



Saturday, February 01, 2025

Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

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**Donald Trump says
US mulling troops
presence in Syria**

Detailed News On Page-07

**Naqvi reveals
PCB's revenue
strategy for CT**

Detailed News On Page-06


**Wahab proposes
cultural exchanges
with France**

Detailed News On Page-08



Urge CJP to take stand

IHC judges oppose 'transferred judge' as Chief Justice

IHC judges quote media reports stating justice from LHC is to be transferred to IHC

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Judges of the Islamabad High Court on Friday penned a letter to Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Yahya Afridi, expressing concerns over recent media reports claiming that a transferred judge would be considered for the post of chief justice of the federal territory's court. "We, the undersigned justices of the Islamabad High Court are writing in view of widely reported news by the media that has since been addressed by multiple bar associations as well, that a justice from the Lahore High Court is to be transferred to the Islamabad High Court. This transferred judge would then be considered for appointment as the Chief Justice of the Islamabad High Court," the IHC judges wrote.

The letter comes as incumbent Chief Justice Aamer Farooq is being considered for elevation to the Supreme Court. The Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP), scheduled to meet on Feb 10, would pick eight judges from five high courts. Traditionally, the senior puisne judge of a high court is appointed as the chief justice. However, the JCP last year introduced new rules to bypass the seniority criterion following the enactment of the 26th Amendment. The judicial commission proposed that the chief justice of a high court could be appointed from among the panel of five senior-most judges.

In the letter, the IHC judges noted that there have also been reports that a proposal to transfer another judge from Sindh High Court to IHC may also be under consideration. The letter noted that the process of transfer from one high court to another is governed by Article 200 of the Constitution, which provides, under sub-clause (1), that "[t]he President may transfer a Judge of a High Court from one High Court to another High Court" but only "after consultation by the President with the Chief Justice of Pakistan and the

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SC judge asks

*What is difference
between Dec 16,
May 9 civilians*

Justice Mandokhail says preventing terrorism and gathering evidence are administration's tasks

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court's Justice Hasan Azhar Rizvi has stressed the need for reforms not only in the anti-terrorism court but also in all other courts for the improvement of the judiciary. The remark came during the hearing of the intra-court appeal against the trial of civilians in military courts, by a seven-member constitutional bench of the apex court on Friday. The bench, headed by Justice Aminuddin Khan — comprising Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Justice Hasan Azhar Rizvi, Justice Musarrat Hilali, Justice Naeem Akhtar Afghan, and Justice Shahid Bilal — questioned the distinction between civilians involved in the May 9 riots and those responsible for the December 16 attacks. Khawaja Ahmad Hussain — the counsel for

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ISLAMABAD: Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Amb. Jiang Zaidong calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. — DNA

Chinese New Year

Pakistan values its relations with China: Shehbaz

The Ambassador thanked the Prime Minister and the people of Pakistan for extending their warm wishes to the Chinese government and its people at this joyous occasion

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: On the auspicious occasion of the Chinese New Year, the Prime Minister received Amb. Jiang Zaidong, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China, at the Prime Minister House. The Prime Minister greeted the Ambassador and conveyed his good wishes to the Chinese leadership as well as the brotherly people of China, including all Chinese nationals residing in Pakistan, in their New Year celebrations.

Continued on Page 06

FBR registers record tax collection

FBR sets record with Rs1,330 billion tax collection in Dec 2024, surpassing expectations

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has collected the highest-ever tax in its history for the month of December 2024. FBR officials confirmed that over Rs800 billion in taxes were collected by January 30. The target for January 2025 was set at Rs956 billion, with a potential shortfall of Rs40 to 50 billion.

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Also criticizes PECA

Omar slams PM as a 'servant' with no power

The PTI leader also expresses strong disapproval of PECA amendments, stating the govt is curbing freedom of speech

STAFF REPORT

SARGODHA: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Omar Ayub has criticised Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, accusing him of only being ready for negotiations when an 'order' arrives. Speaking to the media outside an Anti-Terrorism Court in Sargodha on Friday, he described the PM's role as that of a "servant or clerk," claiming he holds no real power. Ayub stated that PTI came to power through the public's mandate but pointed to the government's policies as the primary cause of rising inflation. He also stated that the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) would likely agree to water distribution deals at the expense of Sindh's people. The PTI leader also expressed strong disapproval of the recent amendments to the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), stating that the government is curbing freedom of speech.

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Siddiqui urges PTI to accept PM's offer

Senator Irfan Siddiqui criticised PTI's unilateral withdrawal from the negotiation process

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Senator Irfan Siddiqui, the parliamentary leader of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) in the Senate, on Thursday urged Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) to take advantage of the prime minister's new offer for broader negotiations after its

Continued on Page 06

Trade benefits under GSP+ linked to progress on HRs

Olof Skoog highlights areas of concern including women's rights, forced marriages, enforced disappearances

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Amid ongoing assessment under the GSP+ trade scheme, EU Special Representative for Human Rights (EUSR) Ambassador Olof Skoog stressed progress on addressing a range of issues in Pakistan, including human rights, in order to reap benefits from GSP+ status. The EU top diplomat made this statement during a week-long visit to Pakistan as the EU mission

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

OGRA hikes LPG price

New LPG price has been fixed at Rs 253.97 per kg

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: In accordance with the policy guidelines of the federal government, Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) has hiked the price of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) Rs3.68 per kilogram effective from February 1st, 2025. According to a notification, new LPG price has been fixed at Rs 253.97 per kg. After the increase, the new price of 11.8 kg LPG cylinder will be Rs 2,997. The LPG producer price is linked with Saudi Aramco-CP and US\$ dollar exchange rate. As compared to previous month Saudi Aramco-CP has increased upto 1.6%. The average Dollar exchange rate has slightly increased by 0.19% resulting to increase in LPG consumer price by Rs43.52/11.8 kg cylinder (1.47%).

Rana sets PTI deadline for talks

Says, that during PTI government tenure baseless cases were registered against them

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Advisor to Prime Minister on Political Affairs Rana Sanaullah Khan on Friday advised PTI negotiating team to come to negotiation table till 12:00 midnight tonight. Talking to a private TV channel, Rana Sanaullah Khan said that present government invited PTI leaders for negotiations in the best interest of the country. Rana Sanaullah reminded them that after controversial 2018 elections, when his party (PML-N) was in the opposition his leader Shehbaz invited founder of PTI for talks.

Weapons, ammunition recovered

10 terrorists killed in separate KP operations

ISPR says four terrorists killed in DI Khan IBO, six terrorists neutralised in North Waziristan

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Security forces have killed at least 10 terrorists in five separate operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) on Friday. According to a statement issued by the military's media wing, an intelligence-based operation (IBO) was conducted in general area of Khulachi in Dera Ismail Khan district. "During the conduct of the operation, own troops effectively engaged the khwarij [terrorists] location and resultantly, four khwarij were sent to hell," the ISPR said. Meanwhile, security forces engaged in four separate encounters in general areas of Datta Khel, Hassan Khel, Ghulam Khan and Mir Ali in North Waziristan district. During the exchange of fire, the ISPR said, six terrorists were successfully neutralised by the troops. "Weapons and ammunition were also recovered from the killed

Continued on Page 06

AC injured in Kurram firing

Official immediately shifted to hospital for treatment as police launch search operation

DNA

UPPER KURRAM: The assistant commissioner (AC) of Boshetra, situated in Upper Kurram, was injured as a result of firing by unidentified attackers, police said on Friday, the latest setback to peace efforts in the restive region. A pact was finally agreed upon in the Kurram region last month after warring tribes agreed to ensure peace, but the agreement suffered a blow after

Continued on Page 06

Those who brought govt have taken charge: Fazl

Fazlur Rehman slams PECA law, calls for amendments after consultation with journalists

DNA

GUJRANWALA: Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman has criticized the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), calling it a law that authorities could misuse at will. Speaking at a press conference in Gujranwala, he called for amendments to the law after consulting journalists, ensuring that media freedom was not compromised. Maulana revealed that a delegation had met with officials in Islamabad to discuss PECA and had urged the President not to sign it. However, despite discussions, the president proceeded with its approval. He also strongly criticized the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), accusing it of sidelining opposition parties in political negotiations. He claimed that PTI had not taken opposition leaders into confidence regarding key discussions. Maulana Fazlur Rehman also expressed grave concerns over the law and order situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), stating that the province was effectively being run by armed groups who were openly engaging in extortion. "There is no such thing as a government in KP. Armed groups are in control, and they are forcibly collecting extortion from the public," he alleged. Commenting on the state of governance,

Continued on Page 06

JAN/FEB 2025

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PAKISTAN OFFSHORE BID ROUND 2025

INVITATION TO BID

FOR GRANT OF PETROLEUM
EXPLORATION RIGHTS IN
PAKISTAN OFFSHORE BASINS

ONE OF THE LARGEST UNTAPPED OFFSHORE POTENTIAL



Salient Features

Pakistan offshore is one of the least explored offshore basins in the world

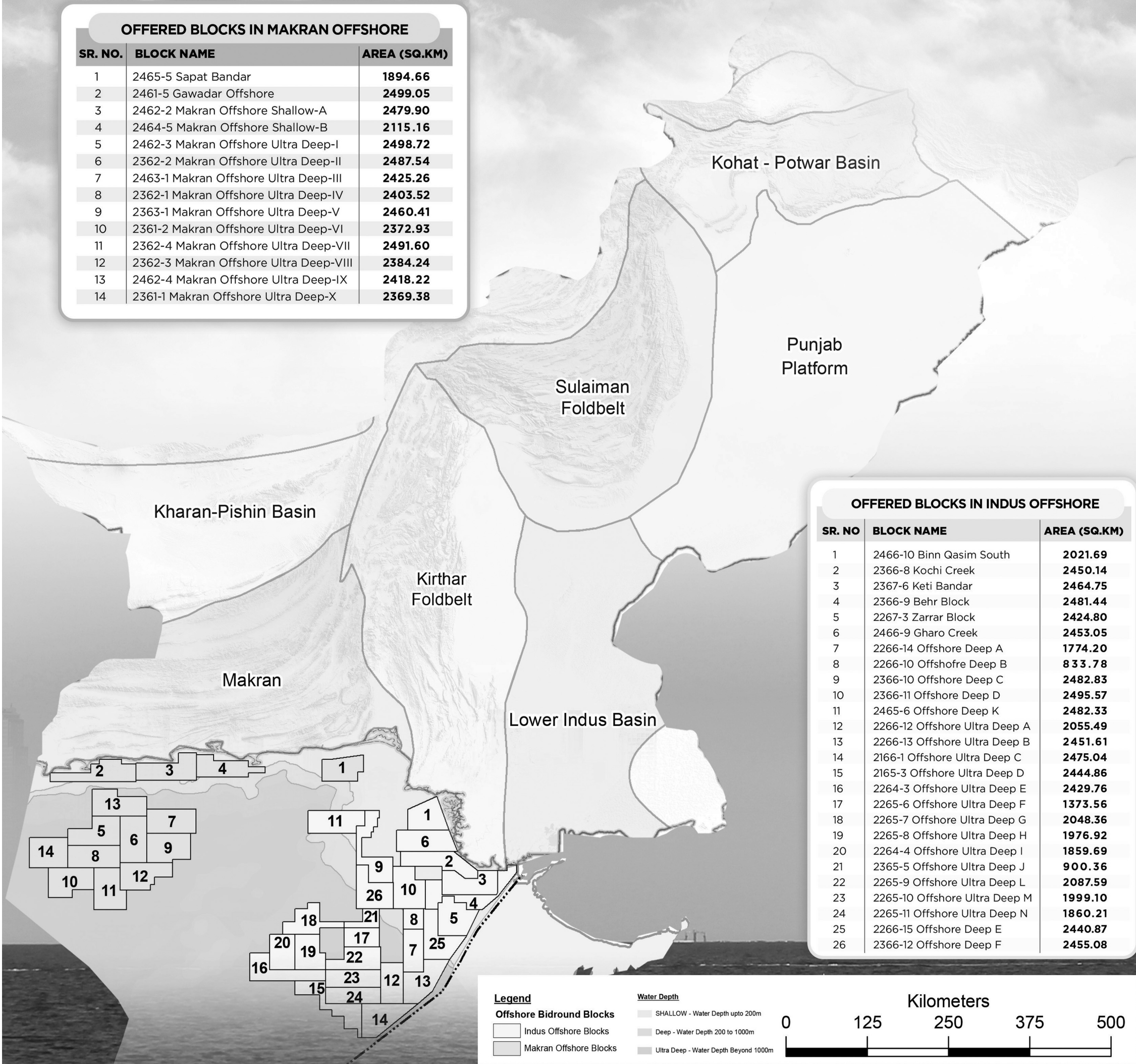
- 1 Two large under - explored basins
Indus – 157,000 sq. km
Makran – 124,000 sq. km
- 2 Multiple untested petroleum plays
- 3 Well-developed infrastructure and market [>4 bcf/d] to early monetize discoveries
- 4 Indication of a working Petroleum System, gas was tested at PakCan-1 in 1986
- 5 Extensive seismic data of fair to good quality for prospectivity evaluation
- 6 Indus Delta is analogous to Niger and Mahakam Delta – which are host to multi billion barrels of reserves

Fiscal Regime

- 1 Gas Price of US\$ 7 – 9/MMBTU (Shallow to Ultra Deep). Bonanza of US\$ 1/MMBTU over and above wellhead gas price for first 3 offshore discoveries
- 2 Government guarantee to buy gas, payments in US\$, option to sell oil/gas to 3rd party, Right to remit dividends
- 3 Profit Oil / Gas UPTO 95 %
Cost Recovery UPTO 85 %
No Royalty for first 4 Years
- 4 Royalty treated as expense for tax, Only 5% Duty on import of equipments, No ring fencing, Transferrable work units

OFFERED BLOCKS IN MAKRAN OFFSHORE

SR. NO.	BLOCK NAME	AREA (SQ.KM)
1	2465-5 Sapat Bandar	1894.66
2	2461-5 Gawadar Offshore	2499.05
3	2462-2 Makran Offshore Shallow-A	2479.90
4	2464-5 Makran Offshore Shallow-B	2115.16
5	2462-3 Makran Offshore Ultra Deep-I	2498.72
6	2362-2 Makran Offshore Ultra Deep-II	2487.54
7	2463-1 Makran Offshore Ultra Deep-III	2425.26
8	2362-1 Makran Offshore Ultra Deep-IV	2403.52
9	2363-1 Makran Offshore Ultra Deep-V	2460.41
10	2361-2 Makran Offshore Ultra Deep-VI	2372.93
11	2362-4 Makran Offshore Ultra Deep-VII	2491.60
12	2362-3 Makran Offshore Ultra Deep-VIII	2384.24
13	2462-4 Makran Offshore Ultra Deep-IX	2418.22
14	2361-1 Makran Offshore Ultra Deep-X	2369.38



Bid Documents can be obtained from the office of Director General Petroleum Concessions (DGPC) 3rd Floor, Petroleum House, G-5/2, Islamabad on a written request and payment of non-refundable fee of US\$ 100 (or PKR 25000.) in favour of DGPC through a bank draft. The Bid Documents can also be downloaded from the website www.ppisonline.com by online payment of US\$ 100 (or PKR 25000.).

Sealed bids are required to be submitted by the interested exploration and production companies to DGPC, 3rd Floor, Petroleum House, G-5/2, Islamabad, Pakistan by 01:00 p.m. (PST) on 30th June, 2025. Applications will be opened publicly by the Bid Opening Committee on the same day in DGPC office in the presence of the applicants or their representatives.

Applicant shall also furnish bid bond with each application equivalent to 1% of the bid offered.

Bids submitted by all applicants will be considered as irrevocable and unconditional. Conditional bids will not be entertained and will be treated as “non responsive”.

The bidding process will be governed by and construed under the laws of Pakistan and any question or dispute regarding grant of Petroleum Right or any matter or thing connected therewith shall be resolved by arbitration in Pakistan and in accordance with laws of Pakistan as per applicable rules of Pakistan Offshore Petroleum (Exploration & Production) Rules, 2023.

The successful applicant will be selected in accordance with the provisions of the Bidding documents. The Authority reserves the right to exercise the power to accept or reject any application. In the event of refusal to grant such petroleum exploration right, the Authority shall, as far as possible, provide the reason thereof. The Authority also reserves the right to cancel or annul the bidding process without specifying any reason.

Any bidder offering Work Units lower than the minimum threshold specified in the policy or the bidding documents shall be treated as non-responsive and his bid would not be further evaluated.

Queries, questions or clarifications can be obtained by contacting the given email.

PID (I) 5255-D/24



National Days and Armed Forces Days

FEBRUARY

Feb 04/Sri Lanka National Day

Feb 06/N. Zealand National Day

Feb 06/Uganda Army Day

Feb 11//Iran Revolution day

Feb 16/DPR Korea National Day

Feb 16/Lithuania National Day

Feb 18/Gambia National Day

Feb 19/Nepal Democracy Day

Feb 23/Uzbekistan National Day


Feb 23/Brunei National Day

Feb 23/Guyana National Day


Feb 23/Russia National Army Day

Feb 23/Tajikistan Armed Forces Day


Feb 25/Kuwait National Day




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




Turkish Airlines.....8494949




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



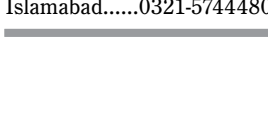
Enquiry
Edhi Ambulance.....115
PIA Flight Info.....114
PIA Cargo.....9280979
Railway Inquiry.....117
Railway Exchange9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi..5555489
CAA.....9281092



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



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




Water Tank
Islamabad.....0321-5744480

President Zardari visits national aerospace science, technology Park

Declaring NASTP a major landmark in PAF’s journey towards progress, the Chief of the Air Staff was also present on the occasion. He emphasized that the project is of national importance, poised to form basis of knowledge and technology-based economy in Pakistan

DNA

RAWALPINDI: President Asif Ali Zardari visited the National Aerospace Science & Technology Park (NASTP), a flagship project spearheaded by Pakistan Air Force. During the visit, the President was briefed in detail regarding various set-ups established at NASTP. Declaring NASTP a major landmark in PAF’s journey towards progress, the Chief of the Air Staff was also present on the occasion. He emphasized that the project is of national importance, poised to form basis of knowledge and technology-based economy in Pakistan. NASTP aims to bridge the gap by seamlessly fusing private and public sector enterprises in Space, Cyber, IT, Artificial Intelligence & Aerospace domains. It was emphasized that the National Aerospace Science & Technology Park is all set to become one of the best Aerospace, Cyber & IT clusters in the world and will transform the national landscape with design, R&D and innovation centres for emerging and disruptive technologies to foster research, innovation and development in related technologies. This endeavour will for sure maximise social, economic, security and scientific dividends for the country. The President lauded PAF, and its skilled personnel and conveyed his admiration for the state-of-the-art technological ecosystem witnessed during his visit to the National Aerospace Science & Technology Park which will serve as a beacon of innovation to promote futuristic aerospace and aviation capabilities. He also commended Pakistan Air Force’s leadership for the vision and proactive approach towards addressing modern warfare challenges and completing this project of national strategic importance in an unprecedented time frame. The National Aerospace Science and Technology Park will play a pivotal role in shaping the country’s aerospace industry, fostering strategic partnerships and contributing to the economic growth of Pakistan. The visit of the President of Pakistan to the National Aerospace Science & Technology Park is a testament to the success of this mega project and highlights the unwavering dedication of the Pakistan Air Force in promoting an environment of research and development in the country.



Surveillance tightened to reduce plastic waste

RAWALPINDI :District government has beefed up the surveillance to decrease the plastic waste. Decisions have been taken to strictly monitor the violations of Plastic Waste Management Regulations and to take punitive against the violators. An important meeting of the District Plastic Management Committee (DPMC) was held under the chairmanship of Additional Deputy Commissioner General Dr. Hassan Tariq in which the decisions were taken. According to the details, It was decided in the meeting that the committee will monitor all matters of plastic waste management and ensure the implementation of regulatory measures. During the surveillance campaign, complete data of all related activities including registration, fines and other legal actions will be compiled so that an effective strategy can be developed to reduce the use of plastic. It was apprised by the DPMC officials that 3.150 kg of plastic bags were seized by the Environmental Protection Agency, Rawalpindi from June 2024 to December 2024. The meeting was briefed that about 5 billion plastic bags are used and discarded in Punjab every year, which is causing an increase in environmental pollution. The committee will facilitate the registration of producers, distributors, consumers, collectors and recyclers of plastic products. The meeting emphasized on promoting awareness campaigns among the public regarding plastic waste reduction and recycling. The meeting also discussed that effective plastic waste management practices would be ensured through cooperation with relevant stakeholders. It was further decided that steps would be taken to make alternatives to plastic bags available in the local market. Dr. Hassan Tariq on the occasion directed that all members of the committee should maintain close contact with elected representatives and relevant institutions, and ensure full implementation of regulations so that effective progress towards environmental improvement can be made.—DNA

NAHE launches 2-week faculty uplift programme

ISLAMABAD: HEC’s National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE) has launched a two-week Faculty Development Programme (Tier-II) for Associate Professors of Public Sector Universities of Federal and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa regions HEC Regional Centre, Peshawar. According to the HEC, the 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.

PTA seeks public input on FSS license

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) has initiated a public consultation process on the draft Fixed Satellite Services (FSS) license, inviting stakeholders to review the document and provide their feedback. The draft license is available on the PTA website, and interested parties can submit their comments by February 14, 2025, via email at satellite-lic@pta.gov.pk**. This consultation aims to ensure transparency and incorporate industry perspectives before finalizing the licensing framework.—APP

NSU welcomes APSUP President South Punjab chapter

Several distinguished figures participated in the ceremony, including Mr. Almass Ayoub Sabir, Founding Chairman of the Board of Governors at the Institute of Southern Punjab, and Mr. Hafiz Muhammad Tahir, Secretary of the Colleges and Higher Education Department from Balochistan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: National Skills University Islamabad (NSU) extended a warm welcome to Mr. Asim Nazir Ahmad, the newly appointed President (South Punjab Chapter) of the Association of Private Sector Universities of Pakistan (APSUP). The ceremony at NSU’s main campus underscored the growing synergy between public and private sector institutions in Pakistan’s evolving higher education landscape. Mr. Ahmad, who also serves as Chairman of the Board of Governors at the Institute of Southern Punjab (recently elevated to university status), was greeted with a bouquet upon arrival. The event marked his induction into APSUP’s leadership and an opportunity to reaffirm the collective commitment to enhancing educational standards across the region. In his address, he emphasized that ensuring quality education is a shared responsibility of public and private sector institutions. APSUP’s South Punjab Chapter, under Mr. Ahmad’s leadership, envisions a thriving ecosystem of private universities distinguished by academic excellence, innovation, and societal impact. The organization aims to establish institutions that are academically rigorous and responsive to the job market’s evolving demands. By fostering strategic partnerships, advancing research, and promoting continuous institutional improvement, APSUP aspires to position private universities as essential contributors to national development. Mr. Ahmad, sharing his vision and commitment, mentioned that graduates from these institutions must emerge as ethical leaders and critical thinkers poised to drive positive change in Pakistan and beyond. A key highlight of the event was the signing of a Letter of Understanding (LOU) between NSU Islamabad and the Institute of Southern Punjab, symbolizing a commitment to advancing skills education in the South Punjab region aligning with the vision of the Government of Punjab. This collaboration seeks to foster technical training programs aligned with labor market needs while facilitating international partnerships for academic and vocational initiatives. The agreement reflects a growing recognition of the importance of skill-based education in addressing unemployment


and economic challenges. Several distinguished figures participated in the ceremony, including Mr. Almass Ayoub Sabir, Founding Chairman of the Board of Governors at the Institute of Southern Punjab, and Mr. Hafiz Muhammad Tahir, Secretary of the Colleges and Higher Education Department from Balochistan. Both dignitaries lauded the initiative, acknowledging its potential to enhance the quality and relevance of higher education in Pakistan. Prof. Dr. Muhammad Mukhtar, the Founding Vice Chancellor of NSU Islamabad who has accepted the position of Rector of the Institute of Southern Punjab, hailed the partnership as a pioneering collaboration model between public and private institutions. He stressed that such alliances will be instrumental in reshaping Pakistan’s academic landscape, creating new opportunities for students and faculty alike. As Pakistan navigates the complexities of an increasingly competitive global education sector, initiatives like this exemplify the power of cross-sector cooperation. By bridging the public and private education gap, stakeholders are laying the groundwork for a more dynamic, inclusive, and future-ready academic ecosystem.

DIG vows strict action against criminals






ISLAMABAD: Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Muhammad Jawad Tariq on Friday chaired a crime meeting attended by SSP Operations Muhammad Shoaib Khan, Zonal SPs, SP Dolphin, SDPOs, SHOs, and the in-charge of AVLs. A public relations officer told APP that during the meeting, DIG introduced all officers and directed them to take strict legal action against criminals involved in serious crimes, ensuring they are brought to justice. DIG Tariq emphasized the immediate arrest of absconding suspects and instructed officers to conduct investigations on merit. “The prosecution of arrested suspects should be based on solid evidence to ensure they receive due punishment,” he said. DIG Tariq also ordered more effective and purposeful patrolling, strict action against illegal display of weapons, and an indiscriminate crackdown on land grabbers. He stressed the importance of arresting proclaimed offenders involved in serious crimes. Furthermore, he directed SHOs to address public complaints at the police station level and resolve citizens’ issues on a priority basis. “Officers must improve their performance; crime meetings will be held in every zone,” he added. DIG Tariq reiterated a zero-tolerance policy against corruption, urging all officers to fulfil their responsibilities professionally. “Negligence in duty will not be tolerated under any circumstances,” said DIG Jawad Tariq.—DNA

ANF recovers over 23 kg drugs in 6 operations

RAWALPINDI: The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting 6 operations across the country managed to recover over 23 kg drugs worth Rs 3.9 million and arrested 5 accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Friday. He informed that 100 grams hashish and 10 intoxicated tablets were recovered from the possession of an accused arrested near Punjab Chowk in Mansehra. The arrested accused confessed to selling drugs to the students of educational institutions. In another operation, 78 Ice-filled capsules were recovered from the stomach of a passenger going to Doha at Peshawar International Airport. 135 grams ice drug tactfully concealed in jeans was recovered from a parcel booked for Australia through a courier office in Karachi. 19.2 kg hashish was recovered from a tanker intercepted near National Highway Hyderabad.—APP

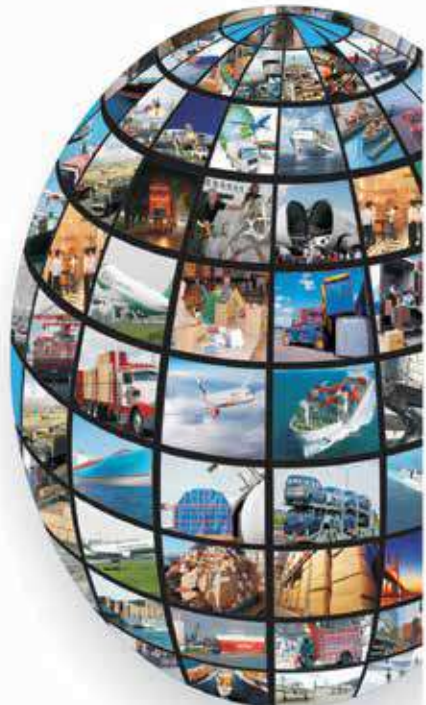


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Briefs

**OGDCL
commences
oil & gas
production
from Bettani-2
Appraisal Well**

ISLAMABAD: Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL), Pakistan's leading exploration and production company, has successfully commenced oil and gas production from the Bettani-2 appraisal well in the Lakki Marwat district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. OGDCL, as the operator of the Wali Exploration License with a 100% working interest, has completed and stimulated the Kawagarh formation, said news. The well currently produces 8.5 million standard cubic feet per day (MMSCFD) of gas and 610 barrels per day (BPD) of oil. The produced gas is being processed at OGDCL's Bettani processing plant and injected into the SNGPL network for distribution, ensuring a seamless supply to the national energy grid. On December 13, 2024, the company announced a significant gas and condensate discovery in the Samanasuk formation at the Bettani-2 well in Lakki Marwat.

The successful commencement of production at Bettani-2 underscores OGDCL's commitment to advanced exploration and production techniques. This achievement reinforces the company's leadership in the energy sector while contributing to Pakistan's energy security and economic growth. OGDCL remains dedicated to sustainable development and operational excellence in meeting the country's growing energy needs.—APP

**Anti-polio
campaign
arrangements
reviewed**

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration is set to launch its anti-polio campaign starting from February 3, aiming to vaccinate 461,125 children across 80 union councils in the Federal Capital. In this regard, a review meeting, presided over by Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad, Irfan Nawaz Memon was held here on Friday to finalize the campaign arrangements. The meeting was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioners, Assistant Commissioners, and health department officials. Discussions focused on reviewing previous years' polio campaigns and global polio cases. The campaign will run from February 3 to 9, with a five-day door-to-door vaccination drive, followed by a two-day catch-up period. On this occasion, DC Islamabad Irfan Memon appealed to citizens to cooperate during the campaign, emphasizing the importance of collective efforts to ensure a healthy and safe future for children. The Islamabad administration's efforts are part of Pakistan's broader polio eradication efforts. In September 2024, a nationwide polio vaccination campaign reached 33 million children. With continued efforts, Pakistan aims to reverse the recent resurgence of wild poliovirus cases and ultimately achieve polio eradication.—APP

Tarar pledges to further strengthen Pak-China friendship

The minister said that Pakistan and China share borders, mountains, and highways, emphasizing that the Pakistan-China friendship is “higher than the Himalayas, deeper than the oceans, and sweeter than honey

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and National Heritage Attaullah Tarar stated on Friday that Pakistan and China are the guardians and protectors of their bilateral friendship, reaffirming their unwavering commitment to strengthen and preserve this bond and ensure it endures for future generations. “We are the guardians and protectors of Pak-China friendship. It is our national duty to strengthen this bond and pass it on to future generations,” Attaullah Tarar said

while addressing the Chinese New Lunar Year and Spring Festival ceremony.

He said the Pakistan-China friendship represents a timeless and profound bond between the governments and people of both nations. This cherished relationship holds a special place in our hearts and stands as a shining example for the entire world. He stated that Pakistan and China share borders, mountains, and highways, emphasizing that the Pakistan-China friendship is “higher than the Himalayas, deeper than the oceans, and sweeter than honey.” He shared that he has

participated in China's exchange programs six times. In various cities across China, he never felt like he was in a foreign country. Every visit to China brings a deep sense of belonging and warmth. The minister expressed his happiness and pride in the mutual respect between the people of both countries. The everlasting journey of Pak-China friendship continues. One Belt, One Road is a remarkable initiative by President Xi Jinping. He stated that the One Belt One Road initiative is associated with numerous stories, emphasizing that its economic benefits are deeply connected

to the project. The One Belt One Road initiative stands as a living testament to the enduring friendship between Pakistan and China. With the completion of the first phase of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), efforts have now transitioned to the second phase. He stated that the Karakoram Highway passes through the mountainous regions and deserts of the north, culminating at Gwadar, where the journey to the sea begins. He also noted the inauguration of Gwadar Airport and the landing of its first flight, describing it as a major milestone. Pakistan-China friendship remains

steadfast regardless of changing times, be it spring or autumn. He prayed for this bond to stay strong and everlasting. As iron brothers, Pakistan and China have always stood together through thick and thin, supporting each other in times of need and strengthening their relationship over time. During Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's recent visit to China, his trip to President Xi Jinping's hometown of Xi'an further reinforced these ties. Pakistan deeply appreciates China's unwavering support and cooperation. This enduring friendship will continue to thrive for generations to come.



ISLAMABAD: A view of massive traffic jam at Expressway in the Federal Capital.

HEC revises geology curricula to align with industry & tech advancements

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Higher Education Commission (HEC), through its National Curriculum Review Committee (NCRC), has revised the Geology degree curricula to reflect the latest advancements in the field, ensuring that academic programs remain relevant to both industry demands and emerging global trends. The two-day consultative session, held at HEC Regional Center, Lahore on January 30-31, 2025, was led by Prof. Dr. Mumtaz Muhammad Shah of Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, with participation from geology experts and senior faculty members from universities across Pakistan. During the meeting, the committee redesigned and enhanced the curricula for Associate Degree, Bachelor of Science, and Master of Science in Geology, focusing on bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and

practical applications. Mr. Muhammad Ali Baig, Deputy Director, Academics Division at HEC and Secretary of the NCRC, welcomed the committee members from across the country and emphasized HEC's vision for an industry-aligned, research-driven curriculum. He provided insights into HEC's curriculum development framework, highlighting the importance of modernizing core geology courses and integrating technological advancements such as artificial intelligence, computational modeling, and geospatial analytics ensuring that future geologists develop strong analytical and digital competencies to thrive in an increasingly data-driven world. To modernize the undergraduate degree structure, the committee introduced new specialized courses, including AI & Computational Geology, aimed at equipping students with advanced technological skills relevant to contemporary geological research and

industry practices. In addition to foundational courses, the committee structured around ten specialized streams, providing students with a well-rounded academic experience tailored to different subfields of geology. The NCRC included distinguished academics and geoscience experts from various universities across Pakistan including Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, Karakoram International University, Gilgit, Khushal Khan Khattak University, Karak, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Muzaffarabad, University of Balochistan, Quetta, University of Karachi, Karachi, University of Malakand, Lower Dir, University of Peshawar, Peshawar, University of Sargodha, Sargodha, University of Sindh, Jamshoro and University of the Punjab, Lahore. Once formally approved by HEC management, the updated curricula will be circulated to universities nationwide for implementation.

Efforts afoot to develop Murree on modern line

MURREE: Secretary Local Government (LG), Punjab, Mian Shakeel on Friday said the provisional government was taking best possible steps to develop Murree on modern lines and promote tourism in the area. The district would be developed on Punjab Chief Minister, Maryam Nawaz's vision for tourism.—APP

Wall chalking wiped out ICT admin cracks down on city defacement, 5 held

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration has launched a city-wide campaign to enforce the ban on wall chalking in public spaces. According to the spokesman of ICT administration here, this move aims to put an end to the defacement of city walls for promotional campaigns. In this regard, the Assistant Commissioner Saddar zone took action against wall-chalkers and removed wall chalking from the Srinagar highway. The wall chalking, which was primarily done by property dealers, has been a persistent problem in the Federal Capital, he said. However, Deputy Commissioner Islamabad, Irfan Nawaz Memon, has ordered strict action against those involved in wall chalking. Memon has instructed all Assistant Commissioners to ensure the implementation of the ban on wall-chalking. In a recent action, 5 shopkeepers were arrested by the AC Saddar zone for wall chalking and violating the official rate list. This move sends a strong message that the authorities are committed to maintaining the city's aesthetic appeal. The ICT administration's efforts to enforce the ban on wall chalking are part of a broader initiative to beautify the city. By keeping the streets free of unsightly wall chalking, the authorities aim to create a more pleasant environment for residents and visitors alike.—DNA

NCGSA showcases rare planetary alignment

ISLAMABAD: The National Center of GIS and Space Applications (NCGSA) organized another captivating observatory session at the IST Astronomical Observatory (IAO), Institute of Space Technology (IST) on Thursday night, where attendees marveled at a breathtaking planetary alignment featuring Saturn, Venus, Jupiter, and Mars. Adding to the celestial spectacle, the new moon of Shaban briefly made an appearance, further enhancing the awe-inspiring night sky. The event offered a mesmerizing view of Saturn's majestic rings, Venus's brilliant glow, Jupiter's swirling storms, and Mars's distinctive reddish hue, leaving the audience spellbound.—APP

PTI urged to accept PM's fresh offer for talks: Siddiqui

ISLAMABAD: Senator Irfan Siddiqui, the parliamentary leader of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) in the Senate, on Thursday urged Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) to take advantage of the prime minister's new offer for broader negotiations, following its (PTI's) failure to capitalize on a valuable opportunity to address its demands. In a statement on X, he criticized PTI's unilateral withdrawal from the negotiation process, describing it as an undemocratic and apolitical move. He emphasized that this action had deprived the party of an important chance to resolve its issues. Siddiqui further emphasized that PTI must acknowledge that street protests, sit-ins, and long marches have not been effective in achieving their goals in the past.—APP

Call for establishing strong Pakistan Bangladesh ties

ISLAMABAD: Speakers at a seminar emphasized that Pakistan and Bangladesh are two brotherly Islamic nations, and there is an urgent need to establish strong and sustainable relations between them in all spheres. The seminar titled “Bangladesh-Pakistan Relations: A New Era of Cooperation” was organized under the auspices of the Isar Trust and Riphah International University here yesterday. The special guest of the event was the High Commissioner of Bangladesh to Pakistan, Iqbal Hussain Khan. Other distinguished attendees included Dr. Anis Ahmed, Vice Chancellor of Riphah International University; Syed Muhammad Bilal, President of Isar Trust; Dr. Rashid Aftab; Lieutenant General (Retd.) Naeem Lodhi; Ambassador Moazzam Khan; Naeem Anwar; and other speakers. During the seminar, proposals were made to establish think tanks and funds to assist each other during natural disasters. The importance of working together for the welfare of the people of both countries, especially the youth, was also highlighted. The speakers noted that this progress comes at a time when Bangladesh and Pakistan are working to resume direct flights and strengthen diplomatic relations after decades of historical tensions.—APP

Pakistan seed security prototype to boost resilience combat emissions

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The International Rescue Committee and Unilever have partnered to create the “Pakistan Seed Security Prototype,” supporting farming communities through green entrepreneurship to enhance resilience and cut greenhouse gas emissions. At the “Pakistan's Humanitarian Future Event 2025,” Unilever and IRC committed to boosting climate resilience through initiatives that strengthen seed systems, reduce disaster risks, and transition livelihoods over the next five years. The event focuses on addressing Pakistan's preparedness and response to the growing impacts of climate change. Speaking at the launch ceremony, Romina Khurshid Alam, Coordinator to PM on Climate

Change, highlighted Pakistan's increasing dependence on glaciers and rivers for its water supply, emphasizing that the country is facing acute water shortages that exacerbate the challenges for agriculture, a crucial sector of the national economy and survival. “Our agriculture is significantly threatened by water scarcity, and we need invest in long-term solutions to tackle these challenges,” she stated. She termed the Seed Security Prototype as vital innovation that can pave way for climate resilient agricultural practices. The report finding indicate that farmers in Pakistan are grappling with dwindling quality and availability of seed stocks, and the harsh impacts of unpredictable and extreme weather conditions make it worse. These issues have not only disrupted the ag-

ricultural cycle but have also led to severe economic consequences, pushing many farmers further into a vicious cycle of debt and poverty. Waqas Dar Country Director International Rescue Committee Pakistan noted that “Achieving sustained growth in agricultural production and productivity heavily depends on developing improved crop varieties and establishing an efficient system to ensure the timely availability of high-quality seeds to farmers.” The Seed Security prototype is designed to support farmers to identify and multiply climate resilient seed varieties, systematize and incentivize the exchange of services, skills and seeds among participating farmers, community-based organizations (CBOs) and other stakeholders. To build climate resilient livelihoods by ensuring availability and

improving sustainable and affordable access to quality seeds lie at the core of our joint vision. Fatima Arshad (Head of Sustainability and Corporate Communications Unilever) said, “Nature has emerged as a key pillar of Unilever's sustainability strategy. We are committed to promoting climate resilient agricultural practices in Pakistan to improve seed security, improve farmer livelihoods, and support regenerative agriculture in the country through strong partnerships with key stakeholders.” It is pertinent to note that the National Seed Policy 2024 states that seeds are very important in shaping food crop production and stresses that it is vital to have seeds with suitable traits to adapt to diverse climatic conditions and intensive cropping systems, while also addressing the varying needs of consumers.

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China’s Deep Seek

WASHINGTON targeted the wrong Chinese AI firms. One of the last acts of former president Joe Biden’s tech war was to blacklist more than two dozen chip and artificial intelligence companies from China, along with two from Singapore. They included Zhipu, China’s most prominent start-up in developing large language models (LLM) for AI. Unfortunately, DeepSeek wasn’t on the list. Now America’s tech warriors may have to add it to their Chinese “entity list” for posing a threat to US national security, however defined. You can hardly blame them for the oversight, though. The Chinese AI upstart, which also specialises in LLM, was virtually unknown until a few weeks ago. Now, it has been blamed for causing a mini-crash on the Nasdaq, with the major chipmaking stocks suffering a double-digit rout on Monday. Nvidia, the darling of the AI-crazed investment crowd, lost a whopping 17 per cent in market capitalisation that day. However, what DeepSeek exposes is not just the investment hype, but also the “China threat” inflation in the United States today. In the former case, the AI bubble has distorted the equities market in the US by taking AI-related company valuations to the stratosphere, thereby making those stocks highly volatile while disguising the moribund market for most other stocks. The “threat inflation” of Chinese AI, which is part of the overall “China threat” narrative being sold by US pundits and politicians, has so warped their perceptions of reality that any tech advance or breakthrough from China is now seen in Washington as a challenge to the US. This is paranoid delusion, cold war-style, which presents a danger to its sufferer and to others as well. Consider the two types of chip ban that have been imposed and proved increasingly self-defeating. One restricts US companies and those from allies and partners from selling advanced chips and their services to China. The other establishes a hierarchy of foreign buyers by designating who can buy what types of chips from the US, with China, Russia and Iran being the most restricted. The benefits of the former – in restricting chip sales – have proved temporary, yet the costs have been immediate and high. Even insiders such as Biden’s former commerce secretary Gina Raimondo have acknowledged the US controls are expediting China’s indigenous development of its own semiconductor industry and supply chains. US tech sanctions probably do impede Chinese innovation and growth for a short while, but the returns are rapidly diminishing. China has been improving its chipmaking capabilities and has learned to use lower-end chips more efficiently and creatively. DeepSeek, which uses lower-level Nvidia chips, has proved how the Chinese can do more with less. OpenAI, whose ChatGPT AI is being directly challenged by DeepSeek, uses much more expensive and cutting-edge Nvidia chips. Meanwhile, US chipmakers in America and those in allied countries are losing revenue streams from their best customer, China, and therefore much-needed funds for their own research and development. In contrast, the Chinese semiconductor industry is fully supported by the state. As for the chip export restrictions, the US programme will end up antagonising much of the world except for a handful of close allies. The controls have divided the world into friends, the somewhat friendly, and then enemies. The first tier includes most Nato member states, Israel and closest East Asian allies.

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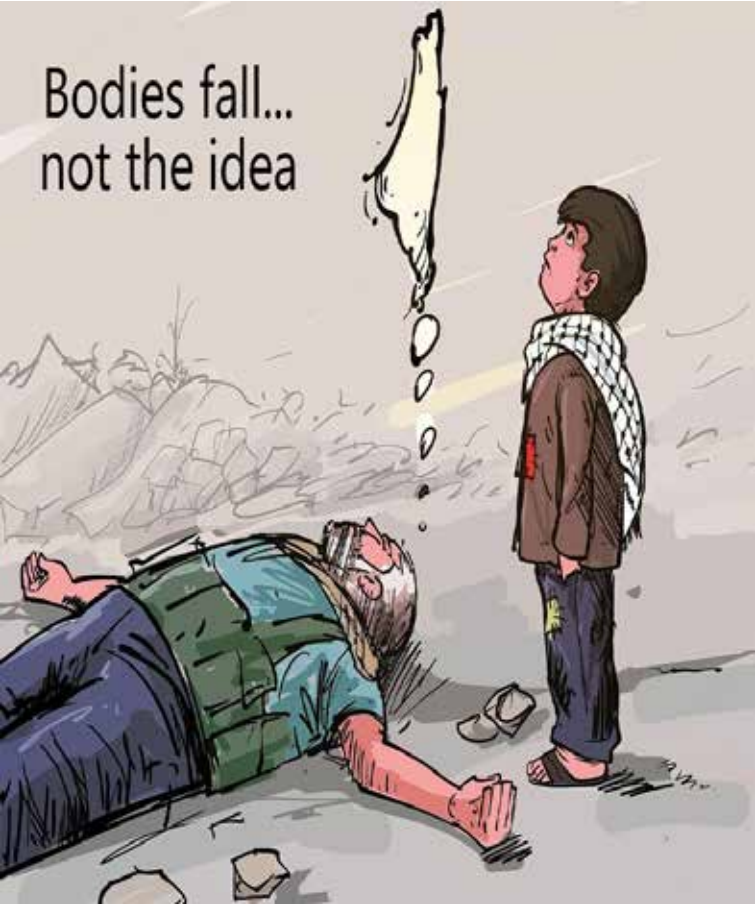
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Dismantling of UNRWA

THIS week, Israel’s ban on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) takes effect, cutting off its services in its two main areas of operation in Palestine; namely, Gaza and, the occupied West Bank, including east Jerusalem. Established in 1949 in response to the Nakba, UNRWA was meant to provide humanitarian aid and protect Palestinian rights until a just resolution to the refugee crisis was achieved. Central to this is the Palestinians’ inalienable right of return, which Israel has consistently denied. Beyond the 5.4 million UNRWA-registered refugees, at least five million more Palestinians have been forcibly displaced by Zionist colonisation. The right of return belongs to them all. In October, the Israeli parliament passed two bills targeting UNRWA. The first prohibits the agency from operating within the 1948 borders. The second bars Israeli officials from engaging with UNRWA in any capacity. These laws are designed to remove Palestinian rights to a homeland and further weaken the agency that serves them. They also mark the culmination of decades of attacks by Israel and its allies seeking to dismantle UNRWA as part of the broader Zionist settler-colonial project. For the 2.1 million Palestinians in Gaza, this will cripple efforts to rebuild the warmth of their homes and the safety of life-sustaining infrastructure vaporised by Israel’s annihilatory violence. This will further obstruct the restoration of life and the healing from nights spent beneath skies ablaze with fire and days suspended between slow and quick death in dwindling food rations. In the West Bank and east Jerusalem, 49,000 students will be forced out of UNRWA schools, and will be left either without education or, in Jerusalem, to the whims of Israeli curricula that distort, dehumanise and erase their history and culture. Nearly a million Palestinians will be denied medical care. The loss of thousands of jobs will further drive Palestinians into economic precarity, deepening the cycle of engineered de-development. The dismantling of UNRWA is not just a humanitarian crisis; it is a political manoeuvre. Zionism has slated Palestine for erasure as part of a broader regional strategy. In this imperialist framework, the US and EU finance oppression, Israel enforces it, the local bourgeoisie complies, and the UN provides a thin veil of legitimacy. The timing of the ban aligns with Israel’s shifting tactics. While the intensity of genocide in Gaza has momentarily slowed, violence in the West Bank—particularly in Jenin and Tulkarem refugee camps—has escalated. Zionist forces use airstrikes to destroy life-sustaining infrastructure, obstruct healthcare, and drive mass evacuations, all while continuing the daily expansion of settlements and mass arrests. Palestinians today face the same oppressive forces as during the 1936-39 revolt: self-serving leadership, Arab regime complicity, and Zionist-imperialist domination. At the core of these dynamics is Palestinian refugeehood—a fundamental consequence of Zionist colonisation. Since 1948, Israel has displaced over 10 million Palestinians, most, descendants from the Nakba, severing them from their homeland. The right of return threatens Zionism’s foundation because it challenges Israel’s colonial reality, built on destruction and displacement. The Zionist-Western axis’ attacks on UNRWA aim to depoliticise its mandate, while crystallising Palestinian refugeehood into a permanent humanitarian crisis to be managed.

Saudi-UAE policy in a post-Assad Syria

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



Saudi Arabia and the UAE’s primary concern is that Syria’s new Sunni Islamist government could inspire similar movements in other parts of the Arab world. Jordan and Egypt, two key regional allies, have long struggled with the influence of Islamist groups. A successful Sunni Islamist administration in Syria could embolden groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, which has a significant presence in both countries. This prospect is particularly troubling for Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, which have invested heavily in suppressing Islamist movements through political and financial means

THE fall of the Assad regime in Syria has created a unique and complex geopolitical challenge for Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). While these states have long viewed Bashar al-Assad as an ally of their regional adversary, Iran, his downfall has paradoxically introduced new threats. The decline of Iranian influence in the Levant, a long-sought objective of Saudi and Emirati foreign policy, has resulted in an unintended consequence: the empowerment of Sunni Islamist groups in Syria, some of which share ideological affinities with movements that Riyadh and Abu Dhabi have historically opposed and repressed. The collapse of Assad’s regime has left a power vacuum that has been rapidly filled by Sunni Islamist factions, particularly those backed by Turkey and Qatar. This shift presents a dilemma for Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which have spent considerable resources suppressing such movements domestically and regionally. Traditionally, these Gulf states have viewed Iran and its network of Shiite militias, including Hezbollah and various Iraqi groups, as the primary existential threat to their influence. The weakening of Iran’s position in Syria initially seemed to be a strategic victory, but the emergence of a government led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and other Sunni Islamist factions has forced a recalibration of their regional policies. The recent visit of Syria’s new administration—represented by Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani, Defense Minister Murhaf Abu Qasra, and intelligence chief Anas Khattab—to Saudi Arabia marks a significant shift. The visit, the first of its kind, suggests a pragmatic Saudi approach aimed at engaging with the new power structures in Syria. This engagement is underscored by Saudi humanitarian aid shipments, including 60 trucks and six planes filled with essential supplies. Such measures indicate Riyadh’s cautious but necessary accommodation of Syria’s new leadership. Prior to the fall of Assad, Saudi Arabia and the UAE had been moving toward a rapprochement with the Syrian leader in an attempt to detach him from Iran’s influence. The reopening of Riyadh’s embassy in Damascus in September 2023 and Assad’s visits to the UAE and Saudi Arabia earlier that year were clear indicators of this strategy. However, the rapid collapse of the Assad government disrupted this trajectory, leaving Riyadh and Abu Dhabi with a new set of challenges. The shift in Syria’s political landscape has highlighted the limitations of Saudi and Emirati influence in the region. While they had hoped that Assad might distance himself from Tehran, the reality was that his regime’s survival was heavily dependent on Iranian support. Once Iran’s position weakened, Turkey-backed factions swiftly filled the void. Saudi

Arabia and the UAE now find themselves dealing with an empowered Sunni Islamist government, a scenario they had long sought to prevent. Saudi Arabia and the UAE’s primary concern is that Syria’s new Sunni Islamist government could inspire similar movements in other parts of the Arab world. Jordan and Egypt, two key regional allies, have long struggled with the influence of Islamist groups. A successful Sunni Islamist administration in Syria could embolden groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, which has a significant presence in both countries. This prospect is particularly troubling for Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, which have invested heavily in suppressing Islamist movements through political and financial means. The situation also exacerbates tensions with Turkey and Qatar, both of which have historically supported Sunni Islamist factions. Turkey, under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has consistently backed the Syrian opposition and has provided military, financial, and logistical support to various rebel factions. Qatar, meanwhile, has maintained its support for Islamist movements across the region, including in Libya and Egypt. The rise of a Turkey- and Qatar-backed government in Syria represents a significant setback for Saudi and Emirati regional ambitions. Given these challenges, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are pursuing a strategy of engagement and containment. By engaging with Syria’s new leadership, they hope to exert influence over its policies and limit the extent of Turkish and Qatari control. Financial aid and diplomatic outreach serve as key tools in this strategy, providing Riyadh and Abu Dhabi with leverage over the fledgling government. At the same time, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are likely to intensify their efforts to counter Islamist influence in other parts of the region. Increased support for Egypt and Jordan, both of which have taken a hardline stance against Islamist groups, could be one avenue for containing the ideological and political spillover from Syria. Additionally, the Gulf states may seek to bolster their alliances with other regional actors, such as Israel and Greece, which share their concerns about Turkish expansionism and Islamist influence. The fall of Assad underscores the broader geostrategic struggle that has defined Middle Eastern politics for decades. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have traditionally viewed Iran and its Shiite allies as their primary geopolitical rivals. However, the events in Syria have demonstrated that Sunni Islamist groups, particularly those aligned with Turkey and Qatar, represent an equally significant challenge. This presents a strategic conundrum: countering one adversary often strengthens the other. The Gulf states’ efforts to weaken Iran have inadvertently facilitated the rise of Sunni Islamist forces, creating a new set of challenges. This cyclical dynamic

suggests that Riyadh and Abu Dhabi will have to navigate a delicate balance between opposing both Shiite and Sunni Islamist influences while avoiding policies that inadvertently strengthen one side over the other. In the short term, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are likely to continue their engagement with Syria’s new government while simultaneously seeking ways to limit Turkish and Qatari influence. Financial incentives, diplomatic outreach, and strategic alliances will be the primary tools in this effort. However, in the long term, the Gulf states face a more fundamental challenge: how to escape the cycle of strengthening one adversary by countering another. One potential avenue is fostering alternative political movements within Syria that align more closely with Saudi and Emirati interests. This could involve supporting secular opposition groups or moderate factions within the new government. However, such efforts will be complicated by the entrenched influence of Turkey and Qatar, both of which have a head start in shaping Syria’s political landscape. Another potential strategy involves deepening alliances with regional partners who share concerns about Islamist influence. Strengthening ties with Egypt, Jordan, and even Israel could provide additional leverage against Turkish and Qatari-backed factions. However, such alliances come with their own set of geopolitical complexities and risks. Ultimately, Saudi Arabia and the UAE must acknowledge that Syria will remain a fluid and unpredictable theater for years to come. Their ability to shape its future will depend on their willingness to adapt to shifting dynamics and engage in pragmatic diplomacy. While they have succeeded in containing domestic Islamist threats, the regional landscape presents a far more complex challenge. The question remains whether they can navigate this new reality without inadvertently strengthening one adversary at the expense of another. The fall of the Assad regime has upended the strategic calculations of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. While they have long sought to weaken Iranian influence in Syria, the unintended consequence has been the rise of Sunni Islamist factions that they have historically opposed. This new reality forces Riyadh and Abu Dhabi to reassess their regional policies and engage with actors they previously sought to suppress. As the situation in Syria continues to evolve, Saudi Arabia and the UAE will have to navigate a complex web of alliances and rivalries. Their short-term strategy of engagement and financial influence may provide some leverage, but the long-term challenge of balancing against both Shiite and Sunni Islamist forces remains unresolved. Whether they can successfully manage this delicate balance will determine their future role in shaping the Middle East’s geopolitical landscape.

Building peaceful seas: The AMAN dialogue’s role

Elmaan Intikhab Qureshi

The AMAN Dialogue reflects this commitment to peaceful and secure seas. What began as a modest initiative to foster regional cooperation on maritime issues has evolved into a global platform, now attracting more than 50 nations to collaboratively address maritime challenges. The dialogue’s objectives have expanded to encompass new areas, including environmental conservation, responses to climate change, and the development of a sustainable blue economy. In February 2025, the AMAN Dialogue will host its largest gathering yet

THE AMAN Exercise, initiated in 2007 by the Pakistan Navy, is a flagship maritime event whose purpose is to foster international cooperation for maritime security. This forum is hosted every two years by the Pakistan Navy and addresses key safety issues in Indian Ocean Region while promoting measures for peace which in turn promotes trade and resource conservation. This initiative aims to enhance regional cooperation and stability by bringing together the navies of different countries. It has expanded significantly by including a prominent component of Pakistan’s International Maritime Conference (IMC). Over the years, the IMC evolved into the Pakistan International Maritime Expo and Conference (PIMEC) broadening the platform to include discussions on trade, technology, and the blue economy alongside maritime security. Retaining its original spirit of peace and collaboration, it has now been remodeled as the AMAN Dialogue, while enhancing the scope to encompass global maritime challenges and cooperation among allied navies and international stakeholders. The AMAN Dialogue, aptly described as a beacon of international maritime unity, is instrumental in covering naval capabilities and intellectual communities from every corner of the globe to tackle common challenges facing the world’s oceans. The Pakistan Navy plays a crucial role in realizing the vision. Recently, the Pakistan Navy rescued 23 Iranian fishermen stranded at sea, demonstrating its commitment to humanitarian values and regional solidarity. Situated strategically along the Arabian Sea, Pakistan’s coastal regions and waters are essential to the vitality of international trade and communication. Through conduct of efforts, Pakistan promotes a safe maritime environment for all, viewing peace at sea as a foundation for sustainable development and shared prosperity across the region. The Indian Ocean is a region ridden by complex

geopolitical dynamics, which makes initiatives like the AMAN Dialogue increasingly significant. As a key maritime corridor, the Indian Ocean Region is vital for global trade, energy supplies and economic connectivity, making its stability crucial. However, the region faces various non-traditional security threats, including piracy, illegal fishing, smuggling and environmental changes. These issues, coupled with the strategic ambitions of major powers, underscore the need for cooperative frameworks that prioritize open, secure, and peaceful seas, reinforcing the IOR’s role as a zone for collaborative security rather than rivalry. The AMAN Dialogue aims to address all these issues while providing a platform to bring together experts from around the world. The AMAN Dialogue reflects this commitment to peaceful and secure seas. What began as a modest initiative to foster regional cooperation on maritime issues has evolved into a global platform, now attracting more than 50 nations to collaboratively address maritime challenges. The dialogue’s objectives have expanded to encompass new areas, including environmental conservation, responses to climate change, and the development of a sustainable blue economy. In February 2025, the AMAN Dialogue will host its largest gathering yet, providing an invaluable opportunity for countries to build partnership and share knowledge for the benefit of the world’s oceans. The theme of “Secure Seas: Prosperous Future” lies at the heart of the dialogue’s mission. The AMAN Dialogue aims to create a resilient network of maritime stakeholders dedicated to fostering peace and shared prosperity in the Indian Ocean Region. Central goals include promoting stability, safeguarding SLOCs, and supporting cooperative relationships among navies and civilian agencies. Through this cooperative framework, the AMAN

Dialogue empowers countries to work together on humanitarian missions, environmental protection, and sustainable economic development, transforming the Indian Ocean into a region of shared resources and opportunities. Pakistan’s leadership in the AMAN Dialogue reflects its commitment to regional solidarity and peaceful maritime engagement. The AMAN Dialogue’s emphasis on building strong, peaceful relationship among stakeholders has fostered greater understanding and reinforced the idea that the seas are a shared resource. By encouraging dialogue, joint training exercises, and the exchange of best practices, the forum enables nations to work together on solutions that benefit all, transcending borders and building trust across the Indian Ocean Region. This vision ensures that the region’s waters remain open, inclusive, and supportive of a thriving blue economy that benefits coastal communities, regional trade, and the global economy. The AMAN Dialogue encourages partnerships to address key policies such as combating maritime piracy, eliminating illegal fishing, and providing humanitarian services, all of which strengthen diplomatic relations and help achieve the vision of peaceful and secure oceans. By aligning efforts to foster a culture of peaceful seas, the AMAN Dialogue brings hope and sets a course for a more stable and prosperous Indian Ocean Region. Its continued focus on sustainable practices and international partnerships reflects a commitment to shared progress, demonstrating that secure, peaceful seas are the foundation of a prosperous future. Organized by the National Institute of Maritime Affairs (NIMAA), Pakistan’s leading maritime institute focused on maritime research and policy, the AMAN Dialogue 2025 embodies these values and goals.

Briefs

IHC judges
oppose
'transferred...'

FROM PAGE 01
Chief Justices of both High Courts". "Any transfer, such as the one being reported, can only happen after the President consults with the Chief Justice of Pakistan and the respective Chief Justices of both, the court from where the judge is being transferred, and the court to which the judge is being transferred," it stated. Citing Al-Jehad case, the IHC judges said that this process of consultation, as enunciated by the Supreme Court, necessarily entails that it be "effective, meaningful, purposive, consensus-oriented, leaving no room for complaint of arbitrariness or unfair play".

What is
difference
between...

FROM PAGE 01
former chief justice Jawad S Khawaja — who opposed the military trials, presented arguments in today's hearing. He said that civilians do not fall under military trials. The counsel also clarified that he is not entirely challenging the Army Act but only a specific aspect of it. He pointed out that Justice Muneeb Akhtar had also referred to the same argument in his verdict. At this, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail said that there was a dispute over different possibilities in the FB Ali case.

Those who
brought
govt have...

FROM PAGE 01
he remarked that those who brought the current government into power were the ones truly running it. "The day they withdraw their support, this government will collapse," he asserted. He further claimed that PTI leaders who approached him always stated that they were doing so on Imran Khan's instructions. The JUI-F chief also condemned the violence against Palestinians. He highlighted that for fifteen months, Israel had relentlessly bombed Gaza, destroying entire neighborhoods and the deaths of over 50,000 women, children, and elderly citizens.

10 terrorists
killed in
separate...

FROM PAGE 01
khwarij, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in these areas against the security forces as well as killing of innocent civilians," it said. Furthermore, the military's media wing said, sanitisation operations were being conducted to eliminate any other terrorists found in the area as the "security forces of Pakistan are determined to eliminate the menace of terrorism from the country". The operations are part of a sustained effort as the country witnessed a surge in violent attacks since the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in 2021, particularly in the bordering provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

AC injured
in Kurram...

FROM PAGE 01
Deputy Commissioner Javedullah Mehsood was injured in a firing incident. However, after law enforcers' efforts, peace was restored and essential supplies also started coming into Kurram, which was cut off from the rest of the country for months. The peace efforts faced another obstacle to day due to the attack on AC Saeed Manan. According to law enforcers, Manan was present in the area alongside the police when he was targeted. He was immediately shifted to a hospital for medical treatment. Following the attack, a heavy contingent of police launched a search operation to track down the perpetrators. Simultaneously, a grand jirga has commenced at the Commissioner House in Kohat to establish lasting peace in Kurram. Adviser to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister on Information, Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif, is attending the jirga.

Pakistan announce squad
for CT-2025, tri-nation series

The squad features three players who won the title in 2017

SPORTS DESK

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Friday, announced the squad for the upcoming tri-nation series and the highly-anticipated ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025, set to commence on February 19. Pakistan's squad includes four changes to their 15-member contingent that featured in a three-match ODI series against South Africa last year, with left-handed opener Saim Ayub a key absentee.

Besides him, out-of-form Abdullah Shafique, Muhammad Irfan Khan and Sufiyan Muqem have also been left out of the team for the eight-team tournament. They are replaced by Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Khushdil Shah and Saud Shakeel. Wicketkeeper batter Mohammad Rizwan will lead the green shirts, with all-rounder Salman Ali Agha serving as his deputy.

The squad also features three players from the 2017 title-winning side — Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf and Fakhar Zaman. Left-arm pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi will lead the pace attack, further comprised of Mohammad Hasnain, Naseem Shah and Haris Rauf. Abrar Ahmed is the sole specialist spinner in the squad but all-rounders Agha and Khushdil serve as more spin options for the defending champions. The same squad will feature in tri-nation ODI series against New Zealand and South Africa in the build-up to the ICC Champions Trophy 2025.

The tri-nation series, featuring New Zealand and South Africa, will be hosted by Pakistan as part of their preparations for the Champions Trophy 2025. This series will be crucial for Pakistan's ODI team as they aim to defend their title in the upcoming mega event. The series will kick off on February 8, with Pakistan facing New Zealand at the Gaddafi Stadium here.



land at the Gaddafi Stadium here. The team is set to begin preparations on February 4,

with New Zealand and South Africa arriving in Lahore on February 5 and February 7, respectively. The tri-series will follow a single-league format, and the final is scheduled for February 14 in Karachi.

After the tri-series, the Champions Trophy 2025 will kick off on February 19 and will run until March 9. Matches will be held across three venues in Pakistan — Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi — and in Dubai, featuring 15 thrilling encounters between the eight participating teams. Pakistan squad for tri-nation series and Champions Trophy 2025: Mohammad Rizwan (c), Babar Azam, Fakhar Zaman, Kamran Gulshan, Saud Shakeel, Tayyab Tahir, Faheem Ashraf, Khushdil Shah, Salman Ali Agha (vc), Usman Khan, Abrar Ahmed, Haris Rauf, Mohammad Hasnain, Naseem Shah and Shaheen Shah Afridi.

ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 Schedule:

19 February: Pakistan v New Zealand, Karachi, Pakistan
20 February: Bangladesh v India, Dubai
21 February: Afghanistan v South Africa, Karachi, Pakistan
22 February: Australia v England, Lahore, Pakistan
23 February: Pakistan v India, Dubai
24 February: Bangladesh v New Zealand, Rawalpindi, Pakistan
25 February: Australia v South Africa, Rawalpindi, Pakistan
26 February: Afghanistan v England, Lahore, Pakistan
27 February: Pakistan v Bangladesh, Rawalpindi, Pakistan
28 February: Afghanistan v Australia, Lahore, Pakistan
1 March: South Africa v England, Karachi, Pakistan
2 March: New Zealand v India, Dubai
4 March: Semi-final 1, Dubai
5 March: Semi-final 2, Lahore, Pakistan
9 March: Final, Lahore
(unless India qualify, else it will be played in Dubai)
10 March: Reserve day

Sutherland ton helps
Australia punish England

England's selection was brought into question with Ecclestone bowling 39 overs in the innings so far, with Ryana Macdonald-Gay's medium pace preferred to Charlie Dean's off-spin

MELBOURNE: Annabel Sutherland's sparkling century and seven dropped catches from England gave Australia complete control of the one-off Ashes Test match in Melbourne.

The hosts, eyeing a 16-0 clean sweep for the series, finished day two on 422-5 and with a commanding lead of 252. Sutherland was dropped on 29 and 31 by Danni Wyatt-Hodge and Amy Jones respectively before grinding England down to reach 163 from 258 balls, her third Test century in just six matches. Beth Mooney also ruthlessly punished England's mistakes, as she was dropped three times on eight, 11 and 18 before finishing the day unbeaten on 98. All-rounder Sutherland added 80 for the second wicket with Phoebe Litchfield, who was caught behind for 45 off Lauren Bell after a fine

opening spell, then added a further 71 with captain Alyssa Healy and 154 with Mooney as England's bowlers toiled admirably but were horribly let down in the field. Ecclestone removed Ash Gardner for 44 late in the day after she had also been put down on 12 and 36, but Australia have a wilting England side at their mercy with two days to play. They even had the luxury of resting an injured Ellyse Perry as a precaution. England's selection was brought into question with Ecclestone bowling 39 overs in the innings so far, with Ryana Macdonald-Gay's medium pace preferred to Charlie Dean's off-spin. The day also saw a new world record attendance for a women's Test with a crowd figure of 23,561 in just two days - surpassing the previous record of 23,207 at Trent Bridge in 2023. Considering the

dismal nature of the tour so far for England, the fact this was arguably their worst day speaks volumes. Youngsters Litchfield and Sutherland looked at ease in the morning session before Bell drew an outside edge from the former, gaining reward for a lively and economical spell which tested the batters' patience regularly. But that was a very rare bright spark in England's day as the painfully familiar sight of spilled catches dominated the day. Though Macdonald-Gay dropped the first chance to get rid of Mooney - a straightforward catch at cover with the batter on eight - she responded admirably with the ball to produce three more chances. But they were all spilled. Ecclestone and Maia Bouchier dropped the next two at slip and gully respectively, before Ecclestone

also dropped Gardner off Macdonald-Gay on 12. Gardner received another life from Lauren Filer on 36 but a much tougher effort was put down in her follow-through. Macdonald-Gay was rewarded with Sutherland's wicket but given her inexperience, she lacked the consistency to play a holding role for Heather Knight which led to the increased workload on Ecclestone. England's fielding has been below-par throughout the series but perhaps more of a concern is the immediate dip in body language and attitude which follows, and leads to the drops becoming seemingly contagious for all. Sutherland's first Ashes century came batting at number eight at Trent Bridge in 2023, and her second came while batting at three to demonstrate her remarkable skill and versatility. — Agencies

New Zealand make
one addition
to ODI squad

New Zealand squad to depart for Pakistan on February 3

AUCKLAND: New Zealand Cricket (NZC) on Friday, announced to add Jacob Duffy to their squad for the upcoming tri-nation ODI series in Pakistan, scheduled to run from February 8 to 14.

According to the cricket board, the right-arm pacer will primarily serve as the cover for experienced Lockie Ferguson, who is currently participating in the ILT20 in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Duffy got the call-up on the back of his brilliant performances in the recently held home white-ball series against Sri Lanka, where he picked up 12 wickets in five matches and was also adjudged the Player of the T20I Series.

Following his inclusion, Duffy will accompany New Zealand's squad on its departure for Pakistan on Monday. New Zealand will take on hosts Pakistan in the opening match of the tri-nation series on February 8 in Lahore before facing South Africa at the same venue on February 10. The Blackcaps will then travel to Karachi if they qualify for the final, scheduled to be played on February 14.

New Zealand will kick off their ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 campaign in the curtain-raiser against Pakistan on February 19 in Karachi.

They will then travel to Rawalpindi for their second group-stage fixture against Bangladesh on February 24 before making a trip to Dubai where they will lock horns with India on March 2.

New Zealand squad for tri-series and Champions Trophy Mitchell Santner (c), Michael Bracewell, Mark Chapman, Devon Conway, Lockie Ferguson, Matt Henry, Tom Latham, Daryl Mitchell, Will O'Rourke, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Ben Sears, Nathan Smith, Kane Williamson, Will Young, Jacob Duffy (tri-series only). — Agencies

Rain disrupts Australia's surge
in first Sri Lanka Test

Sri Lanka trail by a further 518 runs in first innings

WEB DESK

GALLE: Australia's momentum-filled bowling attack was left frustrated as the adamant rain washed out the final two sessions of the third day of their ongoing first Test against Sri Lanka here at the Galle International Stadium on Friday. The action got underway under sunny conditions but only 27 overs could be bowled as it began to downpour here just before lunch. As a result, no further action was possible, with the stumps called two hours ahead of the original schedule. Meanwhile, at the conclusion of the rain-hit third day, Sri Lanka were reeling at 136/5 in response to Australia's mammoth first innings total of 654/6d. Experienced top-order batter Dinesh Chandimal played a lone hand for the home side thus far and remained unbeaten for a 115-ball 63, laced with nine boundaries. Chandimal will resume Sri Lanka's first innings on the penultimate day with wicketkeeper batter Kusal Mendis, unbeaten on 10, as the hosts still trail by 518 runs. The home side resumed their response from an overnight score of 44/3 through Chandimal and Kamindu



Mendis. The duo could stretch their overnight partnership to 47 runs as Kamindu fell victim to Mitchell Starc after scoring 15 off 38 deliveries with the help of one four and a six. Sri Lanka's batting mainstay Chandimal was then joined by skipper Dhananjaya de Silva for a brief 40-run partnership, which pushed their total past the 100-run mark. The fifth-wicket stand culminated when Matthew Kuhnemann got de Silva stumped in the 33rd over. The Sri Lankan captain could score 22 off 34 deliveries with the help of three boundaries. For Australia, Starc and Kuhnemann bagged two wickets thus far, while Nathan Lyon chipped in with one scalp.

India, SA reach
Women's U19
T20 WC final

The blockbuster clash is scheduled to be played on Sunday

KUALA LUMPUR: Defending champions India and South Africa on Friday, qualified for the ICC Women's U19 T20 World Cup final, scheduled to be played here at the Bayuemas Oval on Sunday. The reigning champions secured a resounding victory over England in the second semi-final, while the Proteas edged past Australia by five wickets in the first knockout fixture. In the first semi-final, Ashleigh van Wyk's four-wicket haul, followed by Jemma Botha's 37 up the order, led South Africa to a five-wicket victory. Opting to bat first, Australia could only accumulate 105/8 in their 20 overs despite Caoimhe Bray's grit. The middle-order batter waged a lone battle for Australia with a cautious 34 off 44 deliveries but lacked ample support from the other end as Ashleigh ran through their batting unit. The left-arm spinner returned sensational bowling figures of 4/17 and bagged the Player of the Match award in the high-stakes clash. In response, South Africa chased down a modest 106-run target for the loss of five wickets and 11 balls to spare. Opening batter Jemma Botha remained the top-scorer for South Africa with a brisk 37 off 24 deliveries with the help of five fours and two sixes. — Agencies

PM will inaugurate Gaddafi Stadium on Feb 7: Naqvi
'We did not compromise on the quality of anything,' says Naqvi

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Mohsin Naqvi on Friday, announced that President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister (PM) Shehbaz Sharif will inaugurate the country's newly-renovated major stadia. Naqvi shared the development during a press conference after his detailed visit to the Gaddafi Stadium here to review the renovation. "The stadium in Lahore will be inaugurated by the Prime Minister on February 7. On the 11th of February, the President of Pakistan (Asif Ali Zardari) will inaugurate Karachi's stadium," said Naqvi. "And, a ceremony related to the Champions Trophy will take place on February 16," he added. The chairman added that the stadium's renovation is at the last stages with workers giving it a final touch up and before the 7th, 100 per cent work will be completed. Naqvi further dismissed the notion that the quality was compromised during the fast-paced renovation of the venues, stating that they followed international standards throughout the project. "Across the border, there were a lot of people who were busy finding flaws in our preparations but by the will of Almighty Allah, they would not get anything to create the fuss," said Naqvi. "But, there was a discussion on the [quality of] chairs. So, the ones we are using now are five times cheaper, come with a 20-year warranty and meet international standards. "We did not compromise on the quality of anything. We



first time in the history of Pakistan, a stadium equipped with modern international facilities has been developed," said Naqvi. "Along with the players, cricket fans will enjoy the new facilities. By the will of Almighty Allah, the new Gaddafi Stadium will be inaugurated in the first week of February," he added. The PCB chairman also met the construction workers and lauded their dedication and tireless efforts in getting the venue ready to host the eight-team tournament. He also invited the workers to watch the first match of the upcoming tri-nation ODI series, scheduled to be played at the venue on February 8. "I will sit with you and watch the match," Naqvi told the workers.

For the unversed, Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium will host at least four exciting matches during the Champions Trophy 2025, including the second semi-final, scheduled on March 5. The venue may as well host the final of the eight-team tournament on March 9 if India do not qualify for the blockbuster contest. It is pertinent to mention that the eight-team tournament, comprised of 15 matches, will run from February 19 to March 9, across three venues — Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi — in Pakistan and Dubai. The eight teams are divided into two groups. Group A features Pakistan, India, New Zealand and Bangladesh, while Group B is comprised of Afghanistan, South Africa, England and Australia. Hosts Pakistan will take on New Zealand in the curtain raiser on February 19 in Karachi, while the blockbuster clash between arch-rivals Pakistan and India is scheduled for February 23 in Dubai.

Omar slams
PM as a
'servant' with
no power

FROM PAGE 01

He accused PPP of hypocrisy, noting that while the party once opposed the PECA law, it has now fallen silent on the matter. He said the notion of press freedom or even freedom of expression in Pakistan has ceased to exist, with media personnel unable to speak or write freely. Ayub further asserted that PTI harbors no hopes from the United States or the United Kingdom, particularly in the context of Pakistan's political crisis. He called for Article 6 to be invoked against former Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja, accusing him of aiding the current rulers in rigging elections. Additionally, Ayub highlighted that despite PTI's repeated appearances in court, they remain unclear about the charges against them.

Siddiqui
urges PTI
to accept...

FROM PAGE 01

failure to capitalise on a valuable opportunity to address its demands. In a statement on X, he criticised PTI's unilateral withdrawal from the negotiation process, describing it as an undemocratic and apolitical move. He emphasised that this action had deprived the party of an important chance to resolve its issues. Siddiqui further emphasised that PTI must acknowledge that street protests, sit-ins, and long marches have not been effective in achieving their goals in the past and will not be in the future. He stressed that the key to solving any problem lies in serious and meaningful negotiations and urged PTI to realise this for the benefit of both the party and the country.

Pakistan
values its
relations...

FROM PAGE 01

He expressed the hope that this new year would further strengthen the bonds of friendship between Pakistan and China and bring prosperity to the peoples of both countries. Matters related to economic and security cooperation between the two countries were also discussed during the meeting. The Ambassador thanked the Prime Minister and the people of Pakistan for extending their warm wishes to the Chinese government and its people at this joyous occasion.

Trade
benefits
under GSP...

FROM PAGE 01

Pakistan in meeting its human rights obligations and, in this regard, encouraged diligent efforts and meaningful consultations with all stakeholders, including the country's vibrant civil society. "Pakistan remains a key partner for the EU in South Asia. Our relationship is built on shared values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, guided by the principles of the UN Charter and international norms. The EU welcomes the fact that Pakistan has become the largest beneficiary of GSP+, with Pakistani businesses increasing their exports to the EU market by 108% since the launch of the trade scheme in 2014.

FBR registers
record tax...

FROM PAGE 01

However, officials remain confident they will approach the target. According to officials, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) evaluates tax collection on a quarterly basis, not monthly. The target for tax collection from January to March is Rs3,150 billion, and they expect improved collection in March as economic activity picks up. Data from FBR showed that December 2024 saw the highest-ever tax collection in FBR's history, with Rs1,330 billion collected in that month alone. However, there was a shortfall of Rs384 billion in the tax revenue from July to December 2024-25. In the first six months of the fiscal year, FBR collected Rs5,624 billion in taxes, although the target for this period was Rs6,008 billion.

Briefs

Jazz brings digital experience to its customers

ISLAMABAD: Jazz, Pakistan's leading digital operator on Friday inaugurated its state-of-the-art Karachi Experience Center at COM3 Tower, Block 6, Clifton, reaffirming its commitment to enhancing digital experiences for its customers. Designed to embody the Jazz identity, this second Experience Center in Karachi offers a modern and dynamic workplace that promotes teamwork, innovation and collaboration said a news release. The facility is comprised of a business center, office space, cafe, conference rooms, breakout areas, and common spaces tailored for both in-person and virtual team collaborations—aligning with Jazz's digital workplace strategy. Speaking at the inauguration, Kazim Mujtaba, President Jazz Consumer Division, said, "The Experience Center caters to the rapidly changing workplace dynamics in line with our commitment to provide a healthy working environment. This initiative not only enhances our ability to innovate but also reinforces our commitment to a digitally connected and inclusive Pakistan. At Jazz, we are redefining the customer experience by integrating cutting-edge digital solutions with a human-centric approach." As a responsible corporate entity, Jazz ensures inclusivity by incorporating special design modifications to make the facility accessible for persons with disabilities and foster an inclusive, equitable, and sustainable work environment. Jazz is strategically focusing on innovation and expanding into new technological frontiers while continuing to deliver cutting-edge services to its existing customers. As part of its transformation into a forward-leaning ServiceCo, the company is establishing dedicated Strategic Business Units (SBUs) and has strengthened its position in fintech, cloud services, data centers, software development, and connectivity. This transition has empowered the company to respond efficiently to the evolving digital landscape, further solidifying its role in Pakistan's digital economy. Under its ambitions "4G for all" initiative, Jazz boasts over 50 million 4G users and continues to lead Pakistan's digital revolution. The company's DO1440 strategy ensures customers are served around the clock, prioritizing high-value digital services and enhancing customer engagement.—DNA

Syrian leader Sharaa pledges to form inclusive govt

DAMASCUS: Syria's newly appointed president, Ahmed Al-Sharaa, said on Thursday he will form an inclusive transitional government representing diverse communities that will build institutions and run the country until it can hold free and fair elections. Sharaa addressed the nation in his first speech since being appointed president for the transitional period on Wednesday by armed factions that ousted former Syrian President Bashar Assad in a lightning offensive last year. The armed group that led the offensive, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, has since set up an interim government that has welcomed a steady stream of senior Western and Arab diplomatic delegations keen to help stabilize the country after 13 years of civil war. Sharaa in his speech said he would form a small legislative body to fill the parliamentary void until new elections were held, after the Syrian parliament was dissolved on Wednesday. He said he would also in the coming days announce the formation of a committee that would prepare to hold a national dialogue conference that would be a platform for Syrians to discuss the future political program of the nation. That would be followed by a "constitutional declaration," he said, in an apparent reference to the process of drafting a new Syrian constitution.—APP

Trump says US mulling troops presence in Syria

His remarks follow reports in Israeli media this week that "senior White House officials conveyed a message to their Israeli counterparts indicating that President Trump intends to pull thousands of U.S. troops from Syria." Israel's official public broadcasting Kan wrote, "The withdrawal of American forces from Syria will raise significant concerns in Tel Aviv

NEW YORK: The United States will make a "determination" regarding its troops in Syria, President Donald Trump said Thursday without providing any further details and denying previous claims he would pull troops out of the country. "I don't know who said that. But we'll make a determination on that," Trump told reporters in response to a question about whether he had said he would withdraw American troops from Syria, according to a report in Irbil-based Rudaw news network. "We're not involved in Syria. Syria's its own mess. ... They don't need us involved," he said. His remarks follow reports in Israeli media this week that "senior White House officials conveyed a mes-

sage to their Israeli counterparts indicating that President Trump intends to pull thousands of U.S. troops from Syria." Israel's official public broadcasting Kan wrote, "The withdrawal of American forces from Syria will raise significant concerns in Tel Aviv." In December, taking advantage of Syrian factions toppling Bashar Assad's regime, Israel expanded its occupation in the Golan Heights by seizing the demilitarized zone in Mount Hermon. Furthermore, Israel declared the collapse of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement with Syria, deploying its military in the demilitarized zone of the Golan Heights, most of which it has occupied since 1967. This move has faced



criticism from the U.N. and Arab states. The U.S. has recently upped its presence of troops in Syria from 900 to around 2,000 after a coalition of anti-regime forces led by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) ousted Assad on Dec. 8. The Pentagon has explained the surge in numbers as a temporary measure to prevent Daesh

from gaining a foothold in the country. U.S. forces in Syria are the primary backers of the PKK terrorist group's Syrian wing YPG, which Washington calls its ally in the anti-Daesh coalition. YPG leader Ferhan Abdi Şahin is resolutely against the withdrawal of U.S. troops. The U.S. withdrawal closely concerns Türkiye, who opposes Washington's military cooperation with the PKK/YPG. The PKK is listed as a terrorist group by the European Union, the U.S. and Türkiye. The group is responsible for more than 40,000 deaths in Türkiye, including women and children. It maintains strongholds in northern Iraq and Syria to create a self-styled "Kurdish state." The U.S.

has dispatched troops along with military equipment and weapons to Syria's northeast during the Syrian civil war to help the PKK/YPG under the pretext of the fight against Daesh. Ankara says the YPG/PKK is on par with Daesh and should have no presence in the new Syria. Swathes of northern Syria, including oil-rich areas, have been occupied by the PKK/YPG since 2015. Türkiye has mounted multiple operations against the PKK/YPG since 2016, and the Syrian National Army (SNA) has captured several YPG-occupied towns in the past months, including Manbij and Deir el-Zour. Clashes have continued between the SNA and the YPG since, nowadays concentrated

around the Tishrin Dam near Manbij. Türkiye said it expects Trump to heed his NATO ally's security concerns and pull back U.S. troops from northern Syria. Ankara has also threatened military action if the terrorist group refuses to disband. Earlier this month, then-U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he was working to address Türkiye's concerns and dissuade it from stepping up its offensive against the YPG. In a call with Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan last week, Blinken's successor Marco Rubio reiterated the "need for an inclusive transition in Syria," U.S. State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said.—Agencies

US official vows to 'fix' FAA after fatal collision

WASHINGTON: US Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said late on Thursday he will soon announce a plan to reform the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) after a devastating collision between an American Airlines regional plane and an Army helicopter killed 67 people. "I am in the process of developing an initial plan to fix the @FAANews. I hope to put it out very shortly," Duffy said on X. President Donald Trump who has harshly criticized diversity efforts at the FAA, directed an immediate assessment of aviation safety on Thursday. Earlier, Trump said he had appointed a former senior aviation official as the acting head of the FAA — just one day after the deadliest US air disaster in more than 20 years. The announcement came after an American Airlines regional passenger jet collided with a US Army Black Hawk helicopter and crashed into the Potomac River near Reagan Washington National Airport.—APP

CCP, SECP hold joint meeting to strengthen regulatory coop

ISLAMABAD: The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) and the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) held a productive meeting at the SECP headquarters, aimed at enhancing mutual cooperation and fostering a more conducive regulatory environment for businesses in Pakistan. The meeting was jointly chaired by Dr. Kabir Ahmed Sidhu, Chairman CCP, and Akif Saeed, Chairman SECP, and was attended by all SECP Commissioners, Members of CCP, and senior management from both organizations, said a press release issued here on Friday. During the meeting, both sides shared updates on their respective organizations' progress and deliberated on ways to further strengthen bilateral cooperation. A key discussion point was the need for enhanced regulatory oversight. Both organizations agreed on the importance of ongoing collaboration and decided to hold regular quarterly meetings to review the progress of mutual initiatives and share insights for further strengthening the regulatory framework in Pakistan.—APP

ICCI demands appointment of full-time CDA Chairman

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) has called for the immediate appointment of a full-time Chairman for the Capital Development Authority (CDA) to address the growing concerns of the business community. In a statement, Nasir Mansoor Qureshi, President of ICCI,

highlighted that the business sector in Islamabad is facing multiple challenges due to the absence of a dedicated CDA Chairman, said a press release issued here on Friday. He pointed out that the sitting CDA Chairman is also exercising responsibilities as the Commissioner of Islamabad, a situation that has hindered his ability to focus

on the urgent issues faced by the business community. Qureshi emphasized that businesses in Islamabad are grappling with several problems related to the CDA, which require immediate attention. He added that without a full-time Chairman who can devote focused efforts to resolving these issues, the city's growth potential

and ease of doing business will continue to be adversely impacted. He also suggested that the CDA establish a facilitation desk within the Chamber premises, similar to those created by other organizations such as TDAP, NADRA, and FTO, to facilitate businesses and address their issues swiftly.—DNA

Japan scrambles jets as Russian bombers fly over high seas

TOKYO: Japan scrambled fighter jets after Russian bombers flew over international waters around the country, Tokyo's top government spokesman said Friday. "We confirmed that Russian military bombers and fighter jets flew over the high seas of the Sea of Okhotsk and the Sea of Japan yesterday, and we scrambled Air Self-Defense Force fighter jets" in response, Yoshimasa Hayashi told reporters. "It is difficult to say clearly what the purpose of the flight was... but the Russian military has been active on an ongoing basis in areas surrounding Japan," he said. Tokyo has raised the issue with Moscow in the past through diplomatic routes, including regarding a Russian fighter jet's intrusion into territorial airspace in September, which Russia denied according to media reports. "We will continue to monitor (the situation) closely and do our best to take measures in patrolling and responding to airspace incursions," Hayashi said. Russia's defense ministry said on Telegram Thursday that two long-range bombers flew over international waters in the Sea of Japan and the Sea of Okhotsk. The Russian ministry also released a video of two Tupolev-95 aircraft escorted by Russian fighter jets conducting what it called a regular flight over more than eight hours. "All flights by Russian Aerospace Forces aircraft are carried out in strict compliance with international rules on the use of airspace," it said in a statement. Moreover, Emergency workers in Japan began building a ramp Friday to try and reach a 74-year-old truck driver who has not been heard from since his vehicle was swallowed by a sink-hole this week. The cavity has expanded to 40 meters (130 feet) across, almost the length of an Olympic swimming pool, since opening up in a city just north of Tokyo on Tuesday morning, officials said. The growing hole could be the result of corroded sewage pipes, according to authorities in Yashio. "It is an extremely dangerous condition," local fire chief Tetsuji Sato told reporters on Thursday at the traffic intersection where dozens of rescuers have been working around the clock.—APP



LONDON: Federal Minister for Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal, triumphs in the Oxford Union debate, securing a historic victory with 180 votes against 145 on the proposition 'This House Believes That Liberal Democracies Have Failed the Global South in UK.

Kyiv's forces killed 22 people in occupied village: Russia

MOSCOW: Moscow on Friday accused Ukrainian troops of killing 22 people in an occupied Russian village, including eight women who were allegedly raped before being executed. Ukraine controls dozens of border settlements in the Kursk region of western Russia since launching a surprise offensive in August and says about 2,000 civilians still live in areas it occupies. Russia has now retaken several towns. Russia's Investigative Committee had said on January 19 it was investigating the killing of "at least seven civilians" in the village of Russkoye Porechnoye, about 20 kilometers (12 miles) from the Ukrainian border. On Friday, it said it was now investigating the killing of "22 residents" between September and November. Among the victims, whose bodies were found in the basements of several homes, were eight women who were allegedly raped before being killed, the Investigative Committee said. AFP was not immediately able to verify the claims and there has been no official response from Ukraine.

Russian investigators blame five Ukrainian soldiers for the killings and said one of them, Yevgeny Fabrisenko, was arrested during the fighting in the Kursk region. The committee released a video of the interrogation of a man identified as Fabrisenko, who confessed. At a briefing on Friday, Russia's foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said: "First people were tortured, abused, then killed either by being shot or blown up.—APP

SBP governor advises banks to promote climate resilient

MULTAN: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) convened the Agricultural Credit Advisory Committee (ACAC) meeting on Friday, reaffirming its commitment to boosting agriculture financing and driving sustainable growth in Pakistan's agriculture sector. In his keynote address, SBP Governor Jameel Ahmad underscored the vital role of agriculture in Pakistan's economy, highlighting its contributions to food security, rural livelihoods, and its integration with the industrial and services sectors. While acknowledging the sector's persistent challenges—low productivity, climate change impacts, and limited financial inclusion—he urged banks to prioritize agricultural finance as a core and viable business line. The Governor noted that the agriculture sector achieved remarkable growth during FY24. In Q1-FY25, however, agricultural growth slowed down to 1.2pc from 8.1pc last year and has resulted in a relatively slower GDP growth of 0.9 pc against 2.3pc recorded in Q1-FY24. There are signs of a modest wheat crop, highlighting the need for resilience and innovation in agriculture for sustained growth. During FY24, due to collaborative efforts by SBP and the banks, a record credit disbursement of Rs. 2,216 billion was witnessed, marking a 25pc annual increase. Building on this momentum, the first half of FY25 recorded disbursements of Rs. 1,266 billion whereas the number of borrowers rose modestly to 2.86 million. To increase the number of small borrowers particularly in underserved and unserved areas, the Governor emphasized the banks to expand their rural presence by designating more branches for agrilending and deploying additional agricultural credit officers. Looking ahead, the Governor urged the banks to fully implement their agricultural credit expansion plans and invest in human resources, infrastructure, and digital technologies to better serve the farmers. He encouraged financial institutions to collaborate with relevant Government departments, fintechs, microfinance institutions, and Agri-Tech companies to deliver end-to-end digital loan solutions and advisory services tailored for small farmers. Mr Jameel highlighted that there are three key areas for stakeholders to focus to uplift the agriculture sector. First, addressing the climate change challenges calls for targeted strategies to mitigate risks and enhance resilience by adopting climate-smart agriculture, green financing, and farmer training to ensure food security and sustainable growth. Second, leveraging modern technology is crucial for transforming Pakistan's agriculture. Globally, Geo-spatial technologies are transforming agriculture by enabling precise crop monitoring, enhancing resource management, and minimizing production risks. Pilot projects in Pakistan can adopt these tools to enhance productivity and reduce resource waste. Third, enhancing focus on livestock sector, which contributes 14 pc of GDP and 2.1 pc of the country's total exports, offers massive opportunity for diversifying income streams and reducing dependency on traditional crop cycles by creating exportable surplus. Adopting advanced technologies like efficient breeding, improved dietary regimes, and manure management systems, can increase productivity and also align with Pakistan's climate goals to reduce greenhouse gases by 50pc till 2030. While listening to the issues faced by farmers from Baluchistan, the Governor shared that SBP will take a lead and convene all the stakeholders including relevant government departments.—DNA

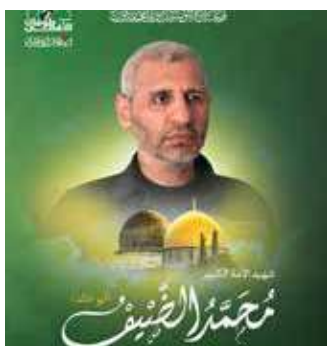
Resistance groups pay tribute to Mohammed Deif

Mohammad 'Abu Khaled' Deif, known for his elusiveness, had survived at least seven attempts on his life by Israel. He had been a key figure in orchestrating military operations against Israel

FOREIGN DESK

GAZA: Resistance leaders have paid tribute to the chief of Al-Qassam Brigades, the military arm of Hamas. On Thursday, Al-Qassam Brigades, the military arm of Hamas, announced the martyrdom of several of its military council leaders in the battle against the Israeli invasion of the besieged Gaza Strip, including its chief of staff Mohammed Deif. Chief of Al-Qassam Brigades Ab Obeida on Thursday also confirmed the death of deputy military commander Marwan Issa in combat. Other commanders killed in the battle included Ghazi Abu Tama'a, the commander of weapons and combat services, Raed Thabet, the commander of manpower and head of supplies uni-

Rafeh Salama, the commander of the Khan Younis Brigade. Ahmed al-Ghandour, the commander of the Northern Brigade, and Ayman Nofal, the commander of the Central Brigade, were the other high-profile Hamas members killed in combat. Mohammad 'Abu Khaled' Deif, known for his elusiveness, had survived at least seven attempts on his life by Israel. He had been a key figure in orchestrating military operations against Israel. Across the Axis of Resistance, factions mourn and honor the martyrs of the Al-Qassam Brigades, led by the great martyred leader, Commander Deif. The Islamic Jihad Movement said it "mourns the martyrdom of Mohammed Deif (Abu Khaled) and his comrades, saluting their pivotal role in initiating the battle of Al-Aqsa Flood and achieving



victories such as the recent prisoner exchange deal under resistance-imposed terms." "The Movement stresses that the martyrdom of leaders strengthens the steadfastness of the resistance and forces the Zionist entity to retreat," it added. "Islamic Jihad reaffirms its steadfastness alongside Hamas and other resist-

ance factions to honor the blood of the martyrs, achieve full liberation, and thwart Zionist-American schemes targeting the Palestinian cause. Indeed it is a jihad of victory or martyrdom." The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine also said it mourns "the great Palestinian fighter and Chief of Staff of the Al-Qassam Brigades, alongside Marwan Issa and their comrades." "Mohammed Deif was a symbol of meticulous planning and heroic resistance, who struck fear into the Zionist entity for decades. The PFLP affirms that their martyrdom will strengthen the resistance and that the enemy's crimes will not halt the struggle but instead ensure the eventual collapse of the Zionist occupation," it added. Deif's deputy, Issa, was instrumental in Hamas's military strategies. Tama'a, responsible for overseeing

the organization's weapons in Gaza, previously served as the head of the Central Camps Brigade of Hamas. Thabet was considered among the top ten most senior Hamas military commanders, while Salama was known for his close association with Deif and Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar who was killed in combat in Gaza in October. Meanwhile, the Al-Nasser Salah Al-Din Brigades, the military wing of the Popular Resistance Committees, said they also "mourn the martyrdom of Mohammed Deif, Marwan Issa, and their comrades." These leaders were heroic symbols of sacrifice who gave their lives defending the sanctities of Palestine in the battle of the Al-Aqsa Flood. The Brigades reaffirm their commitment to escalating resistance against the Zionist enemy, which will meet its inevitable fate of collapse.

WASHINGTON: The present Pakistan government is committed to strengthening the country's democratic institutions and stabilizing its economy, Ambassador Rizwan Saeed Sheikh told a gathering in Washington. Highlighting Pakistan's economic recovery and the lucrative investment climate, the Pakistani envoy pointed to some key indicators including a significant reduction in inflation — from 38% in May 2023 to 4.1% in December 202 — saying the result was a testament to the government's effective economic policies. He was speaking at the "Ambassador Insider Series", a programme that allows people to meet with ambassadors and learn about the countries they represent. The series is hosted by The Washington Diplomat, a monthly newspaper. Attending the event were members of US think-tank community, staffers at Capitol Hill, academicians, civil society and media representatives. Emphasizing Pakistan's growing tech sector, the Ambassador said the country was the second-largest contributor to IT freelancing worldwide — only behind the United States — and underscored Pakistan's cost and quality competitiveness that makes it an ideal partner for IT outsourcing. The US-Pak trade ties remain strong, Ambassador Sheikh said, noting that the United States remains Pakistan's largest trading partner.—APP

Briefs

PTI lacks democratic mindset: Talal Chaudhry

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Senator Talal Chaudhry on Thursday said that negotiations were not in the blood of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), as it lacks a democratic mindset. Talking to a private news channel, he said that dialogue cannot be one-sided and requires patience to speak with reasoning and listen to the other side open heartedly. He said that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has offered talks with an open heart, urging PTI to embrace democratic traditions and participate in the negotiations.

Answering a question, he said that PTI has never believed in political dialogue, especially its founder, who has a track record of going back on his words. "The party is unfamiliar with the principles of democratic discourse and constructive negotiations," he added.

Two killed in Israeli strike on Lebanon

WEB DESK

BEIRUT: Two people were killed in an Israeli strike in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley area, the Lebanese health ministry said on Friday, after the Israeli military said it had struck several Hezbollah targets overnight in the Bekaa Valley and along the Syrian-Lebanese border. The Israeli army said in a statement that the targets included a facility used for underground weapons development and another linked to arms smuggling into Lebanon from neighboring Syria. The Israeli military statement did not mention casualties. Lebanon's health ministry said 10 people were also wounded. Its tolls do not distinguish between civilians and combatants. Hezbollah official Ibrahim Moussawi condemned the air raids, calling them "a very dangerous violation and a blatant and explicit aggression" and called on the Lebanese state to halt Israel's attacks. The strikes were the latest by Israel in Lebanon despite a ceasefire agreement reached in late November between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah that ended more than a year of fighting between the two heavily-armed foes. The agreement calls for the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon and says that all "unauthorized arms" and military infrastructure should be dismantled, starting with southern Lebanon.

US says killed Qaeda operative in Syria

BEIRUT: The US military said it killed a senior operative of Al-Qaeda's Syria branch in an air strike on northwestern Syria on Thursday. The area was the stronghold of interim president Ahmed Al-Sharaa's Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham group before it led the rebel offensive that toppled Bashar Assad in December. "US Central Command forces conducted a precision air strike in northwest Syria targeting and killing Muhammad Salah Al-Zabir, a senior operative in the terrorist organization Hurras Al-Din, an Al-Qaeda affiliate," CENTCOM said in a statement. Britain-based war monitor the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Zabir was killed when the vehicle he was traveling in on the Sarmada-Ildib road was hit by a US drone strike. The US strike came days after Hurras Al-Din announced its dissolution in line with orders from the interim president. The Observatory said Hurras Al-Din "announced its dissolution so as not to enter into armed conflict with HTS." Sharaa's faction was Al-Qaeda's Syria affiliate until it broke ties with the jihadist network in 2016. The US-based SITE Intelligence Group said Hurras Al-Din was founded in February 2018. - Agencies

Pak-Austria to enhance ties through parliamentary coop

Both leaders agreed that future parliamentary delegations to Austria should include representatives from the business sector to strengthen government-to-business (G2B) and business-to-business (B2B) cooperation, thereby enhancing economic and trade relations between the two countries



NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of the Senate of Pakistan, Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani, and Walter Rosenkranz, President of the National Council of Austria, on Friday reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening Pakistan-Austria relations through enhanced parliamentary engagement, economic cooperation, and collaboration on global initiatives. The chairman who is currently on a

visit to Ireland and Austria leading a parliamentary delegation thanked Austria for its valuable support for Pakistan's candidature for the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for the term 2025-26. Pakistan, in turn, reaffirmed its commitment to supporting Austria's candidature for a non-permanent seat in the UNSC. Both leaders emphasized the need for collaborative efforts to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the UN system, ensuring it better

serves global peace, security, and development. During the meeting, the Chairman extended a formal invitation to President Rosenkranz to visit Pakistan, which was graciously accepted. Both leaders agreed that future parliamentary delegations to Austria should include representatives from the business sector to strengthen government-to-business (G2B) and business-to-business (B2B) cooperation, thereby enhancing economic and trade relations between the two countries.

Recognizing the steady evolution of Pakistan-Austria ties, the two leaders reiterated their commitment to expanding collaboration in key sectors such as higher education, technology, renewable energy, and industrial development. The leaders also discussed avenues for enhancing parliamentary diplomacy to further inter-parliamentary cooperation and policy exchange. Gilani emphasized the importance of sustained high-level parliamentary exchanges and the role of the Pakistan-Austria Parliamentary Friendship Group in the Senate of Pakistan in fostering legislative dialogue. He encouraged the establishment of a similar parliamentary group in Austria to promote deeper engagement and mutual learning. Both sides acknowledged the importance of addressing transnational challenges such as climate change and sustainable development. They underscored the need to leverage Austria's expertise in clean technologies and Pakistan's commitment to climate resilience to develop joint initiatives in these critical areas. Chairman Senate and President Rosenkranz also emphasized the role of educational and cultural exchanges in strengthening people-to-people contacts. Recognizing Pakistan's vast potential in heritage, cultural, and adventure tourism, they agreed on the need to improve travel facilitation, including visa policies and direct connectivity, to boost bilateral tourism and student exchanges.

Govt weighs tax relief package

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal government was planning to announce tax relief package for country's real estate sector as Prime Minister's Task Force has finalized the package for the real estate sector which will be finalized after due consultations with IMF. The government is planning to abolish property purchase tax for overseas Pakistanis. The Federal Bureau of Revenue (FBR) will slash federal excise duty tax besides remarkable decrease in taxes for filers and non filers. The government is working on proposal to reduce tax levied on property purchase from 4 percent to 0.5 percent. The FBR is being recommended to impose 1 percent tax on property sales below Rs 5 crore. 3 percent tax is currently levied on property sales below Rs 5 crore. There is suggestion to impose 1.5 percent tax on sale of property worth Rs 5 to 10 crore as currently 3.5 percent tax was being levied on sale of property worth Rs 5 to 10 crore. There is suggestion to impose 2 percent tax on sale of property above Rs 10 crore instead of currently 4 percent tax.

Journalists observe Black Day against Peca tweaks

Journalists wear black armbands, hoist black flags at press clubs across country

DNA

ISLAMABAD/KARACHI: Journalists and media bodies under the umbrella of the Joint Action Committee (JAC) observed a Black Day on Friday with nationwide protests against the recent controversial amendments to the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016. To record their protest, black flags were hoisted at press clubs across the country and on the union's offices, while journalists wore black armbands. The Peca (Amendment) Bill 2025 received assent from President Zardari on Wednesday amid uproar over the contentious amendments by the opposition and journalist fraternity. Earlier the bill was rushed through both houses of parliament.

The Black Day was marked on the call of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) and endorsed by the JAC - comprising the Pakistan Broadcasters Association (PBA), All Pakistan Newspapers Society, Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors (CPNE) and Association of Electronic Media Editors and News Directors (AEMEND). The JAC was of the view that the controversial bill was approved without listening to journalist organisations and the stakeholders. In Karachi, journalist bodies, politicians and the legal fraternity denounced the recent amendments to the cybercrime laws. Addressing an event organised by the Karachi Press Club, former Senate chairman Raza Rabbani said the contentious Peca amendments reflect the rapidly diminishing space for democratic norms and debate in the country.

Jirga stresses to implement agreement

SHAMIM SHAHID

KOHAT: The Kurram peace jirga concluded with an announcement to implement the peace agreement. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government spokesperson stated that committees comprising representatives from both sides would be formed to ensure compliance with the agreement. He emphasized that the next jirga session would be scheduled after further consultation. Addressing the root causes of the conflict, he remarked, "The Kurram issue stems from deep-seated hatred.

Karachi Mayor Murtaza proposes cultural exchanges with France

French envoy calls on Mayor Karachi

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The Consul General of France, Alexis Chahtahtinsky, called on the Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab, at his office on Friday to discuss matters of mutual interest. Murtaza welcomed the French CG upon his arrival at the head office of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation. During the meeting he briefed him on the municipal services provided to the citizens of Karachi and the ongoing efforts to develop the city's infrastructure. Mayor Karachi on this occasion suggested that France could send cultural and academic delegations to Pakistan, while also promoting Pakistani culture in France, which would bring the two nations closer. He noted that France is a prominent and developed country in

Europe, with a rich history and culture, added that the people of Pakistan admire France's remarkable progress in industrial development and technology, and Pakistan desires to learn from France's experience to modernize its own cities, particularly in urban affairs. He also highlighted that Karachi offers vast and attractive opportunities for foreign investment due to its unique geographical significance as a crucial link between South Asia and Central Asia. Karachi has always been developed as an important trade port, which has helped it become a major industrial and commercial hub. French CG Alexis Chahtahtinsky expressed his best wishes for Murtaza Wahab's work and hoped that he would continue to serve the city of Karachi and its people in an even better manner, ensuring they have access to high-quality urban facilities.

Pakistan, Serbia discuss Trade and political ties



Pakistan-Serbia Hold Fifth Round of Bilateral Political Consultations

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The Fifth round of Pakistan-Serbia Bilateral Political Consultations were held in Islamabad today. Additional Secretary (Europe), Mr. Shafqat Ali Khan led the Pakistani delegation. The Serbian side was headed by the Secretary of State, Mr. Damjan Jovic. The two sides discussed important issues on the bilateral agenda including political relations, trade and economic cooperation and people to people contacts. Views were also exchanged on important regional and international issues. Expressing satisfaction at the positive momentum in bilateral relations the two sides agreed to explore new avenues for collaboration.

Israel to release 90, 3 to be freed in Gaza

Netanyahu's office confirmed it had received the names of the three captives to be released

FOREIGN DESK

JERUSALEM: Hamas and Israel will carry out their fourth hostage-prisoner swap of the Gaza ceasefire on Saturday, with the militant group to free three Israeli captives in exchange for 90 inmates in Israeli jails. Militants in Gaza began releasing hostages after the first 42-day phase of the ceasefire with Israel took effect on January 19. The hostages have been in captivity for nearly 15 months. Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants have so far handed over 15 hostages to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. Israeli campaign group, the Hostage and Missing Families Forum, named the captives to be released on Saturday as Yarden Bibas, Keith Seigel, who also has US citizenship, and Ofer Kalderon, who also holds French nationality. The office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu confirmed it had received the names of the three captives to be released. In exchange, Israel will free 90 prisoners, nine of whom are serving life sentences,

the Palestinian Prisoners' Club advocacy group said. During their October 7, 2023 attack on Israel which started the Gaza war, militants abducted Siegel from kibbutz Kfar Aza, and Kalderon and Bibas from kibbutz Nir Oz. Militants took a total of 251 people hostage that day. Of those, 79 still remain in Gaza, including at least 34 the military says are dead. Those seized include the wife and two children of Bibas, whom Hamas has already declared dead, although Israeli officials have yet to confirm that. The two Bibas boys - Kfir, the youngest hostage, who turned two in captivity earlier this month, and his four-year-old brother Ariel - have become symbols of the suffering of the hostages held in Gaza. The children were taken along with their mother, Shiri. Hamas says the boys and their mother were killed in an Israeli air strike in November 2023. The arrangements for hostage handovers in Gaza have sometimes been chaotic, particularly for the most recent handover in the southern city of Khan Yunis, which produced scenes that the Israeli prime minister condemned as "shocking."

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