractors plays a critical role, as safety protocols are often disregarded in favor of profit. Ensuring the safety of miners requires a robust and enforceable framework. Governments must establish and implement strict safety regulations, complemented by regular inspections of mining sites. Miners should be equipped with modern protective gear, including helmets, respirators, and reinforced clothing, to safeguard them from toxic gases and potential accidents. Comprehensive training programs are essential to familiarize workers with safety measures and emergency response

procedures. Additionally, setting up medical facilities near mining sites and devising effective evacuation plans can significantly reduce fatalities during accidents. The compensation framework for miners who lose their lives remains inadequate across Pakistan. In Balochistan, where much of the mining activity is concentrated, compensation laws exist but are poorly enforced. Families of deceased miners typically receive payments ranging from PKR 500,000 to 1,000,000—an amount that barely addresses the financial strain of losing a primary breadwinner. Similar challenges exist in Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Punjab, where families are often left to negotiate with mine owners for support. These compensation packages need to be reassessed to provide more substantial and long-term financial stability for the affected families. Mining activities in Pakistan are particularly intensive in Balochistan, which is rich in coal, gold, copper, and other minerals, attracting both local and international investors. However, safety standards in the province's mines remain alarmingly low. Methane gas explosions and tunnel collapses occur frequently, and the lack of medical infrastructure near mining sites aggravates the situation. In Sindh's coal mines and Punjab's salt mines, workers face similar perils, including long hours and insufficient protective equipment. Meanwhile, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, miners extracting marble and gemstones contend with hazardous dust and unstable working conditions in rugged terrains. Islamic teachings add profound significance to the struggles of miners. Islam values earning a livelihood through honest, hard work. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated, "No one eats better food than that which he eats out of the work of his hand" (Bukhari). Despite the dangerous conditions, miners embody this ideal as they labor tirelessly to support their families and communities. Employers, too, bear a moral responsibility in Islam to ensure the well-being of their workers. The Prophet (peace be upon him) emphasized this, saying, "Pay the worker his wages before his sweat dries"

(Ibn Majah), highlighting the importance of fair and timely compensation. The economic disparity between mine owners and workers is stark. While owners and contractors accumulate substantial wealth from mining activities, the laborers who bear the brunt of the risks often lack access to basic necessities like clean drinking water, healthcare, and education for their children. This inequity perpetuates cycles of poverty and exploitation, leaving workers and their families trapped in a cycle of hardship. Addressing the challenges faced by miners demands a multifaceted approach. Governments must strictly enforce safety standards, ensuring that miners are provided with protective gear and access to emergency medical care. Compensation packages for injured or deceased miners must be restructured to adequately reflect the sacrifices of workers and support their families. Mine owners and contractors must also be held accountable for providing humane working conditions and equitable profit-sharing with their laborers. In addition to structural reforms, societal recognition of miners' contributions is vital. These individuals form the backbone of industries that drive national development, yet their efforts often go unnoticed. Their struggles spotlight broader labor rights and economic inequality issues, underscoring the need for collective action to foster a more equitable society. The Quran affirms the dignity of labor, declaring, "And that there is not for man except that [good] for which he strives" (Surah An-Najm, 53:39). Miners exemplify this verse through their tireless endeavors to provide for their families, despite the dangers they face. The resilience and dedication of miners in Pakistan serve as a testament to the human spirit's ability to endure adversity. Their sacrifices compel us to address their challenges and uphold principles of fairness, safety, and dignity, as advocated by both Islamic teachings and universal principles of justice. By taking these steps, we can build a future where miners' contributions are respected, their lives are safeguarded, and their sacrifices are truly valued.

Briefs

After meeting Imran, PTI ready for...

FROM PAGE 01

During his interaction with journalists today, Raza said, "We are ready for the third round of talks." He urged the government's negotiation team to work on forming a judicial commission before the next round of dialogue. "No progress has been made in the negotiations so far," he said, emphasizing the need for the government to act on their demands, particularly the establishment of the judicial commission. Stressing that the release of political prisoners and the formation of a judicial commission were integral to their demands, Raza said that PTI would submit their two demands in writing to the government's team during the upcoming session.

Rule of law essential for prosperity...

FROM PAGE 01

power for many years but no one has solved problems like health, education or infrastructure. Abbasi said even the PTI founder did not win in 2018 on its own strength. Right now, the country should move forward and all the stakeholders of the country should come together to find a solution. Talking about his own stint as PM, he said, "I reduced the tax on the salaried class for the first time, it was implemented in 2018, there was no tax on those earning up to Rs1.2 million per year." He said, "the accusations game should end now as no party or institution was exempt from this accusation."

'Justice will prevail' against...

FROM PAGE 01

Crime Agency (NCA) had sent the settlement money to Pakistan. However, the then-premier Khan allegedly used the funds to purchase land and establish the Al-Qadir Trust instead. He asked the national media to investigate whether Al-Qadir Trust was a university or not. "We hope that a verdict will be announced tomorrow and justice will be served," he added. The reserved verdict of the £190 million case against the PTI founder will be announced on Monday (tomorrow) which was previously scheduled for January 6. The judgement was deferred multiple times by the accountability court which reserved it on December 18, 2024.

PTI to face disappointment on...

FROM PAGE 01

Imran Khan and wished to keep the founder in jail. He said propaganda had been spread that backdoor negotiations were taking place with Imran Khan and that the PTI founder's wife was leading the negotiations. The former federal minister added that he had advised the PTI founder against the 190 million pound issue, saying it should not have been done. Imran Khan had signed, and now no one will take responsibility for it. "The crime was committed four and a half years ago, and I had warned Imran Khan at that time."

Highest number...

FROM PAGE 01

Pakistan faces its own severe education crisis, with more than 22 million children out of school, according to government figures, one of the highest numbers in the world. Malala stressed "if we don't tackle this crisis, our society will not thrive as it should". "We will fail to live up to Islam's fundamental values of seeking knowledge." This conference, she said, is an encouraging first step. "But we can only have an honest and serious conversation about girls' educations, if we call out the worst violations of it."

Sabalenka starts title defence, Zverev cruises into 2nd round

Sabalenka has now won 28 of her last 29 matches in hard-court Slams since the start of 2023, including 15 consecutive matches at the Australian Open

SPORTS DESK

SYDNEY: Aryna Sabalenka says the Australian Open "feels like home" after she began her title defence with a straight-set victory over American Sloane Stephens. The world number one and back-to-back champion in Melbourne defeated Stephens 6-3 6-2 in the first round on Rod Laver Arena. The 26-year-old Belarusian is aiming to become just the seventh player to claim a third straight Australian Open women's singles title, and the first since Martina Hingis in 1999. "I'm super happy to be back. I love this place and we have a full stadium, I couldn't dream for more," said Sabalenka, who overcame a wobble in the opening set to take victory. "I don't feel like I played my best probably but I'm glad that I managed to close this in straight sets."

"It definitely feels like home." Sabalenka has now won 28 of her last 29 matches in hard-court Slams since the start of 2023, including 15 consecutive matches at the Australian Open. She has also won 17 consecutive sets at Melbourne Park and is the heavy favourite for the women's title. Sabalenka entertained the Melbourne crowd with some dancing on court after the match, having built up a following on social media by posting videos of her dancing with her team on TikTok. Past becoming a fan favourite, she then went to take a picture of the crowd with a polaroid camera before realising it had run out of film. The top seed will face Spain's Jessica BouzasManeiro, who knocked out British hopeful Sonay Kartal, in the next round. Rain affected proceedings on the outside courts on day one of the season's first Grand Slam, but the Rod Laver Arena roof was open in time for Sabalenka's evening match after Zheng Qinwen, her opponent in last year's final, beat Romanian



qualifier Anca Todoni. Sabalenka finished 2024 as the year-end world number one for the first time and, beginning her campaign in Australia as two-time defending champion and top seed, looked in fine form as she raced to a 4-0 lead. But Stephens, who has pedigree on the hard court as a former US Open champion, pegged Sabalenka back, breaking twice for 4-3 as Sabalenka made a series of unforced errors. Often animated on court, Sabalenka roared in frustration



at each mistake, waving her arms around in exasperation. What had looked likely to be a straightforward opening set of her campaign turned out to be more tricky but the three-time Grand Slam champion converted her fifth break point for 5-3 then served to take the set. Sabalenka once again earned herself a double break in the second set and this time was able to hold on to her advantage over Stephens, who has not won a match since last year's Wimbledon.

Zheng Qinwen through despite 'mistake' in Melbourne

"We were doing our pre-season in Los Angeles this year, so we were just there two weeks ago. I really can't believe what's happening"

WEB DESK

SYDNEY: Zheng Qinwen recovered from a "stupid mistake" to begin her Australian Open bid with a straight-set win on a rain-disrupted first day in Melbourne. Chinese fifth seed Zheng, beaten by Aryna Sabalenka in last year's final, won 7-6 (7/3) 6-1 against Romanian qualifier Anca Todoni under the roof on Rod Laver Arena. The Olympic gold medalist served for the opening set at 5-4 40-0, but could not take any of her three set points. Todoni, 20, had never beaten a top-50 opponent and had the chance to move halfway to a shock win after creating three set points on Zheng's serve at

6-5. But she could not convert and Zheng, 22, held before stepping up a gear in the tie-break. The second set was more straightforward as Zheng, backed as usual by a huge number of Chinese fans, broke early before cruising through to victory. "The first set is always not easy, especially because I was doing stupid mistakes - I don't know what happened there," she said. "But I am happy to get through." On expectations rising after winning the Olympic title, she added: "Of course there starts to be more pressure but [the fans] are pushing me to become a better person and better athlete. "I like to play with pressure. Like what Billie Jean King says - pressure is a

privilege. I love this sentence. "Let's keep going and playing with pressure." While Zheng was able to complete her match indoors, a heavy thunderstorm caused play on the outdoor courts to be suspended until 18:00 local time (07:00 GMT). Donna Vekic drew a heart and wrote "LA" on a court-side camera lens following her opening win in a show of support to her coach, Pam Shriver, who has stayed at home in Los Angeles to help her family deal with the wildfires that have devastated the United States' second-largest city. At least 16 people have died and, as of late Saturday, authorities in LA are continuing to manage four main blazes around the

Naveen-ul-Haq withdraws from PSL 10

DNA

KARACHI: Afghanistan's right-arm pacer Naveen-ul-Haq on Sunday, announced to withdraw from the highly-anticipated Pakistan Super League (PSL) 10, scheduled to be played in the April-May window this year. Taking to his Instagram story, Naveen shared a picture of him with wicketkeeper batter Mohammad Harris during his time with Peshawar Zalmi in the previous edition of the league and shared that he will not be taking part in the forthcoming season. "Wonderful last season with [Peshawar Zalmi]. Won't be taking part in this year's [PSL]. Until next time, thanks for all the love and support," Naveen captioned the picture. For the unversed, Naveen was among the 44 foreign players in platinum category, unveiled by the marquee league. Naveen-ul-Haq has featured in two PSL seasons, representing Quetta Gladiators and Zalmi in 2023 and 2024, respectively. In 10 matches, the 25-year-old has picked up 13 wickets at an average of 28.53 with the best bowling figures of 2/22 and an economy rate of 9.76. Notably, the highly-anticipated PSL 10 player draft will take place at Huzuri Bagh here on Monday as the six franchise aim to finalise their squads for the upcoming season. Meanwhile, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) unveiled a revised pick order for the PSL 10 draft. The previous three Platinum categories have been consolidated into two, while the number of Diamond categories has been reduced from three to one. Additionally, the Gold categories have been trimmed from three to two, and the Silver categories have been reduced from five to three.

RWFL: Empowering youth through combat sports

OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The Real World Fight League (RWFL), Pakistan's premier white-collar fighting platform, hosted electrifying combat competitions. The event brought together young adults from the leading schools and universities. RWFL Co-founder Qaim Abbas, a student University of Debreceen Hungary, highlighted the league's mission. "Real World is South Asia's largest Gen Z movement, providing an accessible platform for kids and adults to train in combat sports. It equips them with skills and a mindset to conquer life's challenges, improving both physical fitness and mental health. This is for everyone." Adil Azhar, from LUMS, praised RWFL for breaking stigmas around MMA. "The league has made MMA accessible for recreation, offering a safe and inspiring environment where participants grow in confidence and embrace empowerment. It's about far more than fighting—it's about personal development." Speaking to the media, Pakistan MMA Federation President Omar Ahmed drew parallels with cricket's evolution. "Just as tape-ball cricket popularized the sport, RWFL serves as an entry point for MMA enthusiasts. It transforms perceptions, promoting MMA as a tool for physical and mental growth rather than a violent endeavor. This grassroots initiative ensures that MMA thrives as a sport for all." He added: "The Pakistan MMA Federation is setting itself apart from traditional sports organizations in the country with a forward-thinking approach. While many sports are rooted in conventional methods, we are committed to destigmatizing MMA and integrating it into the mainstream. Through initiatives like RWFL, we are breaking barriers and positioning MMA as a sport that fosters character development, mental resilience, and leadership skills."

Harry Kane penalty moves Bayern Munich four points clear

LONDON: Harry Kane scored the only goal as Bayern Munich restored their four-point lead at the top of the German Bundesliga with a 1-0 win at Borussia Monchengladbach. The England captain converted from the penalty spot on 68 minutes after Lukas Ullrich had pushed Michael Olise in the box. It was the 31-year-old's 15th Bundesliga goal of the season and moved him ahead of Eintracht Frankfurt's Omar Marmoush to the top of the division's scoring charts. Defending champions Bayer Leverkusen had cut Bayern's advantage to a point with a 3-2 win at Borussia Dortmund on Friday. Vincent Kompany's side enjoyed 78% possession in the first half but could not find a way past a stubborn home defence. Leon Goretzka volleyed just wide when well placed in the area, while Thomas Muller's first-time effort from close range drew a superb reaction save from Moritz Nicolas. Gladbach were brighter after the break and should have opened the scoring when Tim Kleindienst met Rocco Reitz's cross, but



somehow headed over from five yards out. The decisive moment arrived when Olise chested down Kingsley Coman's left-wing cross at the far post and went down under a challenge from Ullrich. The referee pointed to the spot and Kane sent Nicolas the wrong way for his sixth successful penalty from six attempts for Bayern this season. Kleindienst headed just

over from a corner as Gladbach pressed for an equaliser. But as the hosts pushed forward they left openings at the other end, with the impressive Nicolas saving superbly from Goretzka, Alphonso Davies and Serge Gnabry to keep the score at 1-0. A sixth defeat of the season keeps Gladbach in 10th, three points behind fifth-placed RB Leipzig. - Agencies

Australia beat England in Women's Ashes opener

England were all out in 43.1 overs as captain Knight top-scored with 39, Danni Wyatt-Hodge made a gritty 38 and Amy Jones 31, but all three failed to capitalise on their promising starts

WEB DESK

SYDNEY: Ash Gardner's fine all-round performance proved the difference as England were beaten by four wickets in the first one-day international of the Women's Ashes in Sydney. Gardner took 3-19 as England were bowled out for 204, and then scored an unbeaten 42 to lead Australia to victory with 11.1 overs to spare. England showed glimpses of promise, and Australia signs of fragility in losing their six wickets, but Heather Knight's side paid the price for a wasteful batting performance alongside sloppiness in the field which included Sophie Ecclestone dropping Gardner on 31. The visitors fought admirably with the ball, with fine economical efforts from Lauren Bell and Ecclestone, but Australia were rarely under scoreboard pressure after a batting innings that was littered with soft dismissals. England were all out in 43.1 overs as captain Knight top-scored with

39, Danni Wyatt-Hodge made a gritty 38 and Amy Jones 31, but all three failed to capitalise on their promising starts. Having been asked to bat first, England were



both caught slog-sweeping by Ellyse Perry. Jones looked in fine form in her rebuilding stand of 51 with Wyatt-Hodge, whose knock was an outlier in a tame middle-to-lower order effort with the last five wickets falling for 47 runs. It was not a faultless bowling performance from the hosts, who conceded 24 extras including a no-ball which gave Maia Bouchier a reprieve when she was bowled in the first over, but England lacked the ruthlessness to punish them. Similarly in the second innings, Annabel Sutherland's dismissal for 10 in the 24th over offered another opening at 124-4, but Gardner showed the steel and discipline which England's batters lacked. The relentless schedule of the series gives England little time to turn their fortunes around, with the second ODI taking place at the Junction Oval in Melbourne on 13 January (23:05 GMT). The win gives Australia a 2-0 lead on points in the multi-format series, which England need to win outright in order to regain the Ashes.

Bureaucracy, feudal lords dominate...

FROM PAGE 01

Hafiz Naeem-ur-Rehman criticized the government, saying it does not impose taxes on feudal lords but instead squeezes the hard-earned income of poor farmers. He alleged that the oppressive rulers drain the sweat and blood of the people and distribute it among themselves. He also stated that 27.7 million children are out of school, and the government seems unconcerned. Unemployment persists, and the prices of essential commodities are skyrocketing. Hafiz Naeem ur Rehman further said that Islam is the name of justice, but a few have confined it. "We will establish a system where women are granted inheritance rights, justice within the family, and protection," he added. The Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami expressed hope, saying, "Insha'Allah, the time will come soon when a system of justice will be established. The oppressive system will end, and justice will prevail."

Security forces eliminate...

FROM PAGE 01

neutralised by security forces after an intense fire exchange in the Esham area. Two terrorists were also wounded in the gunbattle, the military's media wing said. It added that weapons and ammunition were also recovered from killed terrorists, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities against the security forces as well as target killing of innocent civilians. "Sanitisation operations are being conducted to eliminate any other kharij [terrorists] found in the area, as security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country," it concluded.

Pak rejects Afghan FM's...

FROM PAGE 01

UN Monitoring team has issued a report on terror groups active in Afghanistan. These groups included terrorists of banned TTP, Daish and al-Qaeda, Khawaja Asif said. "Over two dozen terror groups are operating in Afghanistan. Now, it is the responsibility of the Afghan acting government to prevent these groups from using its land against other countries," the defence minister said while reacting to the statement of Afghan acting foreign minister.

Senior Journalist Javed...

FROM PAGE 01

Javed Shehzad's sudden death has left the media fraternity in deep sorrow, with colleagues, friends, and admirers expressing their heartfelt condolences. Known for his professionalism, commitment to truth, and integrity, Shehzad was a prominent figure in the media landscape, particularly in Islamabad, where he worked for many years. Throughout his career, Javed Shehzad earned a reputation for his insightful reporting and in-depth analysis of current affairs.

Pakistan forex assets reach \$18.7 billion

FROM PAGE 01

external account. According to Topline Securities, the country's total foreign exchange assets, comprising liquid reserves and gold, stood at a three-year high of \$18.7bn which also includes gold reserves of \$5.5bn - a near-record high courtesy of rising gold prices. In addition to this, \$4.7bn of the liquid reserves are held with commercial banks and are not part of this total FX assets, it added. Saad Hanif, the head of research at Ismail Iqbal Securities, said the rising trend in the country's reserves reflected the impact of strict import restrictions, delays in dividend repatriation, successful debt rollovers with multilateral and bilateral partners, which collectively eased pressure on FX outflows.

Briefs

Australia state premier calls synagogue attack escalation in anti-Semitic crime

SYDNEY: The premier of Australia's New South Wales state Chris Minns said on Sunday that an attack on a Sydney synagogue on Saturday marked an escalation in anti-Semitic crime in the state, after police said the attack was attempted arson. Australia has seen a series of anti-Semitic incidents in the last year, including graffiti on buildings and cars in Sydney, as well as an arson attack on a synagogue in Melbourne that police ruled as terrorism. In the latest incident, police were notified of anti-Semitic graffiti on a synagogue in the inner suburb of Newtown early on Saturday. An arson attempt was also made on the synagogue, police later said. "This is an escalation in anti-Semitic crime in New South Wales. Police and the government remain very concerned that an accelerant may have been used," Minns, the leader of Australia's most populous state, said on Sunday in a televised media conference alongside state police commissioner Karen Webb. "In the last 24 hours, these matters have now been taken over by counter-terrorism command," Webb said.—APP

Dozens hurt after tram collision

Strasbourg: A collision between two trams in a tunnel near the main train station in Strasbourg, France resulted in at least 20 injuries, according to local authorities. The incident occurred around 4pm in one of the busiest transport hubs in France, with one of the trams reportedly derailed after the crash. The cause of the collision is under investigation, and authorities have opened an inquiry. Firefighters later updated the injury toll to approximately 50 people, with a variety of trauma injuries reported, including fractures and sprains. Minister of Transport, Philippe Tabarot, estimated that around 36 people were injured, but local authorities did not rule out the possibility of more injuries. A video shared by a witness on social media depicted a chaotic scene, showing significant damage to both trams, with debris scattered across the tunnel. Emergency services, including paramedics and firefighters, worked quickly to secure the scene and transport injured passengers. Some victims were treated on-site for minor injuries, while others were rushed to hospitals in nearby ambulances. Strasbourg's Mayor Jeanne Barseghian described the collision as "brutal" but confirmed that no fatalities or critical injuries had been reported.—DNA

15 killed in an explosion and fire at a gas station in central Yemen

CAIRO: An explosion at a gas station triggered a massive fire in central Yemen, killing at least 15 people, health officials said Sunday. The explosion occurred Saturday at the Zaher district in the province of Bayda, the Houthi rebel-run Health Ministry said in a statement. At least 67 others were injured, including 40 in critical condition. The ministry said rescue teams were searching for those reported missing. It wasn't immediately clear what caused the explosion. Footage circulated online showing a massive fire that sent columns of smoke into the sky and left vehicles charred and burning. Bayda is controlled by Iranian-backed Houthi rebels, who have been at war with Yemen's internationally recognized government for more than a decade. Yemen's civil war began in 2014, when the rebels took control of the capital.—APP

Families of Monal employees hold protest demonstration

Monal Restaurant, an iconic eatery nestled in the hills of Islamabad, has long been a destination for families seeking a unique dining experience. Known for its picturesque views, especially at sunset, and its expansive menu offering a range of continental and Pakistani delicacies, it has drawn families from across the country

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The families of the employees of Monal restaurant on Sunday staged a protest demonstration in favour of their demands. Hundreds of employees were rendered jobless after apex court decision to close down the restaurant.

Monal Restaurant, an iconic eatery nestled in the hills of Islamabad, has long been a destination for families seeking a unique dining experience. Known for its picturesque views, especially at sunset, and its expansive menu offering a range of continental and Pakistani delicacies, it has drawn families from across the country.

The closure of Monal restaurant has caused significant hardship for many of its employees and their families. As a popular and renowned establishment, Monal employed hundreds of staff members across various departments, including kitchen, service, management, and support. The sudden closure led to loss of income, disruption of livelihoods, and increased financial stress for employees and their families, especially those who had relied on the restaurant as their pri-



mary source of employment. Such closures often have a ripple effect on local communities,

where many workers may have spent years building relationships and gaining experience in

the industry. In the absence of immediate alternative job opportunities, many faced dif-

iculty finding similar employment. Additionally, if employees do not have financial safety

nets, it may worsen their ability to meet basic needs such as rent, bills, and food.

BMP for keeping check as debt servicing eats up forex reserves

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry's (FPCCI) Businessmen Panel (BMP) has denounced the government for not keeping a check on foreign exchange market, as the foreign exchange reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan has decreased by \$15 million on a weekly basis, clocking in at \$11.70 billion, because debt servicing on foreign loans continues to eat up SBP's holdings. FPCCI former president Mian Anjum Nisar said that the exchange rate looks stable, but increasing debt servicing costs have put the economy at risk, as

that Pakistan's economy was stuck in a low-growth trap with poor human development outcomes and increasing poverty. Overall, the country's total foreign reserves, including those held by commercial banks, dropped by \$30.9 million, or 0.19%, to stand at \$16.38 billion. Reserves held by commercial banks also saw a decline, falling by \$15.6 million, or 0.33% WoW, to settle at \$4.68 billion. Despite the weekly contraction, SBP-held reserves have witnessed significant growth in the current fiscal year, rising by \$2.31 billion, or 24.56%. However, on a calendaryear basis, the reserves have posted a slight decrease of \$15.3 million, or 0.13%. The foreign exchange reserves have remained a key

indicator of Pakistan's economic stability, particularly amidst ongoing challenges in external financing and currency market volatility. Experts note that maintaining adequate reserve levels is crucial for meeting international obligations and stabilizing the local currency. The central bank's reserves, which provide an essential cushion against economic shocks, have shown resilience over the fiscal year. However, fluctuations such as these underscore the importance of prudent external account management amid evolving global economic conditions. Mian Anjum said the economic conditions leave Pakistan highly vulnerable to climate shocks with insufficient public resources to finance development and that interna-

tional experience suggests that domestic debt refinancing did not always work unless associated with sharp and sustained structural reforms. He said the IMF had identified the need for reforms over three to four decades ago, but they were still pending. With the formation of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), the government aims to bring up to \$100 billion in investments in the next three to five years, particularly from the Middle East. Memorandums of understanding (MoUs) have been signed with the UAE, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia for billions of dollars, which has helped stabilise the domestic market while the stock exchange has been crossing one milestone after another.

SAARC, IRENA sign MoU to strengthen regional coop

ISLAMABAD: the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to bolster regional cooperation in the domain of sustainable energy. The document, signed by SAARC Secretary-General, Md. Golam Sarwar, and IRENA Director-General, Francesco La Camera, in Abu Dhabi, formalizes a collaborative framework for promoting the widespread and sustainable use of all forms of renewable energy across the South Asian region. The MoU will establish a structured framework for cooperative endeavors between SAARC and IRENA, with a primary focus on facilitating knowledge exchange, capacity development, and the execution of joint projects that promote renewable energy deployment. By leveraging the respective strengths of each organization, this partnership strives to expedite the transition towards sustainable energy systems within the SAARC Member States. This partnership aligns with the vision of the leaders of the SAARC Member States and commensurate with the burgeoning global commitment to transition to sustainable energy.—DNA

Indian Hindu pilgrims take plunge ahead of largest gathering

PRAYAGRAJ, India: Indian farmer Govind Singh travelled for nearly two days by train to reach what he believes is the "land of the gods" — just one among legions of Hindu pilgrims joining the largest gathering of humanity. The millennium-old Kumbh Mela, a sacred show of religious piety and ritual bathing that opens Monday, is held at the site where the holy Ganges, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati rivers meet. This edition of the mega fair, in the north Indian city of Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh state, is believed to be the biggest ever. Organisers expect up to 400 million pilgrims from India and beyond over six weeks, running from January 13 to February 26. It feels great to be in the land of the gods for the Kumbh Mela," said the 53-year-old Singh, who came from a village in Madhya Pradesh state, a journey of more than 600 kilometres (375 miles). "I will stay as long as the gods want me to." The riverside in Prayagraj has turned into a vast tent city.—APP

Czech restaurant fire kills six people

Interior Minister Vit Rakusan said on X that firefighters had evacuated about 30 people from the restaurant and an adjacent block of flats

PRAGUE: A restaurant fire in a northwestern city in the Czech Republic killed six people and injured eight, rescue services said Sunday. "The fire spread extremely fast after a gas heater was probably knocked over," the local fire service posted on X. The fire occurred in a restaurant at a housing estate in the city of Most, about 70 kilometres (45 miles) northwest of the capital Prague. It started at 22:17 GMT on Saturday and was under control by midnight, the fire service said. "Despite all efforts... the fire had tragic consequences for six people," it said. Eight others were injured, six of them seriously. They were taken to hospitals in Prague, Most and the regional capital of Usti nad Labem. Interior Minister Vit Rakusan said on X that firefighters had evacuated about 30 people from the restaurant and an adjacent block of flats.—Agencies

Russia eyes Libya to replace Syria as Africa launchpad

PARIS: The fall of Russian ally Bashar Assad in Syria has disrupted the Kremlin's strategy not only for the Mediterranean but also for Africa, pushing it to focus on Libya as a potential foothold, experts say. Russia runs a military port and an air base on the Syrian coast, designed to facilitate its operations in the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa, especially the Sahel, Sudan, and the Central African Republic. However, this model is in jeopardy with the abrupt departure of the Syrian ruler. Although Syria's new leader, Ahmed Al-Sharaa, has called Russia an "important country," saying "we do not want Russia to leave Syria in the way that some wish," the reshuffling of cards in Syria is pushing Russia to seek a strategic retreat toward Libya. In Libya, Russian mercenaries already support Khalifa Haftar, a field marshal controlling the east of the country, against the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity (GNU) which has UN recognition and is supported by Turkey. "The goal is notably to preserve the ongoing Russian missions in Africa," said Jalel Harchaoui at the RUSI think tank in the UK. "It's a self-preservation reflex" for Russia which is anxious "to mitigate the deterioration of its position in Syria," he told AFP. In May 2024, Swiss investigative consortium "All Eyes On Wagner" identified Russian activities at around 10 Libyan sites, including the port of Tobruk, where military equipment was delivered in February and April of last year. There were around 800 Russian troops present in February 2024, and 1,800 in May. On December 18 the Wall Street Journal, citing Libyan and American officials, said there had been a transfer of Russian radars and defense systems from Syria to Libya, including S-300 and S-400 anti-aircraft batteries. Since Assad's fall on December 8, "a notable volume of Russian military resources has been shipped to Libya from Belarus and Russia," said Harchaoui, adding there had been troop transfers as well. Ukrainian intelligence claimed on January 3 that Moscow planned "to use Sparta and Sparta II cargo ships to transport military equipment and weapons" to Libya. Beyond simply representing a necessary replacement of "one proxy with another," the shift is a quest for "continuity," said expert Emadeddin Badi on the Atlantic Council's website, underscoring Libya's role as "a component of a long-standing strategy to expand Moscow's strategic foothold in the region." According to Badi, "Assad offered Moscow a foothold against NATO's eastern flank and a stage to test military capabilities." Haftar, he said, presents a similar opportunity, "a means to disrupt western interests, exploit Libya's fractured politics, and extend Moscow's influence into Africa." The Tripoli government and Italy, Libya's former colonial master, have expressed concern over Russian movements, closely observed by the European Union and NATO.—Agencies

Pakistan-China Plastic Industry B2B moot concluded in Guangzhou

BEIJING: The Pakistan-China Plastic Industry B2B Investment Conference concluded successfully in Guangzhou with 8 Pakistani companies and 44 Chinese companies attending both online and offline. In his opening remarks, Mr. Sardar Muhammad, Acting Consul General of Pakistan in Guangzhou welcomed participants and underscored the significant investment opportunities within Pakistan's plastic industry. He encouraged businesses to seize these opportunities to foster deeper cooperation and explore joint ventures that would benefit both nations. Gwadar Pro reported on Sunday. The conference facilitated numerous business meetings, resulting in the signing of 8 MoUs. Participants expressed their satisfaction with the event's organization, noting it provided an excellent platform for connecting businesses from both countries, fostering partnerships, and discovering new avenues for mutual growth.—APP

Aerial assault aims to stem LA Palisades fire eastward spread

LOS ANGELES: Aircraft dropped water and fire retardant on steep hills to stem the eastward spread of the Palisades wildfire in Los Angeles on Saturday as on-ground firefighting efforts also intensified amid warnings of wind gusts of up to 70 miles per hour that could make matters worse. Over the past 24 hours, the Palisades Fire spread over an additional 1,000 acres, officials reported and consumed more homes. Earlier on Saturday, Cal Fire official Todd Hopkins told reporters at a press conference that while 11% of the Palisades Fire was now contained, it has burned over 22,000 acres (8,900 hectares). Hopkins said the Palisades Fire had spread into the Mandeville Canyon neighborhood and threatened to jump into Brentwood, an upscale neighborhood where celebrities live and play, and the San Fernando Valley. National Weather Service warned of worsening Santa Ana winds that it predicted would pick up Saturday night into Sunday morning in

Los Angeles and Ventura counties, and again on late Monday through Tuesday morning, bringing sustained winds up to 30 mph and wind gusts up to 70 mph. "We're in a continued period of critical fire weather through Wednesday," said NWS meteorologist Rose Schoenfeld. Conditions were expected to moderate by Thursday. Evacuation orders throughout the Los Angeles area now cover 153,000 residents, putting 57,000 structures at risk.

Another 166,000 residents have been warned that they may have to evacuate, said Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna. But significant progress was reported in bringing electrical power back to Los Angeles neighborhoods. Southern California Edison CEO Steven Powell told reporters there are now about 50,000 customers without power, "down from over half a million just a couple days ago." Powell said there was no evidence that any of

Edison's equipment caused the Hurst fire but that the investigation was continuing. As state and local officials grappled with the worst cluster of fires in Los Angeles history, President Joe Biden spoke by phone with some of them to get an update on their efforts and he also was briefed by his senior aides on federal resources that were being dispatched. Biden's major disaster declaration unlocked federal assistance for those affected by the wildfires, clearing the way for FEMA to provide support. Federal Emergency Management Agency officials, for example, were at the Pasadena Convention Center helping residents navigate FEMA aid applications. FEMA spokesperson Michael Hart said that support can range from funding to help with home repairs to money to replace lost food or medication. The assistance can be provided within a matter of days, he said. "We are looking to put initial funding in people's bank accounts to help them with those serious needs," Hart said. Six simultaneous blazes

that have ripped across Los Angeles County neighborhoods since Tuesday have killed at least 13 people and damaged or destroyed 12,000 structures. At least 13 people are estimated to be missing so far. The toll is expected to mount when firefighters are able to conduct house-to-house searches. The fierce Santa Ana winds that fanned the infernos eased on Friday night. But the Palisades Fire on the city's western edge was heading in a new direction as winds came off the Pacific Ocean. The fire, the most destructive in the history of Los Angeles, has razed whole neighborhoods to the ground, leaving just the smoldering ruins of what had been people's homes and possessions. Before the latest flare-up, firefighters had reported progress in subduing the Palisades Fire and the Eaton Fire in the foothills east of the metropolis after it burned out of control for days. On Saturday, the Palisades Fire was 11% contained and the Eaton Fire in the east was 15% contained.—Agencies



Briefs

Azam Tarar meets PM Shehbaz

DNA

LAHORE: Federal Minister for Law Azam Nazeer Tarar called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif at his Lahore residence. During the meeting, the law minister briefed the prime minister on the overall law and order situation across the country. He also apprised PM Shehbaz of the progress and achievements of the Ministry of Law under his leadership. The discussion focused on the government's efforts to ensure peace and stability nationwide, as well as ongoing reforms within the legal framework. The meeting is part of the government's regular consultations to review security and legal affairs and align on priorities for the country's governance.

Iran launches new drills to protect nuclear facilities

TEHRAN: The Iranian military has launched new exercises in the country's western and northern air defense zones including Fordow and Khondab which host uranium enrichment and heavy water facilities. The drills - dubbed 'Eqtadar' or 'might' in Farsi - began on Sunday in completely real battlefield environments, with the air defense force of the Army playing a central role under the command of the country's integrated air defense network, IRNA reported. It features offensive and defensive missions by missile, radar, electronic warfare, electronic intelligence and reconnaissance units, as well as deception systems of the Iranian Army's Air Defense Force, along with the Air Force's manned and unmanned aircraft. During the drills, the Air Defense Force will defend critical sites against simulated aerial and missile attacks. It will also conduct reconnaissance, identification, interception, and engagement operations against mocked enemy and repel offensive assaults. In the first phase of the exercises, the Air Defense Force destroyed invading unmanned aircraft using Khordad 15 and Talash systems.

After 12 years hiatus

Pakistani trade delegation visits Bangladesh to enhance relations

The visit emphasised enhancing bilateral economic relations and boosting investments between the two nations

NEWS DESK

DHAKA: A Pakistani trade delegation, led by the President of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), Atif Ikram Sheikh, visited Bangladesh after a 12-year hiatus. The visit emphasised enhancing bilateral economic relations and boosting investments between the two nations. According to a statement from FPCCI, the delegation met with Sheikh Bashiruddin, Bangladesh's Minister for Commerce. The Pakistani representatives stressed the importance of increasing economic ties and investment opportunities between the two countries. FPCCI President Atif Ikram Sheikh noted, "This is the beginning of a new era, and we will stand by Bangladesh at every turn." He also highlighted that Bangladesh's Minister for Commerce had expressed a commitment to prioritising trade relations with Pakistan. FPCCI Senior Vice President, Saqib FyazMagoo, welcomed the easing of visa conditions for Pakistanis by Bangladesh, urging the issuance of long-term visas to the Pakistani business community. He added that Pakistan had also relaxed visa restrictions for Bangladesh nationals. Bangladesh's Minister for Commerce, Sheikh Bashiruddin, emphasised, "We will



DHAKA: President FPCCI Atif Ikram met with SK. Bashiruddin, Minister of Commerce Bangladesh, at the Ministry of Commerce in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Meeting highlights the growing economic ties between Pakistan and Bangladesh. - DNA

work together to explore economic, industrial, business, and trade opportunities with Pakistan." He also confirmed that

both countries had agreed to increase mutual trade and that efforts would be made to encourage Pakistani businesses.

The meeting was also attended by Pakistan's High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Syed Ahmed Maroof.

Kundi meets Aseefa to discuss polio eradication

Aseefa Bhutto Zardari praised Governor Faisal Karim Kundi's efforts in promoting women's empowerment, youth engagement, and interfaith harmony, aligning with the vision of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi held a meeting with Member National Assembly, and Ambassador for Polio Eradication, Aseefa Bhutto Zardari. The meeting focused on pressing issues in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including the law and order situation and strategies for polio eradication. Concerns were raised about the provincial government's lack of interest in addressing public grievances. Discussions included proposals for a comprehensive plan to curb the rising number of polio cases, to be supervised by the Governor's House. Aseefa Bhutto Zardari praised Governor Faisal Karim Kundi's efforts in promoting women's empowerment, youth engagement, and interfaith harmony, aligning with the vision of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto.

Kurram begins dismantling bunkers after peace deal

Ashfaq Khan mentioned that relief supplies would be dispatched following security clearance

SHAMIM SHAHID

KURRAM: The removal of bunkers in the conflict-affected Kurram district is set to begin, following the directives of Deputy Commissioner Ashfaq Khan. Deputy Commissioner Kurram, Ashfaq Khan, stated that, as per the Kohat peace agreement, all bunkers in the district will be demolished, and weapons will be surrendered by February 1. He added that during the initial phase, one village from each side will see bunkers demolished. Security personnel will accompany the teams to ensure safety during the operations. Ashfaq Khan mentioned that relief supplies would be dispatched following security clearance. He also noted that Section 144 remains enforced in Kurram, where sit-ins continue at three different locations. It is worth mentioning that orders for the demolition of bunkers in Kurram were issued yesterday following the decisions made in the provincial apex committee meeting and agreements reached between the parties involved. According to media reports, the Deputy Commissioner issued directives to the concerned departments to remove bunkers in Lower Kurram villages, including Kharkali and Balishkhel, with work set to begin immediately.

The Deputy Commissioner instructed the C&W department's executive engineers from Upper and Lower Kurram to be present on-site with the necessary equipment and workers for the demolition process. The notification stated that, initially, bunkers in one village from each side would be removed. A 14-member government team will oversee the operation in both villages. The decision to dismantle bunkers in Kurram was made during an apex committee meeting and included as a clause in the agreement between the parties involved. Previously, roads closures in Kurram prevented the second trucks convoy, carrying food and other items of daily use, from reaching the beleaguered district, where a police party came under fire, officials and local sources said on Friday. According to the district administration, local residents had staged a sit-in in Mandori, Lower Kurram for their demands. Because of the sit-in, the Tal-Parachinar highway had been closed, it said, adding that negotiations were underway with the protest leaders in Tal Cantt for the reopening of the road. According to Kurram police, the trucks loaded with goods could not reach Upper Kurram because the clearance for the road in Lower Kurram was not issued. They added that currently, the convoy was stuck in Tal in the Hangu district.

Firefighters race to beat LA blazes as death toll hits 16

With reports of looting and a nighttime curfew in place, police and National Guard have mounted checkpoints to prevent people getting into the disaster zones

FOREIGN DESK

LOS ANGELES: Firefighters fought on into the night Saturday in a bid to get on top of massive wildfires around Los Angeles as winds ramped up, pushing the blazes towards previously untouched neighborhoods. At least 16 people were now confirmed dead from fires that have ripped through the city, leaving communities in ruins and testing the mettle of thousands of firefighters - and millions of California residents. Despite heroic efforts, including precision sorties from aerial crews, the Palisades Fire continued to grow Saturday, pushing east towards the priceless collections of the Getty Center art museum and north to the densely populated San Fernando Valley. "We're a nervous wreck," Sarah Cohen told the Los Angeles Times of the threat to her Tarzana home. "Every time they drop water, it gets better. But then it gets worse again."

EU agrees to tackle Syria sanctions in Riyadh

Germany pledges \$51m in aid for Syria

RIYADH: European foreign ministers have agreed to meet at the end of January to discuss lifting sanctions on Syria as foreign ministers and top diplomats from Western countries and the Middle East convened in Saudi Arabia in the first such regional meeting since the fall of President Bashar al-Assad last month. Kaja Kallas, the European Union's foreign policy chief, said on Sunday that the foreign ministers would convene in Brussels on January 27 to probe how the 27-member bloc might approach the issue. In Riyadh, she told reporters that the EU wants to see an inclusive government in Syria which shows no signs of "radicalisation" and also respects the rights of women and other groups. The bloc can quickly reverse any openings on the issue of sanctions, she stressed. After Sunday's talks concluded in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister called for the lifting of sanctions on Syria. "We stressed the importance of lifting unilateral and international sanctions imposed on Syria, as their continuation hinders the aspirations of the Syrian people to achieve development and reconstruction," Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud said. Syria's new Foreign Minister Asaad Hassan al-Shaibani, who has repeatedly called for the removal of decades-old sanctions, attended the talks, alongside foreign ministers from the region including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Türkiye. The talks also saw the participation of United States Undersecretary of State John Bass, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock and British Foreign Secretary David Lammy. Reporting from Damascus, Al Jazeera's Mohammad Jamjoom said the "substantial" Riyadh diplomatic meeting was more focused on sanctions than a December 14 meeting in Jordan's Aqaba, which was mostly dealing with ensuring entry of humanitarian aid as Syrians feel the adverse effects. "These sanctions that have been in place for so long have made it very difficult to import or export raw goods," he said. "That means prices are always sky-high when it comes to essential goods, including food and medicines. It also means Syrians can't bring in much fuel, so there are power outages all the time." The conference comes as Syria's new administration, led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), has urged the lifting of sanctions by the West to help international funding flow to Damascus.

Ashrafi warns against misuse of pilgrimage opportunities

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: In a collaboration of Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Religious Affairs for Hajj and Umrah and Pakistan's Ministry of Religious Affairs, all respective issues for pilgrims of Pakistan are being resolved, said Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, Chairman Pakistan Ulama Council, Secretary General International Tazeem-e-Haramain Al-Sharifain Council, Chairman Hajj Organizers Association. While addressing joint press conference here on Sunday in Lahore Press Club, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi and Chairman Hajj Organizers Association from Punjab Ahsanullah said that pilgrims from Pakistan visiting Hajj and Umrah in 2025 through private companies will obey all respective rules and laws of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. They said that there is complete understanding and coordination between the government and Hajj Organizers Association adding that all respective arrangements for Hajj 2025 are being made exemplary. The press conference termed 'Israeli map' as a bid to fan terrorism and conspiracy to disrupt the peace of the world adding that we refute this Israeli act. He said that entire Muslim Ummah under the leadership of Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman are united for the cause of Palestine. Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi while addressing press conference was also accompanied by Office bearers of Organizers of Hajj Association from Punjab including Ahsanullah, Imtiazur Rehman, Rai Zafar, Zeeshan Chaudhy, Hafiz At-e-equr Rehman, Chaudhy Adil, Muhammad Arfakshad Abdullah and Malik Abdul Khaliq.

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