



# Islamabad POST

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**Qatari emir becomes 1st Arab leader to visit Syria since fall of Assad**

Detailed News On Page-07

**Ata Tarar for strengthening Pak-China ties**

Detailed News On Page-08

**Starc achieves major landmark on birthday**

Detailed News On Page-06



## Parliamentary committee proposed

# PTI rejects PM offer to resume negotiations

"I am ready, wholeheartedly, to advance this dialogue so that the country moves forward," says premier

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said Thursday the government was ready to form a parliamentary committee to advance talks with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), a couple of days after the latter quit negotiations with the government. The PTI abruptly quit the talks after three meetings, arguing that the government was not genuinely interested in addressing its demands – the release of "political prisoners" as well as the formation of judicial commissions on events of May 9, 2023, and November 24-27, 2024. The dialogue process between the PML-N-led government and the PTI commenced in late December after months of heightened political tensions – as the former ruling party had taken to the streets on numerous occasions. With the failure of talks, the PTI has now announced staging public gatherings in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Swabi and Punjab's Lahore on February 8, marking the first anniversary of the general elections, which the party claims were rigged. However, PM Shehbaz has said that he wishes to tone down the political tensions and wholeheartedly move forward with the negotiations as the country cannot sustain more damage. Addressing a meeting of the federal cabinet in Islamabad, the PM said the government accepted the PTI's offer for talks very genuinely, contrary to the claim of the leading opposition party. "A committee was constituted and with the facilitation of the speaker, talks began. They provided their demands in writing and then our committee said that they would also respond in writing. The next meeting was scheduled to take place on January 28, but they made a run for it," he added. He said the government committee members told

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## PIA flight ban

### Fact-finding panel to probe Sarwar statement

Committee to estimate financial losses to PIA, national kitty occurred due to ex-aviation minister's statement

DNA

ISLAMABAD: After a shocking statement by an ex-aviation minister in 2020 resulted in years-long suspension of the national airline's flights to several countries, the federal government on Thursday formed a fact-finding committee to determine the motives behind Ghulam Sarwar's "irresponsible and speculative" statement. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chaired the federal cabinet session in Islamabad today where members deliberated on various agenda items, including Sarwar's statement which turned out to be a disaster for the country's aviation industry. Sarwar, during the former Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government in 2020, had revealed that nearly a third of the licences issued to pilots were fake and was followed by another

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif in Islamabad. – DNA

## All feared dead in US aircraft collision

Sixty-four people were on the American Airlines flight and three on the military helicopter when the aircraft collided near Ronald Reagan National Airport

### FOREIGN DESK

WASHINGTON: At least 28 bodies were pulled from the icy waters of the Potomac River after an American Airlines jet carrying 60 passengers and four crew members collided with an Army helicopter while landing at Ronald Reagan National Airport near Washington D.C., officials said Thursday. Crews were still searching for other casualties but did not believe there were any survivors,

Continued on Page 06

## SC judge questions Are May 9 offences more severe than terror incidents

GHQ attack case tried in military courts before 21st Constitutional Amendment, says defence ministry's lawyer

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Supreme Court's Justice Hasan Azhar Rizvi has questioned whether the May 9, 2023, offences are more severe than acts of terrorism. His remarks came as a seven-member constitutional bench of the Supreme Court, led by Justice Amin-ud-Din Khan, heard the intra-court appeal against the trial of civilians in military courts on Thursday. During the proceedings, the Ministry of Defence's counsel, Khawaja Haris, said that military courts were not mentioned within the judicial system under Article 175 of the Constitution and were instead established under a separate recognised law. In response, Justice Jamal Mandokhail remarked that courts established under Article 175 have broad jurisdiction, whereas courts set up under specific laws have limited authority. He further said that the 21st Constitutional Amendment stated that military courts were established in war-time situations, and a constitutional amendment was required for the trial of civilians.

Continued on Page 06

## Court sentences 2 to death for blasphemy

Blasphemy is an incendiary charge in Pakistan, where even unsubstantiated accusations can incite public outrage and lead to lynchings

### COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: Two men were sentenced to death by an Islamabad district and sessions court on Thursday for "proliferating blasphemous content" online. According to a first information report (FIR) registered by the Federal Investigation Agency in 2021, one of the convicts was arrested in Islamabad for creating and disseminating "blasphemous contents ... in respect of the Holy Prophet [Peace Be Upon Him]"

Continued on Page 06

## Briefs

### Shaban moon sighted

Ramadan expected to start March 1

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The moon of Shaban 1446 Hijri has been sighted in Pakistan, marking the beginning of the Islamic month of Shaban. This marks the beginning of the eighth month of the Islamic calendar, leading up to the holy month of Ramadan which is expected to be on March 1. A meeting of the Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee, chaired by Maulana Abdul Khabir Azad, was held in Islamabad on Thursday. The meeting was attended by members of the zonal committees and relevant officials. After the meeting, Maulana Azad announced that credible testimonies confirming the sighting of the moon had been received.

### Petroleum prices expected to go up

New fuel prices will come into effect from Feb 1

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The federal government is expected to raise petroleum prices for the upcoming fortnight due to a rise in global market rates, a Pakistani newspaper reported on Thursday citing sources. According to sources, petrol price could increase by Rs1.24 per liter, while diesel is projected to rise by Rs 4. Similarly, light diesel oil may see a hike of Rs5.93, and kerosene oil could increase by up to Rs 5 per liter. The rise in global prices is expected to directly affect domestic rates, prompting the government to review and adjust the prices accordingly.

## Imran's directives

### PTI to hold rally in Swabi on February 8

"Public gathering, workers both belong to party so we have to make [financial] contribution," says Junaid Akbar

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa President Junaid Akbar has said that the party will hold a public rally in Swabi on the directives of its incarcerated founder Imran Khan on February 8. The day marks the first anniversary of the last general elections, which the party alleges were rigged, resulting in the theft of its mandate. "A public rally will be held in Swabi on February 8 on the PTI founder's call," Akbar said in a statement, who recently replaced Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur as the party's provincial president. The development comes as the former ruling party has also sought permission to hold a public gathering in Peshawar on February 8 which it says would be observed as a "Black Day". PTI leader Aliya Hamza submitted an application to the deputy commissioner's office and sought the local administration's approval for a public gathering at the Minar-e-Pakistan ground, also known as Iqbal Park, next month.

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### Vawda alleges deadly threats from FBR officials

Senator Farooq H Naek suggests referring matter of "life threats" to Federal Investigation Agency

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Senator Faisal Vawda on Thursday claimed that three Federal Board of Revenue (FRB) officers had threatened his life over objections to an "untransparent" proposal for a massive vehicle procurement by the country's tax authority. Vawda is a member of the Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Revenue, which, on January 23, directed the FBR to halt its plan to purchase 1,010 vehicles for operational purposes at an estimated

Continued on Page 06

### Dar lauds EU's support for GSP plus status

He was talking to EU's Special Representative Ambassador Olaf

SIAFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar has emphasized that Pakistan is a firm believer in the protection of fundamental rights and will continue to enact and strengthen human rights legislation. He was talking to EU Special Representative for Human Rights Ambassador Olaf Skoog in Islamabad. During the meeting, he underscored the importance of Pakistan-EU dialogue on human rights.

Continued on Page 06

## FO confirms terrorists using US-left weapons in Afghanistan

Pakistan believes that the conflict can only be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy

KHAYAM ABASSI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Thursday reiterated that it had sufficient proof of terrorist groups in Afghanistan using the US left-behind weapons for terrorist activities on its soil, reminding the Kabul administration of its responsibility to act against such groups. Foreign Office spokesperson Shafiqat Ali Khan, at his weekly press briefing, told the media that Pakistan had repeatedly conveyed its concerns to the Afghan government and also provided evidence. About the boat capsizing incident in Morocco, he said the foreign ministry was coordinating the repatriation of 22 Pakistani survivors. After "thorough investigations" the said individuals would be returned to Pakistan in batches as the first batch had already arrived via two flights in Islamabad on the day. The spokesperson said that the Pakistan Embassy in Rabat was in close coordination with Moroccan authorities to oversee the relief efforts and finalize the complex repatriation process. He extended condolences and sympathies to the victims and families of those affected by the recent attack on a Saudi hospital in El Fasher,

Continued on Page 06

### Around 150 Pakistanis stranded in Goma: FO

So far around 75 Pakistanis have moved to Rwanda

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Around 150 Pakistanis were stranded in the city of Goma following the recent escalation of conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). A Foreign Office Spokesperson said Thursday that with the active engagement of Pakistan's High Commissioner in Kigali, ambassador Naeemullah Khan, the Rwandan authorities have allowed the entry of stranded Pakistanis into Rwanda. So far around 75 Pakistanis have moved to Rwanda. The Pakistan High Commission, Kigali, has arranged accommodation and food for the affected Pakistanis.

Continued on Page 06

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## Pakistan Travel Mart 2025 Serena Hotels to showcase hospitality excellence

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Serena Hotels is set to participate in the highly anticipated Pakistan Travel Mart (PTM) 2025, taking place from January 31 to February 2, 2025, at the Karachi Expo Center. Serena Hotels continues to demonstrate its commitment to promoting Pakistan's tourism industry, sustainable hospitality, and cultural heritage. Pakistan Travel

Mart serves as a premier platform for stakeholders in the travel and tourism sector, including airlines, tour operators, travel agencies, and government officials, to collaborate and explore opportunities for advancing the industry. At the Serena Hotels pavilion, visitors will have the opportunity to learn about the brand's extensive presence in Pakistan, including the newly opened Hunza Serena Hotel, the recently renovated Peshawar Serena Hotel, and the upcoming Sost Serena Ho-

tel. With a strong focus on sustainable tourism and community engagement, Serena Hotels will highlight its efforts in environmental conservation, heritage preservation, and responsible tourism. Visitors to Serena Hotels pavilion at PTM 2025 can expect engaging discussions, networking opportunities, and firsthand insights into the exceptional hospitality experiences that Serena Hotels offers across Pakistan.



ISLAMABAD: Senator Saleem Mandviwalla, chief whip in a meeting with High Commissioner of Bangladesh Iqbal Hussain Khan. — DNA

## KP CM for rehabilitation of drug addicts under Sehat Card

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur on Thursday announced the inclusion of drug rehabilitation treatment under the Sehat Card Scheme and directed officials to prepare a proposal for provincial cabinet approval. He was chairing the first meeting of the Provincial Task Force on Drug Control here, attended by provincial cabinet members, including Mian Khaliq-ur-Rehman, Faisal Tarakai, and Syed Qasim Ali Shah, along with the Chief Secretary, officials from the Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF), police, and other relevant departments. The meeting also decided to intensify anti-narcotics operations across the province. Police have been instructed to launch a large-scale crackdown on drug dealers, and officials failing to take effective

action will be removed from their positions, said an official communique. A special task force meeting will be held in 15 days to review the progress of these operations in all districts. Expressing concern over poppy cultivation in some areas of the province, the meeting devised a plan to eradicate it. A committee has been formed to hold discussions with farmers within a week and submit a report to the Chief Minister. The government will provide alternative crop seeds to encourage farmers to switch to legal cultivation. The Chief Minister emphasized that those involved in the drug trade will be dealt with strictly and assured that there will be no leniency for individuals responsible for destroying lives through addiction. He directed authorities to expand anti-drug operations in all districts and praised

the ongoing drug rehabilitation program in Peshawar, recommending that addicts from other districts also be transferred to rehabilitation centers in Peshawar. He also ordered special measures for rehabilitating addicts currently imprisoned. During the meeting, officials provided a detailed briefing on the Drug-Free Peshawar campaign, which has resulted in three heroin-mixing factories being shut down in Peshawar. Reports also highlighted that in Khyber district, 200 kanals; Mohmand, 112 kanals; Swabi, 45 kanals; and Mansehra, 13 kanals of poppy crops have been destroyed. In 2024 alone, authorities have incinerated 1,141 kg of various narcotics, worth PKR 2 billion in the international market. The Excise Department has seized 2,952 kg of

cannabis, 105 kg of heroin, 157 kg of opium, 37 kg of crystal meth (ice), and 248 liters of alcohol since June 2024, arresting 238 individuals involved in drug trafficking. Special awareness campaigns have been launched in educational institutions, yielding positive results. Narcotics control committees have been established in every university, and the third phase of the Drug-Free Peshawar campaign aims to rehabilitate 2,000 more drug addicts after successfully treating 2,400 addicts in the first two phases. The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) also briefed the meeting on its operations, reporting an 81 percent conviction rate in drug-related cases last year. Additionally, ANF KP arrested 242 Pakistani and six foreign nationals for drug smuggling.—APP

## SMIU's budget becomes surplus, Senate told

KARACHI: The 8th meeting of the Senate of Sindh Madressatul Islam University (SMIU) was held on Thursday at the Senate Hall of the university, which was chaired by Vice Chancellor Dr. Mujeeb Sahrai. The Senate was informed that the budget of SMIU in the financial year 2023-24 was first time surplus in the history of the university. Giving its details it was said that in year 2023-24, SMIU's budget was 963,315,795 rupees, expenditure was 907,484,864 rupees and 55,831,494 rupees were surplus. The meeting said the grant received from the Federal and Provincial governments was 498,783,149 rupees, while the SMIU's contribution to the budget was Rs. 464,532,646 rupees. The Senate was further informed that the SMIU's home contribution remained 50 percent to the total budget, generated from its own resources. Also the pension Fund was increased from 134,809 million rupees in the financial year 2023-24, while it was 74.115 million rupees in year 2022-23. Likewise, the budget deficit was gradually reduced in the last four years. The Senate was informed that in the financial year 2018-19 budget deficit was 70 million rupees, in 2019-20 was 67 million rupees, in 2020-21 was 8 million rupees, in 2021-22 was 7 million rupees, in 2022-23 was 6 million rupees and in 2023-24 the SMIU went 50 percent in surplus.—APP

## RCCI holds seminar on wood quality and export procedures

RAWALPINDI: A seminar on increasing exports of furniture sector was organized by Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) in collaboration with Pakistan Furniture Association (TFPA) at Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The objective of the seminar was to shed light on best practices and strategies to promote the quality and export potential of Pakistan's furniture industry and to share knowledge for sustainable development. The seminar was organized to provide information on wood identification, quality testing, and export procedures, with the aim of developing Pakistan's furniture industry and increasing the share of the

furniture industry in the export sector. The session was chaired by RCCI President Usman Shaukat, who appreciated TDAP and TEVTA for focusing on non-traditional sectors, especially the furniture industry. The participants of the seminar were informed that Pakistan's furniture market is believed to be worth around \$3 billion (Pakistan & Gulf economist, 2019). It is consisted on more than fifteen thousand small and medium units across the country. Pakistan's furniture sector has variety of traditional (Classical) style furniture e.g. Antique, Chinoi, Mughal, Oriental etc. While, domestic furniture market is sharply moving towards modern (Italic) designs. As the traditional (Antique & Chino-

ti) solid wood furniture is relatively expensive, in comparison to modern designs MDF (medium density fiberboard) furniture. The chief guest of the event was Mr. Khalid Rasool, Director General (E&M Division-II), TDAP. Senior Vice President Khalid Farooq Qazi, Vice President Fahad Barlas, Executive Member Bilal Javed and officials and representatives of the furniture industry were present on the occasion. The seminar was also addressed by Zahid Hussain, Chairman Pakistan Furniture Association, Islamabad, and Samiullah, Project Director TEVTA Woodworking Center, Rawalpindi, who shared valuable insights on the growth and opportunities of the sector.—APP

## KP judicial academy launches training for paralegal staff

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Judicial Academy (KPJA) has launched a series of one-day training programs to enhance the professional skills of paralegal staff across the province. The inaugural session, held today, was chaired by Director General Mr. Jahanzeb Shinwari, with 21 petition writers from various districts in attendance. Senior officials, including Dean Faculty Mr. Zia-ur-Rehman and Senior Director Administration Mr. Dost Mohammad Khan, were also present. In his address, DG Shinwari emphasized the importance of accuracy and precision in drafting legal documents, stating that errors in written materials could harm a litigant's case. He highlighted the critical role of petition writers in preparing petitions, appeals, and other legal documents, urging them to uphold professional ethics. The training covered topics such as "Professional Ethics," "Substantive & Procedural Laws," and "Maintenance of Record." Certificates were distributed to participants at the end of the session. Two additional trainings are scheduled for January 31 and February 8, 2025, as part of the series.—APP

## IWMB launches campaign to revive Margalla Hills greenery

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Wildlife Management Board (IWMB) has launched an ambitious plantation drive to restore and protect the natural beauty of the Margalla Hills, a key national heritage site, aiming to rejuvenate the green landscape of the Margalla Ridge. In a symbolic gesture to kick off the initiative, IWMB planted Chir Pine saplings along the Margalla Ridge. The event saw the active participation of several prominent figures, includ-

ing Member of the National Assembly Ispahanyar M. Bhandara, renowned journalist Nasim Zehra, and activist Nilofer Qazi. Dozens of school children also joined the rewilding project, which aims to restore the area to its former ecological splendor, said a press release. To further engage the community, IWMB has launched a weekly campaign inviting both school children and prominent citizens of Islamabad to participate in planting local trees at the

site. The goal is to restore the ridge to its former glory, creating a green Margalla viewpoint that will remain accessible to the public free of charge. The rewilding project is being implemented in two phases. The first phase, currently underway, focuses on making the site accessible and safe for visitors. Immediate efforts are in progress to repair the area, including the installation of safety grills, benches, parking facilities, site clearing, and greening measures.—APP

## PN COMKAR Command Annual efficiency awards ceremony held

DNA

KARACHI: Pakistan Navy COMKAR Command Annual Efficiency Awards Ceremony 2024 was held at PNS JAUHAR, Karachi. Vice Chief of the Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Ovais Ahmed Bilgrami, graced the occasion as Chief Guest. Upon arrival, the Chief Guest was received by Commander Karachi, Vice Admiral Muhammad Faisal Abbasi. In his address, VCNS expressed complete satisfaction in efficient achievement of assigned targets by COMKAR Command. He emphasized the significance of training in ongoing techno-strate-

gic landscape embedded with Artificial Intelligence and Cyber Security. He



acknowledged the role of COMKAR Command in providing professional and academic training to PN Officers and personnel, while focusing on their personal development and intel-

lectual growth. The Chief Guest congratulated the prize winners for demon-



strated performance during the year 2024 and encouraged healthy inter-command competition. Earlier, in his welcome address, Commander Karachi, Vice Admiral Muhammad Faisal

Abbasi, elaborated the role and significance of COMKAR Command units in



imparting professional and technical training. During the ceremony, VCNS presented efficiency awards and trophies to the best-performing units and individuals of COMKAR Command.

## ISSI hosts seminar on Int'l year of peace and trust

Ambassador Sohail Mahmood congratulated Turkmenistan on playing a leadership role globally in steering the process of advancing the objectives enshrined in UNGA Resolution 78/266 declaring 2025 as the International Year of Peace and Trust

ISLAMABAD: The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organised a seminar titled "International Year of Peace and Trust: Cooperation for Peace," in collaboration with the Embassy of Turkmenistan and the UN Resident Coordinator Office in Pakistan. The event included speeches by H.E. Atadjan Movlamov, Ambassador of Turkmenistan to Pakistan; Mohamed Yahya, UN Resident Coordinator in Pakistan; and Ambassador Syed Haider Shah, Additional Secretary (UN and OIC) Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The working session featured talks by Ambassador Masood Khalid, former Ambassador of Pakistan to China; Ms. Ammara Durrani, Assistant Resident Representative UNDP; and

Dr. Maria Saifuddin Effendi, HOD Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, NDU. In his welcome remarks, Ambassador Sohail Mahmood congratulated Turkmenistan on playing a leadership role globally in steering the process of advancing the objectives enshrined in UNGA Resolution 78/266 declaring 2025 as the International Year of Peace and Trust. He emphasized that peace is not merely the absence of conflict but rather a dynamic and participatory process which requires dialogue, mutual understanding, and the ability to accept and respect differences. Ambassador Mahmood noted that the resolution's emphasis on preventive diplomacy, peaceful settlement of disputes, and

peace as a lived experience is pertinent to the contemporary international environment, which is beset by divisions, discord and conflict. He highlighted the genocidal war in the Middle East, conflict in Europe, and the unresolved Jammu and Kashmir dispute, and stated that the UN and international community must fulfil their obligations towards ensuring just and lasting solutions of these issues. Ambassador Sohail Mahmood added that the International Year of Peace and Trust also serves as a moment of reflection on the contributions of various actors to the global peace agenda including women, youth, regional organisations, civil society, academia and the private sector. He

also emphasised Pakistan's role in promoting international peace and security, noting that the country has a proud history of contributing to global peace efforts from UN peacekeeping to advocating peaceful resolution of disputes. These efforts are rooted in the belief that dialogue and diplomacy are the most effective means of addressing conflicts and building sustainable peace. As an elected member of the security council for the term 2025-26, Pakistan would remain in the vanguard of the efforts for promoting these objectives, he underlined. Ambassador Atadjan Movlamov noted that we are witnessing a complexity in global politics. In this backdrop, Turkmenistan advocated to

consolidate international efforts for purposes of peace and trust by introducing a General Assembly resolution on "International Year of Peace and Trust 2025." The resolution projected fundamental principles and commitments of the UN charter, particularly peaceful settlement of disputes. Turkmenistan also adopted a special program called "The Concept of Activities and Priorities of Turkmenistan within the Framework of International Year of Peace and Trust 2025." Turkmenistan sees the implementation of the resolution as a global-scale event and a genuine opportunity for the qualitative transition of a new stage in international relations. —DNA

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## National Days and Armed Forces Days

### JANUARY

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

## Hotels & Restaurants



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



Turkish Airlines.....8494949



## Emergency

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Bomb Disposal.....15  
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Emergency Ambulance.1122  
& Rescue Services.4451122  
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## Hospitals

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Shifa International 4603666



## Departments

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Met Office.....9250360-6  
RDA.....5555864  
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Cantonment Board 9270151-3

## Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi visiting F-8 Exchange Chowk Interchange Project. —DNA

## Experts urge strengthening tech policies during roundtable

Tapping into critical mineral wealth, and adopting a pragmatic approach in global tech rivalry”

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS), Islamabad, hosted a roundtable discussion on the ‘Trump-Tech Nexus: Opportunities and Challenges Ahead,’ analysing the implications of US President Donald Trump’s second term on global technology, Big Tech regulations, Artificial Intelligence, and cybersecurity. The session brought together leading experts to assess how President Trump’s policies, and strategic collaborations with tech leaders could reshape the global technological landscape and its potential impact on Pakistan.

Setting the stage for the discussion, CASS moderator Mr Mustafa Bilal opened the discussion by outlining the significance of President Trump’s second presidency for global technology policy, emphasising its geopolitical and economic ramifications. Ambassador Zamir Akram, Advisor, Strategic Plans Division, GoP, provided a policy-focused assessment of the shifting geopolitical landscape

in technology and underscored the unprecedented nature of the global tech confrontation, warning that generative AI could be as transformative as the industrial revolution or as dangerous as nuclear weapons. He highlighted that Pakistan must strategically



navigate this geopolitical divide, which has led to export restrictions on critical technologies and a tightening US-India partnership

that indirectly impacts Pakistan’s access to investments and tech transfers. He stressed that Pakistan’s private sector should lead in digital transformation, as inefficiencies and multi-layered regulatory hurdles stifle growth. He called for streamlined de-

cision-making processes and a regulatory framework that enables, rather than obstructs, technological advancements. On the

opportunities ahead, Ambassador Akram pointed to Pakistan’s rare earth mineral resources, noting that foreign investment in critical minerals such as lithium and copper must be actively pursued. Air Vice Marshal Soban Nazir Syed (Retd), DG, National Aerospace Science and Technology Park (NASTP), highlighted NASTP’s pivotal role in fostering startups in technology, AI, and emerging technologies, underlining its commitment to creating an ecosystem that nurtures innovation and entrepreneurship. He shared NASTP’s initiatives in providing infrastructure, mentorship, and funding opportunities to accelerate research and development in critical tech domains. He further stressed the importance of public-private collaboration in ensuring Pakistan remains competitive in the global technology and AI landscape. Founder & CEO of Al-goryte, Mr Talha Bin Afzal noted that while support for Big Tech under President Trump seemed likely, hurdles in regulatory and legal battles could delay innovation. Mr Afzal noted that Pakistan faces significant challenges,

including slower innovation, geopolitical risks, and limited access to advanced technologies due to export restrictions. Despite these challenges, he was optimistic that Pakistan has considerable opportunities in the global digital economy. With rising compliance costs elsewhere, Pakistan could emerge as an attractive destination for IT outsourcing. Increased access to international markets, coupled with adherence to ethical technology standards, could further strengthen its position. He urged a shift from the freelancer-driven economy to a structured technology sector, fostering a more stable and competitive digital ecosystem. Thanking the speakers for their insightful presentations, Air Marshal Javid Ahmed (Retd), President CASS, acknowledged the need for Pakistan to strategically engage with the global tech ecosystems while adapting to evolving global regulations. He stressed that Pakistan must adopt a proactive, balanced approach, strengthening its regulatory framework, attracting foreign investment, and fostering local innovation to remain competitive.

## Media playing crucial role in promoting national stability: Nasir

MANSOOR QURESHI

ISLAMABAD: Nasir Mansoor Qureshi, President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), emphasized the vital role of media in promoting positivity within society by highlighting both strengths and weaknesses, ultimately contributing to the stability of the nation. In a discussion with the Chairman/Editor-in-Chief of Daily, The Pakistan Observer on Thursday, Qureshi remarked that the media in every country holds great significance. He stressed that responsible journalism not only raises awareness

of critical issues but also fosters constructive dialogue, which is essential for national progress and social cohesion. He further added, “The media’s influence extends far beyond mere reporting; it shapes perceptions, encourages accountability, and plays a fundamental role in strengthening democratic values and national stability.” Qureshi called on the media to continue playing a pivotal role in guiding public opinion, fostering informed discussions, and promoting solutions to challenges faced by the country. He added that as far and his team is concerned they are dedicated to working alongside policymakers and stakeholders to promote policies that encourage inno-

vation, investment, and sustainable growth. Together, we can overcome obstacles and create a robust business ecosystem that contributes significantly to the development of our economy. The Chamber will continue to advocate for the interests of businesses, facilitate networking opportunities, and offer the necessary tools to help our members succeed. We remain committed to being the catalyst for positive change, supporting the growth of business, and advancing the prosperity of Islamabad’s commercial sector. Faisal Zahid Malik, while discussing the significance of media-Chamber collaboration for the economic growth of Pakistan, underscored the crucial role of the Islamabad

Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) in fostering a conducive environment for business development. Malik praised the Chamber’s efforts in promoting industry-academia linkages, advocating for the ease of doing business, and creating a favorable cost-of-doing-business environment for the business community. He emphasized that these initiatives are vital for nurturing a thriving business ecosystem. Furthermore, Malik commended the ICCI’s efforts to bridge the gap between the public and private sectors, as well as the Chamber’s initiatives to enhance collaborations with overseas chambers through relevant embassies.

## Sherry advocates for people-centric approach to solar energy policy

ISLAMABAD: Senator Sherry Rehman, Chairperson of the Senate Standing Committee on Climate Change on Thursday addressed the ‘Great Solar Rush in Pakistan’ event, emphasizing the nation’s growing progress toward solar energy. Talking to the Great Solar Rush Conference 2025, held at Serena Hotel, she stated that “Pakistan has emerged as a market leader in South Asia for solar adoption adding that we should not be disabling this revolution; we should be enabling it.” She said that failure to integrate solar into national planning would stall Pakistan’s progress on energy security and economic stability. Pakistani cuisine recipes She said that Pakistan is increasingly relying on imported solar panels,

primarily from China, as the country strives to meet its energy needs adding that nearly one-third of Pakistan’s energy capacity is being sourced from solar imports to address the challenges of an unreliable energy supply and high electricity rates. However, she raised concerns about the current energy system, specifically the aging grid and the burden it places on consumers. Despite the increasing adoption of solar energy, many consumers still find themselves paying high costs for electricity and are unable to afford the initial investment required for solar options. She pointed out that while there are two main types of solar operations underway in Pakistan—1 Net Metering, which is enabling policy but faces unintended consequences,

and 2 small consumers going off-grid, leading to an excess electricity supply—there is still a gap between public demand and policy implementation. Senator Rehman highlighted the importance of continuing to invest in renewable energy rather than relying on fossil fuels. She emphasized that the country’s solar market growth is crucial for sustainable energy development and must be enabled by sound policy. She discussed how the public has moved faster on renewable energy, with the people’s actions now outpacing the policy measures in place. She stressed that policy needs to catch up with the public’s transition to solar energy, ensuring that equitable and affordable electricity is available nationwide.—DNA

## AIU holds ‘Performance-Based Awards’ ceremony

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIU) held a ‘Performance-Based Awards’ ceremony yesterday under the chairmanship of Vice Chancellor, Professor Dr. Nasir Mahmood. During the event, 119 teachers, officers, and staff members who provided outstanding services in 2024 were awarded cash prizes and appreciation certificates. Congratulating the award recipients, Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Nasir Mahmood stated that the ‘Performance-Based Awards’ ceremony would now be a regular annual event at the university. He emphasized that recognizing employees for their exceptional contributions would not only encourage hardworking individuals but also motivate others to enhance their performance.—APP

## Novelist Sarfaraz explores literary and cultural synergy

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) hosted acclaimed Paris-based novelist Sarfaraz Baig, honoring his literary contributions and commitment to global storytelling. His visit sparked engaging discussions on the intersection of literature, cultural diplomacy, and artistic collaboration, reinforcing the role of the arts in bridging diverse societies. Upon his arrival, Baig was warmly received by Dr. Bilal Karim, Director of Public Relations and Research (PRR), and Khurshed Ahmed, Deputy Director of Administration. As a gesture of appreciation for his literary achievements, Dr. Bilal Karim presented him with a book. During his visit, Baig commended PNCA’s efforts in preserving Pakistan’s rich artistic heritage and providing a platform for creative expression. He emphasized the importance of strengthening literary ties between Pakistan and the international literary community to foster mutual understanding and cultural exchange. “Literature has the unique power to transcend borders, connect cultures, and shape narratives that inspire generations. Platforms like PNCA play a crucial role in nurturing this dialogue,” he remarked. PNCA continues to serve as a vibrant hub for intellectual and artistic engagement.—APP



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## Briefs

## Chinese automotive giant signs agreement

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chinese automotive giant GEELY, along with its subsidiary FARIZON, signed a groundbreaking joint venture agreement with Pakistan's Habib Rafiq Engineering (HRL Engineering) in Hangzhou, China, to revolutionize Pakistan's automotive sector. They will be introducing New Energy Vehicles (NEVs) and fostering local manufacturing capabilities. The agreement, signed by Mr. Luis Liu, Business Head at GEELY, and Mr. Imran Zahid, Executive Director of HRL-ESM, establishes plans for the sales and assembly of commercial vehicles. The partnership will facilitate the import of Completely Built Units (CBU) and the establishment of a Completely Knocked Down (CKD) assembly plant in Pakistan. The venture will roll out NEV buses, Light Commercial Vehicles (LCVs), and Heavy-Duty Trucks (HDTs) in multiple phases, paving the way for a sustainable future in Pakistan's transportation sector, Gwadar Pro reported.—APP

## HEC launches faculty development programme

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE), HEC has launched a two-week Faculty Development Programme (Tier-II) for Associate Professors of Public Sector Universities of Federal and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa regions at Higher Education Commission (HEC), Regional Centre, Peshawar. The program aims to elevate teaching excellence, research innovation, and professional growth. This two week programme aims to equip faculty members with the skills to serve as Trainers of Trainers (TOT), enabling them to enhance their roles as professional educators and trainers across Pakistan in terms of fostering excellence in teaching, research, and professional growth. The training, designed for mid-career faculty members, will equip participants with advanced andragogical techniques, innovative research strategies, and leadership competencies required to meet the evolving demands of higher education. The opening ceremony was graced by distinguished guests including Director of the Institute of Management Sciences, Peshawar Prof. Dr. Usman Ghani and Vice Chancellor, Kohat University of Science & Technology Prof. Dr. Naseer ud Din. Mr. Nasir Shah, Director General HEC Regional Centre, Peshawar, welcomed the participants and applauded NAHE team for their initiative aimed to enhance the skills, knowledge, and leadership capabilities of faculty members. The Faculty Development Programme Tier-II reflects NAHE's unwavering commitment to academic advancement and innovation. Faculty members are encouraged to actively participate, benefit from this transformative opportunity, and contribute to the institution's legacy of excellence. The programme features eight specialized modules including Ensuring Excellence in Higher Education Teaching, Effective Academic Planning & Implementation Strategies, Psychological.

## Rana calls for youth empowerment

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Prime Minister's Youth Programme (PMYP), Rana Mashood Ahmad Khan, along with delegates of the Commonwealth Asia Youth Alliance (CAYA) Summit, emphasized the need to enhance youth capacity, promote knowledge sharing, and ensure their inclusion in governance. They reiterated their commitment to meaningful youth participation in decision-making and addressing the challenges faced by young people across the region. Speaking at a press conference on Thursday after signing the Islamabad Declaration alongside representatives from over 12 countries, Rana Mashood stated that Pakistan had successfully hosted the CAYA Summit 2025. He expressed gratitude to all participating delegates from CAYA and non-CAYA member states, including Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Brunei

## Gwadar has yet to reach its full potential: Report

The city's resilience has brought its transformation into the spotlight. With China-aided projects like the internationally recognized Gwadar Port, South and North Free Zones, Eastbay Expressway, Pak-China Vocational and Technical Institute, Pak-China Friendship Hospital, a 1.2 MGD desalination plant, and the New Gwadar International Airport, Gwadar is experiencing rapid growth

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Despite many socio-economic advances, Gwadar has yet to reach its full potential, says a report published by Gwadar Pro on Thursday. Gwadar was once an old fishing town and the largest slum in the region, plagued by abysmal infrastructure, limited opportunities for trade and business, and persistent socio-economic challenges. After decades of hardship, Gwadar is now steadily modernizing under the framework of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The city's resilience has brought its transformation into the spotlight. With China-aided projects like the internationally recognized Gwadar Port, South and North Free Zones, Eastbay Expressway, Pak-China Vocational and Technical Institute, Pak-China Friendship Hospital, a 1.2 MGD desalination plant, and the New Gwadar International Airport, Gwadar is experiencing rapid growth. These developments have improved economic dynamics, created jobs, enhanced skills, and raised the

quality of life for locals. Additionally, projects such as the Gwadar Central Business District, Industrial Estate, Export Processing Zone, and Ecological Corridor, outlined in the Gwadar Smart Port City Master Plan (2025-2035), aim to accelerate inclusive growth. The city's skyline is changing with new markets, housing schemes, shopping centers, hospitals, sports stadiums, parks, educational institutions, and recreational areas. Modern roads, eateries along the coastal belt, and bustling commercial streets like Marine Drive, Syed Hashmir Road, and Ustad Abdul Majed Road are transforming Gwadar into a vibrant city. Two- and three-story commercial buildings painted in vivid colors now dominate these areas, reflecting the city's rising prosperity. The presence of banks with ATM facilities further highlights the growth in business activity. Transportation services have also expanded significantly. Bus services between Gwadar and Quetta, once non-existent, are now offered by multiple companies, including Mumtaz, Aldawood, Almaqbool, and Javed

Transport. Trips between Gwadar and Karachi have also increased, offering more options for travelers. The city's main market, Jannat Bazar, is often packed with shoppers, particularly women purchasing traditional embroidered clothing. New hotels, such as Royal Hotel and Saadaf Hotel, are springing up to meet demand. Gwadar's sports landscape is also evolving. The cricket stadium on Gwadar Port Road has drawn widespread attention, while new football stadiums, including the Baba-e-Bizenjo Football Stadium, are under development. A state-of-the-art mini-football facility with FIFA-certified turf was recently installed in collaboration with the Balochistan government. For many locals, football remains a beloved pastime, with fishermen of ten playing barefoot on the beaches after returning from work. Recreational spaces such as GDA Central Park, GDA Sunset Park, and New Town Family Park add to the city's appeal, offering locals and visitors places to unwind. The construction boom has led to a surge in demand for building materials. Local shops now sup-

ply everything from cement and bricks to steel and masonry tools, saving residents the cost and time of sourcing these materials from Karachi. "This activity has greatly benefited us by reducing construction costs and timelines," said Shahid Baloch, a homeowner in the Old Town area. Since 2013, the city has seen significant socio-economic improvements. Thousands of jobs have been created through industrialization, particularly in the Gwadar Free Zone, while infrastructure projects continue to enhance daily life. Social welfare programs, such as the Gwadar Women's Development Centre, focus on skills training, women's empowerment, and poverty alleviation. Additionally, China has installed over 7,000 solar panels in Gwadar to provide efficient electricity to local communities. In education, the China-Pakistan Girls High School in Faqeer Colony has made notable strides, while initiatives like the Women's Garments Factory and goat farming in the Free Zone offer sustainable livelihoods. To improve governance, laptops and motor-

cycles have been provided to Gwadar Police, increasing their efficiency. Environmental sustainability is also a priority, with the establishment of the China-Pakistan Friendship Forest, where over 50,000 trees have been planted. Looking ahead, the Balochistan government has approved a Central Business District spanning 2,500 acres under the Gwadar Master Plan. The tax-free status granted to Gwadar district is expected to attract further economic activity. Infrastructure projects such as the Rs. 42.19 billion breakwater at Jebel-e-Nuh aim to provide marine protection and improve port operations. The industrialization of the Gwadar Free Zone marks the beginning of a new era for Pakistan, positioning it as a manufacturing hub in South Asia. As exports grow, Pakistan's current account deficit will shrink, and foreign reserves will increase. Gwadar's transformation is a testament to the power of strategic investment and international collaboration, with China playing a central role in shaping the city's promising future.

## Lecture on without data, you are just another person with an opinion

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) hosted a distinguished lecture titled "Without Data, You're Just Another Person with an Opinion", by Dr. Naem uz Zafar, Chief Statistician at the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS). This lecture marked a significant moment aimed at discussing the critical role of data in advancing socio-economic development, improving governance, and fostering fiscal resilience in Pakistan. The event attracted a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including key government bodies, research institutions, and development partners, to explore how data can be leveraged to drive more informed and effective decision-making in the country, said a press release issued here on Thursday. The lecture focused on the transformative power of data to address various socio-economic challenges. The importance of data in understanding and addressing the needs of diverse population groups, ensuring equitable access to resources, and driving sustainable development was emphasized. One of the main objectives of the event was to showcase the role of data in governance and its potential to stimulate economic growth.—DNA

## Mian Latif slams PTI's founder lust for power

ISLAMABAD: PML-N prominent leader Mian Javed Latif Thursday criticized PTI founder, accusing him of prioritizing power over stability by holding protests and allegedly working on a foreign agenda that damages state institutions, warning that this will no longer be tolerated. In an exclusive conversation with a private news channel, Mian Latif strongly criticized PTI's Chairman's relentless pursuit of power, warning that it poses a significant threat to Pakistan's democracy. Mian Latif has issued a stern warning, emphasizing that state institutions are robust and will not permit anyone to undermine the system. He specifically called out the PTI, accusing them of being insincere in their pursuit of dialogue and instead seeking to create chaos. Latif stressed that the government.—APP

## NAB, OPF to support overseas Pakistanis with new MoU

ISLAMABAD: The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) and the Overseas Pakistanis Foundation (OPF), under the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis & Human Resource Development (HRD), on Thursday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish a collaborative framework aimed at addressing the issues and complaints of overseas Pakistanis. The MoU signing ceremony, held at NAB headquarters, marked the creation of a structured mechanism for mutual cooperation and strategic coordination to tackle challenges such as property disputes, financial fraud, misuse of authority, and other matters requiring NAB's intervention. The primary objective of the MoU is to develop an efficient and collaborative system where OPF and NAB will jointly address grievances reported by overseas Pakistanis. These grievances may include fraudulent practices in housing schemes, property possession disputes, allotment issues, and financial mismanagement or irregularities by housing developers and private individuals. Under the agreement, a dedicated facilitation desk or cell for overseas Pakistanis will be established at all NAB offices, including the Head Office and Regional Offices, to receive and process complaints referred by OPF or submitted directly by overseas Pakistanis. Additionally, a helpline will be set up between NAB and OPF to ensure constant communication and efficient resolution of complaints. During the ceremony, the OPF team provided a detailed briefing on the foundation's operations and the challenges faced by overseas Pakistanis. Speaking on the occasion, Chairman NAB, Lt. Gen. (Retd) Nazir Ahmed, emphasized that overseas Pakistanis are a valuable asset to the nation.—DNA



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Germany Alfred Grannas calls on President Asif Zardari.— DNA

## Naqvi pays tribute to martyred soldiers in NW

ISLAMABAD: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Thursday paid a heartfelt tribute to Major Hamza Israr and Soldier Muhammad Naem, who embraced martyrdom while bravely confronting extremist terrorists in North Waziristan. The security forces successfully neutralized six terrorists in the operation, dealing a major blow to their nefarious plans. Naqvi acknowledged the supreme sacrifice of the fallen soldiers, stating, "Major Hamza Israr and Soldier Muhammad Naem laid down their lives for the peace of our homeland.

Their bravery is a source of immense pride for the entire nation." He further emphasized that the sacrifices made by security personnel in the fight against terrorism would never be forgotten. "The entire nation salutes the great sacrifice of our martyrs. These brave sons of the soil have become immortal by giving their lives for the country," he said. Expressing solidarity with the families of the martyrs, Naqvi assured them of the nation's unwavering support. "We stand with the families of the martyrs in this difficult time," he stated. He also commended

the security forces for eliminating six terrorists in the operation. "The security forces have once again proven their commitment by thwarting the evil designs of extremist terrorists. The nation stands shoulder to shoulder with its defenders," Naqvi remarked. Pakistan's security forces continue their relentless efforts to root out terrorism, ensuring peace and stability in the region. The sacrifices of heroes like Major Hamza Israr and Soldier Muhammad Naem will forever be remembered in the annals of history.—DNA



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## Trump's tough trade tactics

US President Donald Trump's first term changed the conversation on trade in the United States. Where the consensus had once been that open markets would eventually lead to even adversarial states like China and Russia adopting values like America's, Trump's first-term tariffs led to a recognition of their uses, and a deeper understanding of how adversarial states game the free-trade system. Tariffs do indeed lead to higher costs for consumers, but had Europe and the US strategically borne that pain years ago, the former might have weaned itself off Russian oil long before the Ukraine invasion, and the latter would not be facing a strategic dependence on pharmaceuticals and critical minerals from its primary geopolitical opponent. Just as one can be too trusting with those who might betray them, liberal defenders of the free-trade system have too often displayed an idealism that its opponents could take advantage of. Yet, just as one can be too trusting and idealistic, one can also be too calculating. If the former are too easily taken advantage of, the latter are telling the world their promises are of no value and will soon run out of partners. Though Trump has been in office less than two weeks, his tariff threats have tipped past the point of pragmatism into irrationality. He has threatened 25 per cent tariffs on Canada and Mexico. He has threatened 10 per cent tariffs on China and levies on the European Union. He has even threatened tariffs (and sanctions) on Russia if it does not negotiate an end to its Ukraine invasion. And, most recently, he threatened tariffs on Colombia if it did not take back planes full of immigrants originating from the South American country. Though the tariffs were scrapped once the Colombian government (allegedly) relented to US demands, the president of Colombia initially responded with an interesting (if long-winded and tangential) social media post. Among other things, it said: "Your blockade does not scare me; because Colombia, in addition to being the country of beauty, is the heart of the world ... I am informed that you put a 50 per cent tariff on the fruits of our human labour to enter the US, I do the same. Let our people plant corn that was discovered in Colombia and feed the world." Had a deal not taken place, these tariffs would have led to a spike in coffee prices, as well as the price of roses just before Valentine's Day - not to mention the costs of retaliatory tariffs on US goods to Colombia, such as corn, soybeans, wheat and cotton. Tariffs on Canada and Mexico could lead to higher prices on petrol, cars and other goods. Such consequences have been well documented. If Trump is bluffing, that might have other consequences - during his first term I warned that adversarial nations were growing wise to his threats of devastating action that never came. But these are outcomes that would materialise should Trump's repeated threats face resistance in other countries. Should those countries' leaders relent, we might face another problem, one suggested by Trump's rise to political power. The Americanisation of global culture and dominance of American brand names and products has not been universally welcomed, even in countries that are reliable partners of Washington.

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## WB aggression and Gaza ceasefire

ISRAELI attacks on Palestine's West Bank continue to take on a new intensity. In the wake of the Gaza ceasefire, Israeli occupation forces and settlers have worked in tandem to attack innocent Palestinians, opening fire and injuring scores of individuals. The spike in violence should send a powerful message to all those who believe that the occupation can be trusted on the Gaza ceasefire: it has simply shifted the center of its brutal aggression to the West Bank. "[Her] mother was feeding her [when] she got a bullet from the sniper in her head," said the grandmother of Laila al-Khatib, the two-year-old Palestinian girl shot and killed by occupation forces over the weekend. This violence cannot be seen in isolation and has the potential to disrupt the Gaza ceasefire. The Israeli forces' violent raid at Al-Aqsa Mosque in 2023 into account. The deadly event became a catalyst for spillovers elsewhere, promoting escalations and increasing the scope of confrontations manifold. At present, "Israel" is testing the Resistance's ability to respond to its deadly onslaught in the occupied West Bank and is creating conditions that could prompt more fitting reactions. Realities on the ground speak for themselves: hundreds of Palestinians in the Jenin refugee camp were forced to leave their homes and the casualty count in the occupied West Bank has reached double-digits. By pushing to expand "large scale" occupation raids, "Israel" shows few signs of bringing its terror campaign to a halt. Continuation could put the Gaza ceasefire on thin ice, where both sides are expected to operate in good faith. These expanding raids also put a premium on stamping out groups that are committed to protecting Palestine's freedoms. If violence in the occupied West Bank spirals out of control in the future, an already-fragile Gaza ceasefire may not hold firm. The value of the ceasefire is impossible to ignore. Legions of Palestinians are finally returning to their homes in northern Gaza, having borne the brunt of a raging genocide that confined their home soil to rubble. The ceasefire also reaffirms the Resistance's commitment to its people, as well as their freedoms and liberties as it prioritizes their interests in the captive exchange. But "Israel" appears hellbent on introducing new risks to that arrangement. It has been using sophisticated weaponry and deadly warfare techniques to attack the Jenin refugee camp and proudly claims that "lessons" from the Gaza genocide are being applied to the occupied West Bank. Why should Resistance groups hold back? It is Palestinian blood that is being targeted from Gaza to the occupied West Bank, and "Israel" feels it can normalize repeated massacres and avoid any consequences. There are also reports that "Israel" is tightening the screws around the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), calling it to "vacate all premises in occupied East Jerusalem and cease its operations in them by 30 January 2025." This move should be seen as part of a broader effort to strangle critical assistance to Palestinians in both Gaza and the occupied West Bank. After all, UNRWA wields a central role in humanitarian assistance across these territories. The timing of a potential UNRWA ban thus coincides with "Israel's" raging West Bank warfare, suggesting a conscious strategy to further entrench the occupation - while projecting itself as committed to the Gaza truce.

# PECA and Journalism: A Safeguard, Not a Threat

Imran Ghaznavi



PECA helps make this distinction clear: Legitimate journalism is based on evidence, verified sources, and ethical standards. Propaganda thrives on selective reporting, anonymous claims, and emotional manipulation. PECA does not criminalize reporting. it criminalizes deceit. And in an era where half-truths and outright fabrications dominate online discourse, this distinction matters more than ever. The Path Forward: Responsible Digital Journalism Rather than fearing PECA, journalists should ask

THE Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) is a law with a purpose. It was designed to regulate digital content, combat cybercrimes, and ensure responsible online communication. But for journalists, the law has often been framed as something else, a threat, a tool to silence, a means to control the press.

Is that true? Or is PECA something else entirely?

For genuine, ethical journalists those who report facts, verify sources, and act in the public interest, PECA is not an enemy. It is a shield, a framework designed to protect reputations, expose propaganda, and hold digital manipulators accountable.

The real question is: Who actually fears PECA, and why?

PECA: A Law That Targets Digital Crime Not Journalism

A journalist sits down at their desk. A stack of notes. A file of sources. A draft of a report that could shake the powerful. They check their facts. They confirm their sources. They publish. This is the process of legitimate journalism. It's not what PECA is designed to stop. Instead, PECA zeroes in on digital crime, fraud, harassment, defamation, and the deliberate spread of falsehoods. It distinguishes between real journalism and calculated digital deception.

What does PECA actually target?

Fake news and manipulated content which is designed to provoke unrest or incite violence. Character assassination and baseless defamation, a common tool in political and corporate warfare. Cyber harassment and doxing, the exposure of private information for intimidation.

For a journalist who follows ethical reporting standards, fact-checking, fairness, accountability PECA is not a concern. The law doesn't punish truth. It punishes the deliberate distortion of it.

The Age of Disinformation: Why PECA Matters

A video goes viral. It claims to show corruption at the highest level. Millions watch. News outlets report on it. The damage is done. Then the truth emerges, it was fabricated, stitched together with artificial intelligence and deceptive editing. But the lie has already traveled farther than the correction ever will. This is the new battlefield.

Today, digital platforms aren't just sources of information they are weapons. Fake accounts, bot networks, and coordinated disinformation campaigns spread narratives that are not just misleading but deliberately constructed to deceive. PECA stands as a defensive wall against this manipulation.

It allows authorities to: Trace and dismantle fake news networks, hold individuals accountable for spreading falsehoods and prevent content that incites violence or communal hatred.

Journalists who deal in truth benefit from this framework, it helps preserve the credibility of their work in an increasingly polluted information space.

A Journalist's Shield Against Digital Smear Campaigns often Journalists themselves have become targets.

A critical report is published. Within hours, a flood of online attacks follows. Accusations surface bribery, bias, secret affiliations. The claims are baseless, but they spread faster than the truth.

Under PECA, journalists have a legal route to push back: If false accusations are made online, there is legal recourse, if their name and likeness are misused, action can be taken and if a coordinated harassment campaign is launched against them, authorities can investigate.

The law is a tool. How it is used depends on those enforcing it. But its existence gives journalists a means to defend their reputation in the digital age.

The Divide: Journalism vs. Propaganda

Infect there is a fundamental difference between journalism and propaganda. Journalism

is about facts. Propaganda is about influence. Journalism is accountable. Propaganda operates in the shadows.

A journalist's duty is to inform, investigate, and challenge. A propagandist's goal is to manipulate, mislead, and obscure.

PECA helps make this distinction clear: Legitimate journalism is based on evidence, verified sources, and ethical standards. Propaganda thrives on selective reporting, anonymous claims, and emotional manipulation. PECA does not criminalize reporting. it criminalizes deceit. And in an era where half-truths and outright fabrications dominate online discourse, this distinction matters more than ever.

The Path Forward: Responsible Digital Journalism

Rather than fearing PECA, journalists should ask: How can this law help protect our profession?

It starts with responsible digital reporting: i. Fact-checking before publishing. ii. Avoiding sensationalized or misleading headlines. iii. Verifying sources and cross-referencing information and iv. Holding online misinformation networks accountable.

In an era of digital warfare, the integrity of journalism is under attack. PECA, when applied fairly, is a countermeasure, a legal framework that ensures truth prevails over digital manipulation.

Who Actually Fears PECA?

PECA is often painted as a threat. The truth? Only those who thrive on falsehoods have reason to fear it.

For ethical journalists, PECA is not a roadblock. it is actually a safeguard. It does not silence investigative reporting, it protects from fabricated counterattacks. It does not punish truth, it punishes deliberate deception and It does not target the press, it targets those who misuse digital platforms to spread lies.

The fight for truth is ongoing. PECA, when used responsibly, ensures that the fight is fair.

# Trump's hammer falls on transgenders

Qamar Bashir



The LGBTQ+ movement, particularly the Pride movement, has gained significant visibility, with major corporations, media outlets, and politicians expressing support. What once started as small-scale protests has now grown into large global celebrations. June was officially designated as Pride Month in the U.S., with corporations, government institutions, and celebrities promoting LGBTQ+ inclusivity

ON January 20, 2025, immediately following his inauguration as the 47th President of the United States, Donald Trump signed an executive order titled "Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government." This order mandates that all federal agencies recognize only two sexes—male and female—as determined at birth, effectively eliminating federal recognition of transgender and non-binary identities. The order states: "Sex refers to the immutable biological classification of male or female as determined at conception."

The executive order directs federal agencies to replace the term "gender" with "sex" in official documents and policies, cease funding for gender-affirming care, and prohibit the promotion of what it terms "gender ideology." It also rescinds previous policies that allowed individuals to self-identify their gender on federal documents such as passports and mandates that federal facilities, including prisons and shelters, assign individuals to sex-segregated spaces based on their biological sex assigned at birth. In addition to this order, President Trump signed another executive order on January 28, 2025, aimed at prohibiting federal support for gender transitions for individuals under 19 years old. This order directs federal insurance programs, including Medicaid and TRICARE, to exclude coverage for gender-affirming care for minors and encourages legal action against healthcare providers offering such services. Transgender rights in the U.S. have evolved significantly over time, shaped by different presidential administrations. The Obama administration (2009–2017) implemented policies recognizing gender identity in federal laws, issued guidance allowing transgender students to use bathrooms corresponding to their gender identity, and removed the ban on transgender individuals serving openly in the military.

The Biden administration (2021–2025) introduced transgender military service rights, strengthened Title IX protections for transgender students, and expanded rights for transgender inmates, allowing them to be housed based on their gender identity. Additionally, gender-affirming care had been included in various federal health programs. Under Biden's policies, transgender students could participate in sports teams aligning with their gender identity, though several states had passed

laws restricting transgender athletes in female sports. In U.S. prisons, policies allowed transgender inmates to request housing based on their gender identity. One significant legal case involved a federal judge ruling in favor of a transgender inmate's right to receive gender-affirming surgery while incarcerated.

The LGBTQ+ movement, particularly the Pride movement, has gained significant visibility, with major corporations, media outlets, and politicians expressing support. What once started as small-scale protests has now grown into large global celebrations. June was officially designated as Pride Month in the U.S., with corporations, government institutions, and celebrities promoting LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Over the past few decades, the conversation around gender identity, transgender rights, and medical gender transition has gained significant traction. What was once a fringe discussion has now become a mainstream topic, driven by advocacy organizations, media coverage, medical advancements, and policy shifts. The concept of individuals experiencing gender dysphoria—where a person feels they were born in the wrong body—has been widely discussed, debated, and, in many cases, legally recognized across the world. The transgender movement had received significant support from various advocacy groups, including organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), GLAAD, and the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE). These groups have played a major role in lobbying for legal protections, healthcare access, and social acceptance of transgender individuals. The media, too, has contributed by producing stories, documentaries, and movies portraying the struggles of transgender people, bringing their experiences into the public consciousness. Pharmaceutical companies and medical institutions have also entered the conversation, offering hormone therapy and surgical procedures to help individuals transition to their perceived gender identity. The gender-affirming care industry, which includes hormone replacement therapy (HRT), puberty blockers, and sex reassignment surgeries, has grown into a multi-billion-dollar sector. Studies show that the cost of gender transition treatments can range from \$10,000 to over \$100,000, depending on the procedures involved. President Trump, with his trademark unpredictable policies and thinking pattern, with one

stroke of a pen, has reversed two decades of advocacy and transgender policies and sex transformation technologies back to zero. After his executive order, many sex change clinics will be closed, many drug manufacturing companies and surgical procedures that were minting money will go bankrupt, the federal government will trash tons of stationery to change the word sex to gender in their forms and formulations, and the schools, hospitals, and jails will have to close down transgender facilities. What Trump did reflected his conservative ideology and deeply religious inclinations. While modern science, psychology, and behavioral sciences recognize transgender identity as a legitimate phenomenon, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam traditionally acknowledge only two sexes—male and female—as divinely ordained. Islamic teachings generally reject gender transition, considering gender immutable. Christianity upholds the binary concept of gender, citing Genesis 1:27, with conservative denominations rejecting transgender identity. Judaism, particularly in Orthodox traditions, also adheres to the binary gender framework. Though President Trump's executive order has officially denied the existence of any gender beyond male and female and has halted federal funding for gender-affirming treatments, the notion of transgender identity is unlikely to disappear anytime soon. Hormone treatments and surgical procedures may move underground, while other countries could become destinations for gender transition surgeries. Advocacy groups are expected to launch protracted legal battles, and Congress and the Senate will likely engage in serious debates on the issue. Human rights organizations may condemn the order as a violation of fundamental rights, arguing that individuals should have the freedom to make decisions regarding their bodies and gender identity. Some critics may accuse the president of turning the U.S. into a theocracy, while religious institutions may support his stance. While the executive order will undoubtedly impact the transgender movement, how society—particularly the transgender community and the rest of the world—reacts to it, is yet to be seen.

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



## Briefs

## PTI rejects PM offer to resume...

FROM PAGE 01  
the PTI leaders that since they had provided the demands in writing, they would do the same. The premier mentioned that the government's committee members told their PTI counterparts that they should hold a meeting with them and they would speak to them on these issues. "Was it not the case that when we entered the parliament wearing black armbands [in 2018], PTI's Imran Niazi told me that [his government] would form a parliamentary committee and that I should nominate members from the opposition benches," he said, reminding the former ruling party founder of their dealing with the opposition during their tenure.

## Fact-finding panel to...

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statement claiming that the qualifications of 262 pilots in the country were "dubious". Additionally, the cabinet approved a 25% reduction in the provincial quota in medical and dental colleges managed by the federal government. The initiative was taken in the context of an extremely low quota for students domiciled in the Islamabad Capital Territory in provincial medical and dental colleges so that students domiciled in Islamabad could get better opportunities for education in such institutions. The federal cabinet, on the recommendation of the Rightsizing Committee of the federal government, has approved an amendment to the Rules of Business, 1973 regarding the merger of the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan and the Ministry of Frontier Affairs.

## FO confirms terrorists...

FROM PAGE 01  
calling its a clear violation of international law. "Pakistan believes that the conflict can only be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy. We express our full support for the unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Sudan." He categorically rejected the baseless and unfounded allegations aimed at targeting the Pakistan-China friendship. "We reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the foundational principle of the One China Policy, which is a consistent cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy and remains unchanged." Spokesperson Shafiqat Khan told the newsmen that Pakistan was set to host AMAN 25, the 9th edition of the multinational AMAN exercise, from February 7 to 11.

## Around 150 Pakistanis...

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The High Commission is also reaching out to the Pakistani community to identify and reach out to any other citizen in difficulty. There is likelihood of more Pakistanis crossing over to Rwanda in the coming days. The High Commission staff is in contact with every individual who has asked for assistance and help. Furthermore, the High Commission is also reaching out to Pakistanis in the border city of Bukavu. Any affected Pakistani, if requiring assistance, may contact the High Commission at following number: Pervez Bhatti, Head of Chancery: WhatsApp +92 333 5328517.

## PTI to hold rally in...

FROM PAGE 01  
The opposition party's prospective return to street politics comes against the backdrop of its negotiations with the government - which now seem to have collapsed after its refusal to attend the fourth round of talks on January 28 citing the government's failure to form a judicial commission to probe the May 9 riots and November 2024 protests as per its charter of demands. The dialogue process between the PML-N led government and the PTI commenced in late December after months of heightened political tensions.



BAKU: Federal Minister for Communications, Privatization & Board of Investment Abdul Aleem Khan held meeting with Minister of Transport of Azerbaijan. - DNA

# PCB finalise opening ceremony schedule for Champions Trophy

Opening ceremony will be held at National Bank Stadium in Karachi on Feb 11

DNA

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Thursday confirmed the schedule for the opening ceremony of the upcoming Champions Trophy 2025, scheduled to take place next month. Chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Mohsin Naqvi has approved all associated events. The main opening ceremony of the aforementioned tournament will now take place at HazooriBagh in Lahore on February 16, with key national figures, prominent cricketers, and ICC officials expected to attend. The opening ceremony of the upgraded Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore will be held on February 7, with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expected to attend as the chief guest. A second ceremony is scheduled for February 11 at the National Bank Stadium in Karachi, where former President Asif Ali Zardari is anticipated to be the chief guest. This comes after the official opening ceremony originally planned for February 16, was cancelled due to the delayed arrival of two participating teams. As a result, tradi-

## Champions Trophy reaches Pakistan as world tour concludes

The eight-team tournament is set to commence on February 19

LAHORE: The prestigious silverware of the prestigious ICC Men's Champions Trophy on Thursday, returned to host country Pakistan after completing its world tour. According to the details, the title reached here after visiting each participating nation in the eight-team tournament, scheduled to run from February 19 to March 9. Following its arrival, the trophy will embark on its second tour of the country, amid which it will be put on display in major cities like Islamabad, Peshawar, Lahore, Faisalabad, Multan, Bahawalpur, Sargodha and Sheikhupura until February 15. Meanwhile, it will also be exhibited during the opening ceremonies at the newly-renovated Gaddafi Stadium here and Karachi's National Stadium on February 7 and 11, respectively. Remember, the Champions Trophy has already toured several cities in Pakistan in November last year. During the tour, the trophy was exhibited in major cities like Karachi, Islamabad, Murree, NithiaGali, Taxila and Abbottabad but was not exhibited in Lahore. - DNA

tional pre-tournament activities, such as the captains' press conference and the official photoshoot in Karachi, have also been cancelled. An ICC official, speaking anonymously, mentioned that both the ICC and PCB had shown interest in hosting an opening ceremony, but the schedules of England and Australia, as well as player workload management, made it impractical. The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) and Cricket Australia (CA) have now confirmed their arrival schedules, with England arriving in Lahore on February 18 and Australia on February 19. The ICC Champions Trophy 2025 will feature eight teams competing in 15 matches from February 19 to March 9, across Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi, and Dubai. The teams are divided into two groups. Group A: Pakistan, India, New Zealand, Bangladesh. Group B: Afghanistan, South Africa, England, Australia. Hosts Pakistan will kick off the tournament against New Zealand on February 19 in Karachi. The highly anticipated clash between arch-rivals Pakistan and India is scheduled for February 23 in Dubai.

## Afghanistan unveils official jersey for ICC Champions Trophy 2025

Afghanistan becomes the first team to unveil their official team jersey

WEB DESK

KABUL: The Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) on Thursday unveiled their official team jersey for the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy 2025, set to take place across Pakistan and the UAE next month. The much-anticipated announcement was made via the board's social media platforms, accompanied by a unique video showcasing Afghanistan's breathtaking mountainous regions before revealing the team's new shirt. The ACB captioned the post, "Presenting Afghanistan's Official Jersey for the ICC Champions Trophy 2025!" "Inspired by our rich cultural heritage, the jersey design beautifully blends the elegance of Naskh calligraphy with the geometric patterns of the historic Jam Minaret in Ghor Province." "The Jam Minaret, standing for nearly 800 years, is located in the historic city of Firuzkoh along the banks of the Harirod River. With a height of 65 meters and a diameter of 9 meters, it serves as a testament to Afghanistan's rich heritage." The ACB's message continued, "As AfghanAtalan take the field, they will wear the spirit of unity, the determination of our nation, and the elegance of Jam. They will create history and keep Afghanistan's name shining on the global stage!" Captain Hashmatullah Shahidi and fellow cricketers were seen proudly wearing the new jersey, leading the charge for Afghanistan's campaign in the tournament. The ICC Champions Trophy 2025 will feature eight teams competing across three venues in Pakistan-Karachi, Lahore, and Rawalpindi-and Dubai, with the tournament running from February 19 to March 9.

## Chelsea agree deadline-day deal for Walsh

LONDON: Chelsea have agreed a deal to sign Barcelona's England midfielder Keira Walsh on the Women's Super League's transfer deadline day. Sources at Barcelona said the total deal was worth up to £800,000, including add-ons. Chelsea sources would not confirm the figures involved but said the basic fee was lower than £800,000. Barcelona had been unwilling to sell but it is believed Chelsea's bid was accepted late on Wednesday, and Walsh was due in London for a medical on Thursday. The 27-year-old, who left Manchester City to join Barcelona for a then world record fee of £400,000 in 2022, was keen to return to England to be close to family. The fee is believed to be under the world record of around £900,000 Chelsea paid for USA defender Naomi Girma earlier this month. Chelsea's interest in Walsh has been long-standing and the club have been looking to bolster their midfield options since the summer. Walsh told Barcelona in September that she did not wish to extend her contract, with it due to expire in six months' time. - Agencies

## Starc achieves major landmark on birthday

Khwaja stars as Aussies pile on pressure in Galle

GALLE: Usman Khawaja's maiden double century and a hundred on debut from Josh Inglis gave Australia complete control of the first Test against Sri Lanka after two days in Galle. At the age of 38, Khawaja's 232 made him the second-oldest Australian to make a double hundred in Test cricket, after the great Sir Don Bradman. He extended his third-wicket partnership with Steve Smith to 266 before Smith, standing in as captain for Pat Cummins, was out for 141. Khawaja then added another 146 with Inglis, the 29-year-old born in Leeds. Inglis' 102 is the first century on Test debut by an Australian man since Adam Voges in 2015. The tourists were eventually able to declare on 654-6, their highest total in a Test in Asia. After 154 overs in the field, in which they used only four different bowlers, Sri Lanka wilted in reply. Oshada Fernando was lbw to Matthew Kuhnemann, the left-arm spinner opening the bowling as part of a three-pronged Australian spin attack. Mitchell Starc, the sole frontline seamer for the tourists, had Dimuth Karunaratne superbly caught at the second attempt by sub fielder Nathan McCusker at gully. Travis Head then trumped McCusker's effort with a flying grab at short leg to hold Angelo Mathews off Nathan Lyon, leaving Sri Lanka 44-3, a massive 610 behind. Meanwhile, Australia's experienced pacer Mitchell Starc made his 35th birthday a memorable one by taking his 700th international wicket during the ongoing first Test against Sri Lanka here at the Galle International Stadium on Thursday. The left-arm pacer amassed the milestone on the second day of the series opener when he dismissed Sri Lanka's opener Dimuth Karunaratne on seven. Starc bowled a short delivery just outside the off-stump channel, which hurried and climbed following the impact and thus ended up taking the outside edge, very close to the shoulder of the bat, and flew to Nathan McCusker at gully. As a result, Starc became the sixth-fastest bowler to take 700 international wickets, taking 373 innings. Sri Lanka's Muttiah Muralitharan sits at the top of the list of the fastest to 700 international wickets, followed by India's Ravichandran Ashwin. The elusive list further features notable figures like Australia's Shane Warne and Pakistan's Waqar Younis and Wasim Akram. The left-arm pacer, who made his international debut for Australia in 2010, has taken 377 wickets in Tests, 244 wickets in ODIs and 79 wickets in T20Is, showcasing his brilliance across formats.

### Fastest to reach 700 international wickets

Muttiah Muralitharan - 308 innings	Glenn McGrath - 358 innings
Ravichandran Ashwin - 351 innings	Mitchell Starc - 373 innings
Shane Warne - 354 innings	Brett Lee - 381 innings
Waqar Younis - 355 innings	Wasim Akram - 382 innings

## Afghan cricketers play first match since fleeing Taliban

In 2020, 25 players were given professional contracts by the Afghanistan Cricket Board but after the Taliban returned and they could no longer play or train safely, they had asked the International Cricket Council (ICC) for permission to play as a refugee team. The request was denied

SPORTS DESK

MELBOURNE: Female cricketers from Afghanistan hope their first competitive match in Australia will "open doors for Afghan women for education, sport and [the] future". An Afghanistan Women's XI played a 20-over exhibition match against Cricket Without Borders at Melbourne's Junction Oval on Thursday, before the Women's Ashes Test between Australia and England at the nearby Melbourne Cricket Ground. More than 20 members of the Afghanistan national team have been in Australia since the Taliban's return to power in 2021, because female participation in sport in the country has effectively been outlawed. But they are now hoping to send a message of hope and positivity to their country. "We are going to represent millions of Afghan women who are in Afghanistan and denied their rights," player Firoza Amir told Cricket Australia before the match. "It's very special for all of us to get back together after three years, leaving everything and losing everything back home in Afghanistan." In 2020, 25 players were given professional contracts by the Afghanistan Cricket Board but after the Taliban returned and they could no longer play or train safely, they had asked the International Cricket Council (ICC) for permission to play as a refugee team. The request

was denied. For the exhibition match, the side could not play under the name of Afghanistan women because they are not recognised as a national team by the ICC and they had to wear a custom-made kit as opposed to the official logo. Benafsha Hashimi, one of the Afghan players, designed the logo which depicted a red tulip and a golden wattle - the national flowers of Australia and Afghanistan - entwined around a cricket ball. With the message of hope driving the players, the match delivered a joyful occasion with each run applauded like a century and players from both sides embracing the friendly spirit. England captain Heather Knight was in attendance despite the fact she was lead-

ing her side in the Ashes Test match just a few hours later, alongside the Australian Governor General and Clare Connor, the deputy chief executive of the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB). There are two sets of Afghan players in Australia, based in Melbourne and Canberra, and the match saw them unite for the first time since their arrival. Many of the players did not speak English when they arrived but had to learn it to help them settle and apply for jobs. Nahida Sapan says that the players are always playing for more than just themselves. "We play for Afghanistan, it means a lot for Afghan women because with this, they can and we can hope," Sapan told Cricket Australia. "This match can open doors for

Afghan women for education, sport and future. "We are building not just a team, we are building a movement for change and improvement." There have been calls for teams to boycott fixtures against Afghanistan men, who England are due to meet in next month's Champions Trophy. ICC regulations state full membership is conditional upon having women's cricket teams and pathway structures in place. However, Afghanistan's men's team has been allowed to participate in ICC tournaments seemingly without any sanctions. As a result, Labour MP Tonia Antoniazzi, in a letter signed by more than 160 parliamentarians, said England's players should use their "power" to "make a difference". ECB chief executive Richard Gould said "a coordinated, ICC-wide approach would be significantly more impactful than unilateral actions by individual members". An ICC working group, set up after the Taliban takeover in 2021, met with representatives of the Afghanistan government and said it was keen to use its position and the sport of cricket to influence change in the country. The governing body added it was their intention to "support the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) in fostering cricket development and ensuring playing opportunities for both men and women in Afghanistan". Its stance is that the ACB is not in control of government policy and therefore players should not be punished for it.



## Vawda alleges deadly...

FROM PAGE 01

cost of Rs6 billion, citing concerns about transparency in the procurement process. Echoing Vawda's apprehensions, committee chairman Senator Saleem Mandviwalla also reported receiving similar threatening messages. The allegations led to a heated debate in the committee meeting, with concerned members demanding a high-level inquiry into the threats. Vawda insisted that the threats warranted criminal action - a demand which was strongly endorsed by Mandviwalla and other members. Senator Farooq H Naek, another committee member, suggested referring the matter to the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). "The threat issue has surfaced in the committee," Naek said in the meeting, demanding it must be exposed.

## Are May 9 offences more...

FROM PAGE 01

In response, the defence ministry's counsel said that no amendment was needed for trials; rather, the amendment expanded the Army Act to include additional offences. Justice Rizvi observed that the 21st Constitutional Amendment also mentioned the Mehran and Kamra base attacks. He questioned where the trials of those who attacked the General Headquarters (GHQ) and the Kamra airbase were conducted. "Two Orion aircraft worth billions of rupees were destroyed - was the 9 May offence more serious than these terrorist incidents?" he asked. On Justice Hassan's questions, the defence ministry's lawyer said that all the terrorists of the Mehran base attack were killed. "Was there no investigation after they were killed? Who were they? Where did they come from and how did they come?" Did the file of the Mehran base attack was closed after the terrorists were killed? questioned Justice Rizvi.

## Court sentences 2 to death...

FROM PAGE 01

to a WhatsApp group. Two warrants of the commitment of conviction to the Adiala Jail superintendent were issued today for the two convicts by Sessions Judge Afzal Majoka. They said the two were sentenced to death by hanging for violating Section 295C (Use of derogatory remarks, etc, in respect of the Holy Prophet (PBUH)) of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC). "[The] convict shall be hanged by his neck till he is dead subject to confirmation of death punishment by honourable Islamabad High Court," both warrants read. The judge noted that both convicts had the right to file an appeal in the Islamabad High Court within 30 days.

## All feared dead in US..

FROM PAGE 01

which would make it the deadliest U.S. air crash in nearly 24 years. The National Transportation Safety Board is leading the investigation into the collision, and newly-appointed Secretary of Transportation Sean Duffy said the work to recover the wreckage of the jet, which broke apart in the Potomac River, is underway. "NTSB is going to start to analyze that aircraft, partner with the FAA with all the information we have to get the best results possible for the American people," he said.

## Dar lauds EU's...

FROM PAGE 01

Deputy Prime Minister further highlighted Pakistan-EU's growing cooperation in the political and economic spheres and appreciated EU's continued support for Pakistan's GSP plus status. The EU special representative positively assessed the potential of Pakistan-EU relations and appreciated the continued growth of the collaborative partnership across all sectors.



## Briefs

## PSX turns bullish, gains 1,719 more points

ISLAMABAD: The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) turned around to bullish trend on Thursday, gaining 1,719.04 more points, a positive change of 1.54 percent, closing at 113,206.40 points as compared to 111,487.36 points on the last trading day. A total of 483,939,931 shares were traded during the day as compared to 449,244,755 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs26.103 billion against Rs. 28.186 billion on the last trading day. As many as 441 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 272 of them recorded gains and 118 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 51 companies remained unchanged. The three top trading companies were Sui South Gas with 48,364,956 shares at Rs 39.11 per share, Waves Home Appliances with 33,226,540 shares at Rs.12.78 per share and Bank Hakramah with 31,509,642 shares at Rs.3.71 per share. —APP

## Rupee sheds 10 paise against dollar

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani rupee on Thursday depreciated by 10 paise against the US dollar in the inter-bank trading and closed at Rs278.97 against the previous day's closing of Rs278.87. However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs 279.50 and Rs 281.00, respectively. The price of the Euro increased by 18 paise to close at Rs290.73 against the last day's closing of Rs290.55, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese yen went up by 01 paise and closed at Rs1.80, whereas an increase of 08 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs347.33 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs347.25. The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal increased by 03 paise each to close at Rs 75.95 and Rs74.37 respectively.—APP

## Gold prices up by Rs1,600 per tola to Rs.290,300

ISLAMABAD: The price of 24 karat per tola gold increased by Rs.1,600 and was sold at Rs 290,300 on Thursday against its sale at Rs 288,700 on previous trading day, All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported. The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs.1,372 to Rs.248,885 from Rs. 247,513 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat went up to Rs.228,152 from Rs.226,895. The prices of per tola silver increased by Rs.59 to Rs3,450 whereas that of ten gram silver went up by Rs50 to Rs2,957. The price of gold in the international market increased by \$15 to \$2,778 from \$2,763, the Association reported.—APP

## RCCI delegation to participate in Industrial Exhibition in Rwanda

ISLAMABAD: The delegation of Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) led by its President Usman Shaikat said that the Chamber's delegation would participate in the upcoming industrial 'Trade and Industrial Exhibition' to be held in Rwanda (Kigali) in July 2025. Talking to Rwandan High Commissioner Fatou Harerimana during his visit the Rwanda High Commission along with his delegation here Thursday, the President RCCI said that Rwanda was an emerging economy of African region, which has huge potential for the local private sector to search for new avenues of trade. Shaikat said that RCCI leadership would play its due role for increasing the bilateral economic and trade ties between both of the nation and increasing the trade in diverse sectors of the economy.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar posing for a group photo graph along with Minister for Maritime Affairs is Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, Director of China Cultural Center in Pakistan Chen Peng and others during "Spring Festival" in connection with Chinese New Year, at Pakistan National Council of Arts in Federal Capital.

## Monetary policy vital in restoring macroeconomic stability

The SBP governor noted that Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) financing rose from Rs. 543 billion in December 2023 to Rs. 638 billion in December 2024, while agriculture credit disbursement increased by 14.5 per cent year-on-year, reaching Rs. 1,266 billion in the first half of FY25

DNA

MULTAN: Governor State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Jameel Ahmad said on Thursday that prudent monetary policy stance had played an important role in restoring macroeconomic stability. While addressing the executive body of the Multan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), he highlighted recent policy initiatives taken to enhance ease of doing business; including export and import facilitation, dividend repatriation, and support for free-

lancers and IT exporters, as well as strengthening the digital ecosystem. The SBP governor noted that Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) financing rose from Rs. 543 billion in December 2023 to Rs. 638 billion in December 2024, while agriculture credit disbursement increased by 14.5 per cent year-on-year, reaching Rs. 1,266 billion in the first half of FY25. He also appreciated the role of the MCCI and called on the business community to invest in future technologies and explore non-traditional

markets to diversify the overall exports of the country. He said that many countries of the world were exporting non-traditional items these days, adding that "our business community should also explore new forex by exporting non-traditional items". The environment is very conducive for business, Jameel Ahmad said, recalling that some 11,000 applications were pending with the central bank for opening LCs in 2022 but "we have passed through the troubled times now". The SBP chief highlighted a number of

policies initiated by the central bank with support of the government for business fraternity for improvement in the economy. SBP Deputy Governor Saleemullah, MCCI SVP Mohsin Masood Khawaja, former president, Khawaja Muhammad Younus SBP Director Abid Qamar, Deputy Director, Faheem Arshad, presidents of banks and other officials were present. Earlier, in his welcome address, MCCI President Bakhtawar Tanvir Sheikh shed light on a number of challenges faced by the world and Pakistan economy dynamics

were changed in COVID-19 and post-COVID scenario. He lauded the government and the SBP policies to stabilise the economy of the country, adding that the policy rate was 22pc in July last year which had reduced to 12pc now. He informed that economic indicators were going in a very positive direction now and added that the business fraternity was hoping that SBP would bring the interest rate to single digit at the earliest. Later, a question-answer session was also held wherein Jameel Ahmad replied to a volley of questions by the businessmen.

## Germany's far-right 'firewall' crumbles as migration debate flares

BERLIN: Weeks before Germany's elections, a heated immigration debate inflamed by a deadly knife attack triggered a political earthquake Wednesday when conservative parties for the first time cooperated with the far-right AfD. In what was decried by opponents as a breach of a long-standing taboo, the opposition CDU-CSU relied on backing from the anti-immigration Alternative for Germany (AfD) party to pass a controversial resolution through the national parliament. Together, and with backing from the smaller FDP, they narrowly passed a toughly-worded motion that harshly attacked the immigration policy of embattled center-left Chancellor Olaf Scholz ahead of February 23 elections. Though it lacked the force of law, the motion called on the government to permanently police all borders and deny entry to all irregular migrants, whether they claim asylum or not. Emotions are raw after a knife attack killed two people, including a two-year-old child, in Bavaria last Friday. Police have arrested a 28-year-old Afghan man as the main suspect. In heated exchanges in the chamber, Scholz had told his election rival, frontrunner Friedrich Merz, that any cooperation with the AfD would be an "unforgivable mistake." Scholz told parliament that "since the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany over 75 years ago, there has always been a clear consensus among all democrats in our parliaments: we do not make common cause with the far right." Merz angrily fired back at Scholz, recalling a series of bloody attacks blamed on asylum seekers and demanded: "What else needs to happen in Germany?" "How many more children have to become victims of such acts of violence before you also believe there is a threat to public safety and order?" The AfD's top candidate, Alice Weidel, cheered the outcome of the vote in a message on X, calling it "a historic day for Germany, a victory for democracy." In the vote, conservative and far-right lawmakers, also backed by the liberal Free Democrats (FDP), passed the resolution with 348 votes in favor and 344 against, with 10 abstentions. Afterwards, Scholz posted on X that he would "need some time to process what we have experienced together today... That is a bad sign. For the parliament. And also for our country." The resolution calls for the "rejection of all attempts to enter the country illegally without exception" because in the neighboring EU countries they arrive from, "they are already safe from persecution." The resolution also argues that people required to leave Germany "must be taken into custody immediately," adding that more detention centers should be built.—DNA

## Ahsan visits Cambridge University to strengthen academic collaboration

LONDON: Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Wednesday visited Cambridge University, where he held a productive meeting with Hilary Perott, Representative of the Strategic Partnership Organisation. The discussions focused on fostering collaboration to create new opportunities for Pakistani students at Cambridge and other leading universities in the UK, a news release said. During the meeting with the team leading partnerships under the Cambridge Trust, Ahsan Iqbal was apprised of the availability of co-funded PhD scholarships between Pakistan and Cambridge, which remained unutilized due 'procedural challenges.' Expressing concern over the issue, the minister immediately directed the Chairman of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) to address the procedural bottlenecks and ensure that all available scholarships were awarded to deserving Pakistani students who have secured admission in PhD programs at Cambridge and meet the required criteria. Additionally, he assigned the Member Science and Technology, Planning Commission, to follow up on the matter, emphasizing that no eligible student should be deprived of this opportunity. Ahsan Iqbal reiterated his vision of enabling every Pakistani student who secured admission to top universities worldwide to receive financial support. Reflecting on his own journey, he shared how he was able to pursue an MBA at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, through a scholarship, which played a crucial role in shaping his career and achievements. Furthermore, the minister informed that he has engaged with the heads of all major commercial banks in Pakistan, urging them to develop scholarship programs under their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. He emphasized the importance of public-private partnerships in expanding higher education opportunities for talented Pakistani students.—DNA



A delegation from FPCCI, comprising Tariq Jadoon Vice President, Karim Aziz Malik Chairman FPCCI, Malik Sohaib Hussain Chairman Coordination FPCCI and Najeeb Chaudhary FPCCI Ambassador at Large Washington DC USA met with Jawad Paul Khawaja, Secretary Commerce. During the meeting, they were briefed on trade, commerce, and business opportunities for the Pakistani diaspora in Washington D.C., Virginia, and Maryland, USA. Additionally, Malik Sohaib and Karim Aziz also discussed the upcoming FPCCI Prime Minister's Awards.

## Syria, Qatar discuss reconstruction during emir's visit

DAMASCUS: Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani said discussions with a Qatari delegation in Damascus Thursday included reconstruction in the war-torn country, during the first visit by a head of state since Bashar al-Assad's ouster. The trip by Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, less than two months after Islamist-led rebels ousted Assad, comes a day after Syrian leader Ahmed al-Sharaa was appointed interim president for an unspecified transitional period. It also follows a visit by Qatar's prime minister earlier this month. "We discussed a comprehensive framework for bilateral cooperation concerning reconstruction" in the country devastated by nearly 14 years of civil war, Shaibani said during a press conference with Qatari Minister of State at the foreign ministry, Mohammed al-Khulaifi. He said their talks covered "vital sectors including infrastructure... investment

and banking services, paving the way for economic recovery, health and education". Khulaifi welcomed Wednesday's announcement by Syria's authorities "on the end of the revolutionary phase and the transition to the phase of establishing the state". Doha will continue "to provide the required support on all humanitarian and service levels, and also regarding infrastruc-

ture and electricity", he told the press conference. Unlike other Arab countries, Qatar did not restore diplomatic ties with Syria under Assad and was one of the first to back the armed rebellion that erupted after his government crushed a peaceful uprising in 2011. Syria's new authorities on Wednesday said Sharaa had been tasked with forming a transitional legislature, and they

also announced the dissolution of all armed groups involved in Assad's overthrow, as well as the former government's army. Sharaa's Islamist group led the offensive that ousted Assad on December 8. Qatar's emir arrived Thursday on "an official visit to Damascus" where he was welcomed by Sharaa, a statement from the Qatari court said. The Syrian embassy in Doha had told AFP that Sheikh Tamim would meet Sharaa "in a historic visit" that would address "cooperation and aid in several sectors". Qatar was the second country, after Turkey, to reopen its embassy in the Syrian capital following Assad's overthrow, and has urged the lifting of sanctions. During a visit earlier this month, Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani also pledged to support the rehabilitation of Syria's infrastructure. He said the agreement included

providing Syria with 200 megawatts of power and gradually increasing production. A diplomatic source has also said Qatar was weighing plans to assist Syria with public sector salaries. Also this month, ministers from Syria's transitional government including Shaibani met the Qatari premier on their first visit to the Gulf country since taking power. On December 23, Khulaifi led the first high-level Qatari delegation to Damascus after a 13-year diplomatic rift. Qatar's ruler is the most senior of a string of foreign officials to visit Damascus since December. A delegation from Russia, a close ally of ousted leader Assad, visited this week, while foreign ministers or senior officials from countries including France, Germany and Turkey have also been to Damascus. Syria's defence ministry said Thursday that a high-level Turkish military delegation had also visited the country.—DNA



## UK to keep ban on asylum seekers

LONDON: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government will retain a ban on asylum seekers being able to claim protections under modern slavery laws, even as its ministers have previously criticized those measures. Starmer is under pressure to deal with tens of thousands of people who arrive to the UK each year on small boats, a key issue of concern for British voters, after he pledged in last year's election campaign to "smash the gangs" controlling the people smuggling trade. The Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill introduced to parliament on Thursday will allow the police to seize the mobile phones of asylum seekers to help track down people smugglers, and target those suspected of supplying parts used in the small boats to transport people to England. The Labour Party, which won power in July, also plans to retain parts of legislation passed by the previous Conservative government that will disqualify asylum seekers using modern slavery laws to challenge decisions to remove them, and the power to detain child asylum seekers for up to 28 days. Labour had voted against those measures in parliament when legislation on them was passed in 2023. Starmer said at the time that the decision to deny asylum seekers using modern slavery laws would "drive a coach and horses" through protections for women trafficked to Britain. Jess Phillips, now a junior interior minister, said in 2023 the legislation was a "traffickers' dream" because it would hide victims of modern slavery.—APP

## KPEC crucial regional connectivity project: Karim

PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to KP CM on Industries, Abdul Karim Tordher has said that the Khyber Pass Economic Corridor (KPEC) was a crucial project to connect the whole region through communication corridor. The project will not only promote trade and commerce rather the other subsidiary developmental projects will usher an era of progress and development in the area, he said during a briefing on the mega communication project of KPEC at Civil Secretariat here Thursday. Besides, Project Director (PD) Imran Zahoor, Economist Sadiq Hussain and Deputy Secretary (Industries) Aizaz Ullah the representatives of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zones Development and Management Company (KP-EZDMC) and other concerned departments also attended the briefing. On this occasion, Abdul Karim Tordher was given a meticulous briefing on this World Bank (WB) funded crucial regional connectivity project and other subsidiary facilitative nature projects and progress on them.—APP

## Norway says sending \$24m to UNRWA after Israel ban

OSLO: The Norwegian government said Thursday that it would contribute \$24 million to the UN agency that helps look after Palestinian refugees, the same day that Israel banned the group from operating on Israeli territory. "Gaza is in ruins, and UNRWA's help is more necessary than ever," Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide said in a statement. "It is extremely dramatic for Palestine that Israeli laws come into force that in practice can prevent UNRWA from working." Starting Thursday, UNRWA is banned from operating on Israeli soil and contact between it and Israeli officials is forbidden. Israel's supreme court rejected late Wednesday a challenge to the ban. UNRWA has provided support for Palestinian refugees around the Middle East for over 70 years, and it says it has brought in 60 percent of the food aid that has reached Gaza since the start of Israel's war with Hamas in 2023.—APP



## Briefs

### IHC summons attorney general

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) has adjourned the hearing of missing persons' recovery case until the first week of March, summoning Attorney General Mansoor Awan for assistance in the next hearing. During the proceedings, advocate Imaan-Mazari urged the court not to grant the government more time and hold responsible individuals accountable. Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir responded that the entire process aimed to determine accountability. Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani highlighted that missing persons must be either legally prosecuted or released, warning that the state's workings would be exposed otherwise. The court also directed authorities to submit performance report every 15 days and mandated the Attorney General's personal appearance at the next hearing on March 6.

### Desecrator of Qur'an shot dead in Sweden

STOCKHOLM: An Iraqi immigrant whose repeated desecration of the copies of the Holy Qur'an in Sweden outraged Muslims and non-Muslims across the world has been killed in his home near the Nordic country's capital of Stockholm. Swedish public television SVT reported on Thursday that 38-year-old Salwan Momiqa had been found dead in his apartment in the city of Sodertalje after being shot. Local police said they received a report of an overnight shooting, where a man was found with gunshot wounds. He later died in the hospital, and a preliminary murder investigation was launched. Police confirmed that the dead man was Momiqa and a murder investigation got underway. Prosecutor Rasmus Öman told Swedish news agency TT that several people had been arrested in the case, without elaborating. - Agencies

### Israeli drone strike in WB kills 10 Palestinians

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM: An Israeli drone strike on a village in the occupied West Bank has killed at least 10 Palestinians and injured several others as the regime has intensified its military assault in the region since a ceasefire took effect between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. The Palestinian Health Ministry in a statement on Thursday said "there are 10 martyrs due to the occupation's bombing of the town of Tamun in the Tubas district" in the northern West Bank on Wednesday. Initially, the Palestinian Red Crescent reported seven deaths from the attack. - Agencies



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Bulgaria Irena Gancheva along with Ambassador of Portugal Frederico Silva and artist cut the ribbon to inaugurate the exhibition "Bound by the Code" at Satrang Art Gallery, in Federal Capital. - Online

# Pakistan, Austria discuss strengthening bilateral ties

Chairman Senate appreciated Austria's support in establishing Pakistan's Parliamentary Budget Office and urged continued technical assistance and knowledge exchange

NEWS DESK

VIENNA: Chairman Senate of Pakistan Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani and President of the Federal Council of Austria, Ms. Andrea Eder-Gitschthaler on Thursday reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening parliamentary ties, fostering cooperation in key sectors, and enhancing bilateral relations. During a meeting with the President of the Federal Council in Vienna, the Chairman Senate conveyed warm greetings on behalf of the Parliament and the people of Pakistan, emphasizing the importance of parliamentary diplomacy in deepening mutual understanding and cooperation, said a news release received here on Thursday. Both leaders acknowledged the steady progress in Pakistan-Austria relations and discussed avenues for expanding inter-parliamentary collaboration through the Pakistan-Austria Parliamentary Friendship Group. Chairman Senate appreciated Austria's support in establishing Pakistan's Parliamentary

## Attaullah Tarar vows to further strengthen Pakistan-China ties

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar has reaffirmed government's unwavering resolve to further strengthen Pak-China relations. He was addressing a ceremony in Islamabad on Thursday in connection with the Chinese Lunar New Year and Spring Festival. Attaullah Tarar said Pakistan-China friendship is deeper than the oceans, sweeter than honey and taller than Himalayas. He said the incumbent government is the custodian of this time tested friendship and is committed to transfer this bond to new generations. Highlighting the deep rooted bilateral ties between both the countries, the Minister said

Islamabad fully supports President Xi Jinping's One Belt, One Road initiative as Pakistan's own economic benefits are linked with this mega initiative. He said China has always supported Pakistan in difficult times. Earlier, addressing the ceremony, Minister for Maritime Affairs Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh expressed government's desire to relocate Chinese industry to Pakistan as it will be beneficial for both the countries. The Minister said Pakistan is also focusing on imparting technical education to youth to facilitate businesses on the pattern of China. Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh said Pakistan has a huge potential in the maritime sector and the government is determined to further develop the Gwadar Port through China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Budget Office and urged continued technical assistance and knowledge exchange. He also highlighted Austria's contributions in higher education, particularly through the Pakistan Austria Fachhochschule-Institute of Applied Sciences and Technology (PAF-IASST) in Haripur, and discussed opportunities for expanding academic and research collaborations. Discussions further covered Austria's expertise in renewable energy, industrial development, and hydroelectric power, with an emphasis on forging stronger economic and trade partnerships. The Chairman Senate underscored Pakistan's commitment to sustainable development and called for joint efforts in tackling global challenges such as climate change, renewable energy, and technical education. The role of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) was also highlighted as a key initiative for promoting investment and economic collaboration between Pakistan and Austria. He reiterated Pakistan's commitment to inclusive regional development and welcomed Austria's cooperation in this regard.

## MQM's Maqbool Siddiqui criticises PPP for Sindh's ills

Artificial majority was being used to rule Sindh: MQM leader

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) leader Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui criticised the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) for maintaining a continuous hold on Sindh's government for the past 15 years, while political transitions have taken place in the other three provinces. Speaking at a press conference alongside party leaders Farooq Sattar and Mustafa Kamal, Siddiqui remarked that Chief Minister Sindh and PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto had recently invited traders for discussions. "We had hoped they would offer an apology, but their tone was nothing short of a threat," he said. Siddiqui accused the provincial government of disregarding the concerns of the business community. "They are troubled that traders have voiced their grievances elsewhere. But will they respond to these concerns? Karachi witnesses extortion demands daily, and those who refuse to comply face dire consequences," he alleged.

## Pakistan can't afford risk of exiting IMF programme

Ali Malik says country cannot risk exiting IMF programme; mission due in February

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan cannot afford the risk of exiting the International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme with \$100 billion in external financing requirements in the short to medium term, said Minister of State for Finance Ali Pervaiz Malik. The statement underscores the country's dependency on foreign creditors, which has limited its options and hindered its desire for rapid economic growth due to weakened economic fundamentals. "We have a narrow path from short to medium term due to \$100 billion gross external financing needs and cannot be adventurous," said Malik while speaking at a seminar organised by the Pakistan Business Council (PBC) the representative body of local and foreign manufacturers. The statement came a day after the IMF's Resident Representative Mahir Binici also advised Pakistan to stay on course and exercise patience. An IMF mission is expected to visit Islamabad next month

to hold the first formal review talks under the \$7 billion bailout package. The review will determine the government's seriousness in implementing structural reforms. So far, it has not been able to privatise even one entity, and there is no tangible progress on implementing new income tax rates for the agriculture sector, while traders have also remained largely untouched. The \$100 billion external debt repayments from fiscal year 2024-25 to 2026-27 exclude payments on liabilities recorded on the central bank's balance sheet and financing requirements for the current account deficit. The government lacks a viable plan to repay these loans other than requesting lenders each year to defer payments. For this fiscal year alone, external debt repayments amount to \$18.8 billion, excluding repayments of central bank liabilities. Pakistan has secured \$12.7 billion in cash deposits to avoid default and heavily relies on four lending nations for annual debt rollovers. Kuwait has previously provided a \$700 million loan. The rollovers Pakistan seeks to meet its cumulative \$100 billion repayment in four years primarily come from Saudi Arabia (\$5 billion), China (\$4 billion), the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (\$3 billion), and Kuwait (\$700 million). While the economy is experiencing a phase of relative stability, there is increasing pressure on the government to allow for growth.

## Major martyred, six terrorists killed in NW

STAFF REPORT

RAWALPINDI: A senior Army officer was martyred and six Khwarij terrorists were killed in a fierce gunbattle fought in North Waziristan District. According to an ISPR statement released in Rawalpindi on Thursday, during the night between January 29 and 30 security forces personnel carried out an intelligence-based operation in Mirali area of North Waziristan District and targeted a hideout of the Khwarij terrorists. In the ensuing fierce gunbattle, six terrorists were sent to hell. During the exchange of fire Pakistan Army's Major Hamza Israr and Sepoy Muhammad Naeem were martyred while fighting gallantly. Martyred 29-year-old Major Hamza Israr was a resident of Rawalpindi District and he served the Army for nine years while 26-year-old Sepoy-Naeem was a resident of Naseerabad District and served the Army for six years.

## PIA slashes ticket prices for flights from Canada

DNA

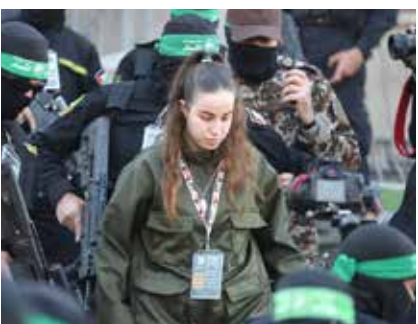
ISLAMABAD: Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has announced a 10% discount on tickets for flights from Canada to Pakistan. According to a statement from PIA's spokesperson, passengers can book discounted tickets immediately, with the offer available until February 9, 2025. The discounted tickets will be valid for travel from February 9, 2025, to May 20, 2025. This promotion provides a cost-effective option for passengers planning to travel between Canada and Pakistan, encouraging more bookings on PIA's international routes. PIA's spokesperson confirmed that the offer applies to all flights operating between Canada and Pakistan during the given period.

## EU rep meets CM Maryam

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: A delegation led by the European Union's special representative for Human Rights, Olof Skoog, met with Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz to discuss key issues related to human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. During the meeting, CM Maryam lauded the EU's continued engagement with Pakistan, particularly Punjab, and its constructive dialogue on human rights. She stressed the provincial government's commitment to upholding democratic values, ensuring the rule of law, and safeguarding fundamental rights. The EU delegation reaffirmed its support for the Punjab government's efforts in protecting human rights. Skoog commended Pakistan's initiatives to promote human rights and safeguard vulnerable communities.

## Israel release of 110 as Hamas frees 5 captives



FOREIGN DESK

GAZA: Hamas freed three Israeli and five Thai hostages in Gaza on Thursday and Israel began releasing 110 Palestinian prisoners after delaying the process in anger at the swarming crowds at one of the hostage handover points. Arbel Yehud, 29, abducted from Kibbutz Nir Oz in the Hamas-led assault on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, looked fearful and struggled to walk through the crowd as armed militants handed her to the Red Cross in a tense scene in the southern city of Khan Younis. Another Israeli hostage, Gadi Moses, 80, was also released along with five Thai nationals working on Israeli farms near Gaza when the militants burst through the border fence. Israeli Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the sight of their handover amid the swarming crowds was shocking and threatened death to anyone hurting hostages. After urging mediators to ensure the scene would not be repeated, the prime minister's office said mediators had committed to ensuring the safe passage of hostages in future releases. Later on Thursday, buses arrived in the West Bank city of Ramallah carrying some of the 110 Palestinian prisoners expected to be freed as part of the phased agreement that halted fighting in the shattered coastal territory earlier this month. Netanyahu and the Defense Minister Israel Katz said they had ordered the delay in releases "until the safe exit of our hostages in the next phases is assured." Palestinian health officials said at least 14 Palestinians were hurt by Israeli fire, some with live and rubber bullets, others from gas inhalation, as they gathered at the entrance to Ramallah, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, to welcome the freed detainees. There was no immediate comment from Israel. Some prisoners from East Jerusalem had arrived at their homes while others, who were due to be taken to Gaza or deported to Egypt, had yet to reach their destinations. Israel has pulled back from several areas of Gaza as part of the ceasefire, which came into effect last Sunday.

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