



Islamabad POST

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PM Starmer backs Ukraine's Nato bid despite US view

Detailed News On Page-08

EU working to ease Syria sanctions

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Mbappe to return to France squad

Detailed News On Page-06



Pak slams Natenyahu's statement

Pakistan's reference in joint India-US statement misleading

"Pakistan's reference can't cover up India's sponsorship of terrorism and extrajudicial assassinations," says FO spox

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Friday has "strongly" condemned the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's statement regarding the establishment of the Palestinian state in Saudi Arabia. ARY News reported quoting Foreign Office. Foreign Office spokesperson Shafiqat Ali Khan, at his weekly press briefing, called the statement "irresponsible, provocative, and thoughtless" offending and disregarding the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and an independent state on their own historical and legitimate territory. "Pakistan stands in solidarity with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and any attempt to undermine Saudi Arabia's unwavering position and misrepresentation of its commitment to the Palestinian cause is deeply regrettable," he stated. He said that in his telephonic conversations with counterparts from Iran, Egypt, Turkey, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and UAE, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar termed the proposal to displace the people of Gaza deeply troubling and unjust and conveyed Pakistan's support for convening an extraordinary OIC meeting of Foreign Ministers to deliberate upon this issue. Pakistan on calling its reference in the Indo-US joint statement as "one-sided, misleading, and contrary to diplomatic norms" said that it could not cover up India's sponsorship of terrorism, subversion, and extrajudicial assassinations in the region and beyond. Pakistan's reference had been included notwithstanding its counterterrorism cooperation with the US. He said that such references could not shift international attention from the stark reality of India being a safe haven for perpetrators of hate crimes against Muslims and other minorities. "The joint statement fails to address India's non-compliance with UN Security Council resolutions, which is a key source of tension and instability in the region, nor does it take cognizance of the grim human rights situation in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. Regrettably, this amounts to an abdication of international responsibility," he remarked.

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India involved in smuggling drugs, weapons across LoC

Waqar Ahmad Noor says India's military, intelligence agencies have been involved in destabilising the region

DNA

MUZAFFARABAD: Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Interior Minister Waqar Ahmad Noor has said that India is smuggling weapons and drugs across the Line of Control (LoC) and orchestrating sabotage activities using explosive devices. Speaking at a press conference in the regional capital of Muzaffarabad, Noor said that India's military and intelligence agencies have been involved in destabilising the region. He revealed that since 2016, there have been 54 incidents of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) being planted along the LoC, with an increase in such activities in recent years. The minister detailed that Indian IEDs have been discovered and detonated in various locations, including Chakothi, Nezapir, Chirikot, Rakh Chakri, and Deva. The number of such incidents has also risen in Battal, Kot Kotera, and other areas, resulting in multiple civilian casualties. According to Noor, India's long-standing subversive activities along the LoC have intensified, with IEDs, weapons, and drugs being moved through Bagh, Battal, Deva, and other sectors. He further disclosed that between February 4 and 6,

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ISLAMABAD: UN Resident Coordinator in Pakistan, Mohamed Yahya, Sharif calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. - DNA

NZ ease past Pak to win tri-nation series

New Zealand chase down the 243-run target with 28 balls to spare

SPORTS DESK

KARACHI: Will O'Rourke's four-wicket haul, followed by half-centuries from Daryl Mitchell and Tom Latham, led New Zealand to win the tri-nation ODI series by defeating hosts Pakistan by five wickets here at the National Bank Stadium on Friday. Chasing a modest 243-run target, the visitors comfortably knocked the winning runs for the loss of five wickets and 28 balls to spare. The Blackcaps, however, got off to a contrasting start to the pursuit as their opener Will Young (five) fell victim to Naseem Shah in the second over with just five runs on the board.

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MD IFC meets Shehbaz PM lauds IFC's role in fostering private investments

The Prime Minister emphasized to focus on export led growth. He underlined the need for digitization of the entire echo-system of Pakistan's economy

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif met with Mr. Makhtar Diop, Managing Director and Executive Vice President of the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the private sector investment arm of the World Bank Group (WBG), to discuss IFC's ongoing and pipeline portfolio in Pakistan. Mr. Muhammad Ishaq Dar, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Mr. Muhammad Aurangzeb, Finance Minister; Mr. Ahmad Khan Cheema, Minister of Economic Affairs, and senior officers of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs attended the meeting. The Prime Minister appreciated the WBG's recently launched new decade-long Country Partnership Framework (CPF) (2026-2035)

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PM Shehbaz calls for stronger UN role on climate action

Sharif reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to combating climate change

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, on Friday, stressed the importance of strengthening collaboration with the United Nations in addressing the critical issues of sustainable development and climate change. During a meeting with UN Resident Coordinator in Pakistan,

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

Petrol price expected to drop

Significant reduction expected in petroleum prices from mid-February, with diesel, petrol seeing cuts.

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) has submitted a summary to the federal government, proposing a reduction of Rs2.49 in the price of petrol for the next 15 days. The decision to lower the prices follows a decrease in crude oil prices in the international market, with the government aiming to provide relief to the public. Additionally, the price of high-speed diesel is set to drop by Rs9.11, bringing the new price to Rs258.84 per liter from Rs267.85.

Honor killing prime suspect arrested: police

DNA

RAWALPINDI: The police on Friday said they had arrested the primary suspect in the murder of a first-year college student who was poisoned to death in the name of 'honour' in Rawalpindi last week. According to a case filed earlier this week, the victim's father and uncle were booked on the complaint of a police officer. It said that the girl's family "suspected that she had established relations with someone" and ran away from home, alleging that she was poisoned to death by her relatives.

Holiday Notice

The offices of daily Islamabad POST shall remain closed on Saturday on account of weekly off therefore there will be no newspaper on Sunday. - Editor

Stripped off FDA advisory role

Justice Mansoor says 'not afraid' of reference

Senator Siddiqui says unaware of any government plans to file a reference against two judges

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Supreme Court (SC) Justice Mansoor Ali Shah has said he is not afraid of any reference, saying that if he has done nothing wrong, there is no reason to fear. Speaking informally to journalists after the oath-taking ceremony of newly-appointed judges in the Supreme Court on Friday, Justice Mansoor responded to a question about the reference being reportedly filed against him. The senior puisne judge responded: "We will see when the reference comes. If I have done nothing wrong, why should I fear? Allah is the ultimate authority. We will not give up and go down fighting." Rana Sanaulah, the prime minister's adviser on political and public affairs, earlier this week hinted at filing a reference against two senior apex court judges who, according to him, were committing "misconduct" by

Continued on Page 06



CJP administers oath to new SC judges

Justice Mian Gul Hassan Aurangzeb takes oath as acting apex court judge

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan Yahya Afridi on Friday administered oath to the six newly-appointed Supreme Court judges in a swearing-in ceremony at the apex court. The new judges include former Balochistan High Court (BHC) chief justice Muhammad Hashim Khan Kakar, ex-Sindh High Court (SHC) chief justice Muhammad Shafi Siddiqui, SHC senior puisne judge Salahuddin Panhwar, Peshawar High Court (PHC) judge Sha-keel Ahmad, ex-Islamabad High Court (IHC) chief justice Aamer Farooq, and

Continued on Page 06

Afghan Taliban continue providing funds to TTP

"With over two dozen terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan, the security threat emanating from the country is a continuing driver of instability in the region and beyond

NEWS DESK

NEW YORK: The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a United Nations designated terrorist group, continued to receive from Afghanistan's de facto authorities logistical and operational space as well as financial support in conducting cross-border attacks in Pakistan, according to a new U.N. report. The U.N. sanctions monitoring team released its annual assessment late Thursday amid a surge in TTP terror attacks against Pakistani security forces and civilians, killing a number of them in recent weeks. "The ambition and scale of TTP's attacks on Pakistan, though, had significantly increased, with over six hundred attacks during the reporting period, including from Afghan territory," the United Nations Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team reported. TTP, it said, established new training centers in Afghanistan's Kunar, Nangarhar, Khost, and Paktika (Barmal)

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Harnai blast kills 11 labourers, injures 6 others

Balochistan govt orders inquiry into roadside explosion targeting coal miners' vehicle

DNA

QUETTA: A deadly explosion in the Shahrag area of Harnai killed at least 11 labourers and left six others injured on Friday, Deputy Commissioner Hazrat Wali Kakar confirmed. Initially, nine labourers were reportedly killed and six injured in the deadly blast took place near a vehicle carrying coal miners. Later, two of the injured miners succumbed to their wounds.

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Sindh to provide affordable electricity: Murad

Mr Shah announced that the Sindh Electric Power Regulatory Authority (SEPPRA) will soon be fully operational, allowing the provincial government to independently regulate the electricity supply in the province

DNA

KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah chaired a meeting of the Business Facilitation Coordination Committee (BFCC) to address the challenges faced by industries related to electricity and gas and emphasized the importance of the timely release of Rs33 billion subsidy packages similar to the 2020-2023 industrial support package and the provision of locally sourced gas to support the industrial sector, as mandated by Article 158 of the Constitution of Pakistan for the national interest. The meeting, held at the Chief Minister's House, included industrialists who raised significant concerns regarding electricity shortages, gas supply issues and power theft. The attendees included provincial ministers Syed Nasir Shah, Saeed Ghani, Jam Ikram, Karachi Mayor Murtaza Wahab, Secretary of Energy Musaddiq Khan, Commissioner of Karachi Hassan Naqvi, Secretary to the CM Raheem Shaikh, various provincial secretaries, the Managing Director of the Water Board, as well as representatives from K-Electric (KE), including CEO Monis Alvi, Chief Distribution Officer Sadia Dada, and Deputy MD of SSGC Syed Saeed Rizvi. Business community leaders, such as MNA Akhtiar Baig, Zubair Motiwala, Zubair Chayya, and Shabir Diwan, were also present at the meeting, a CM House communique said on Friday. The chief minister urged KE to immediately release the Rs 33 bil-

lion subsidy for industries, stating that industrial growth is crucial for strengthening Pakistan's economy. "The subsidy will help industries remain competitive and stimulate economic activity, ultimately benefiting the national economy," he asserted. Mr Shah announced that the Sindh Electric Power Regulatory Authority (SEPPRA) will soon be fully operational, allowing the provincial government to independently regulate the electricity supply in the province. "This step will enable us to address industrialists' concerns regarding electricity supply and pricing without unnecessary obstacles," he added. Industrialists welcomed this development, noting that a provincial regulatory authority could reduce reliance on federal agencies and potentially offer more favourable electricity rates. In response to the high cost of electricity, Murad Ali Shah revealed that the Sindh government was facilitating Chinese company Ming Yang Renewable in developing 350 MW and 75 MW hybrid renewable energy projects specifically for industries. "These projects will provide electricity at rates ranging from Rs 18 to Rs 25 per unit, significantly lower than the current Rs 60 per unit that industries must pay," he explained. This initiative aims to reduce the financial burden on industries, enabling them to increase production and create more employment opportunities. During the meeting, the industrialists expressed frustration over frequent electricity and gas load-shedding in industrial areas despite consistently paying their bills. They accused power

theft mafias of stealing electricity from Pole-Mounted Transformers (PMTs) located in industrial zones, which increases line losses and exacerbates power outages. They claimed that K-Electric (KE) deliberately enforced load-shedding in industrial areas to compensate for its own supply losses. They insisted that K-Electric must take stringent measures against power theft rather than penalising industries with load shedding. In response, K-Electric CEO Monis Alvi mentioned that the company has successfully reduced its line losses from 40 per cent to 15 per cent and is working to improve the situation further. The Chief Minister then instructed K-Electric to implement technical solutions to prevent industrial power theft and to consider separating PMTs for industrial and residential areas. They expressed concern about the natural gas shortage affecting production and expressed their willingness to use Thar coal for their boilers if a reliable transportation system were established. At this, the chief minister directed Energy Minister Nasir Shah to assess the coal demand from industries, assuring that the provincial government would arrange transportation once this demand was confirmed. "We will take necessary steps to facilitate industrialists in accessing Thar coal as an alternative energy source," he stated. He also committed to approaching the Federal Government to retain the exemption of sales tax on Thar coal for power generation when the sale of Thar coal for non-power generation begins.



ISLAMABAD: President of Malaysia Consultative Council of Islamic Organization (MAPIM) Haji Mohd Azmi Abd Hamid called on Chairman Parliamentary Committee on Kashmir Rana Muhammad Qasim Noon at Parliament House.

Meeting reviews projects for inclusion in ADP 2025-26

PESHAWAR: A meeting was held here with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Livestock, Fisheries and Cooperatives Fazal Hakeem Khan Yousafzai in the chair on Friday reviewed development projects to be included in the annual development programme (ADP) for the financial year 2025-26. In meeting Director General Livestock Extension Dr. Asal Khan, Director Livestock Extension Merged Districts Dr. Waheedullah Wazir, Director Livestock Research Dr. Khushro Kaleem and other relevant officers were also present. On this occasion, the provincial minister Fazal Hakeem directed to establish a livestock call center for better and prompt treatment of livestock and other matters in remote areas of the province. Under which the remote livestock farmers of the province will be able to benefit from the emergency centers established in the department. During the meeting, fifteen development projects worth billions of rupees to be launched under the Livestock Department Extension in the province were discussed. The projects under consideration also include a plan to establish a poultry hatchery to increase chicken production so that the province can become self-sufficient in the poultry sector. Similarly, a plan for the Katta Bachao Program is also being planned. Under this project, young cattle will be raised in government farms at the government level. This will increase meat production to the maximum.—APP

NRKNA hosts multi-religious session to promote interfaith harmony

ISLAMABAD: Scholars and religious leaders at a multi-religious session hosted by the National Rahmatullahi-Alameen Wa Khatamun Nabiyyin Authority (NRKNA) on Friday, emphasized the need to counter religious misinterpretations and group ideologies that foster division. They highlighted that the Seerah of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) offers clear guidance in addressing these challenges. The session brought together scholars and representatives from various religious traditions, including Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, the Bahai Faith, and the Kalash community. Additionally, postgrad-

uate students and faculty members specializing in interfaith studies attended, contributing to a rich and diverse discussion. Keynote addresses were delivered by Elena Dini, a communications specialist from Rome, Italy, and Dr. Abdul Basit Zafar, a comparative theology expert from Bonn, Germany. Dini underscored the importance of fostering genuine interfaith dialogue rooted in mutual respect and understanding. She stressed that theological debates, when approached with openness, can bridge gaps and cultivate global unity. Commending NRKNA's initiative, she lauded the platform as a vital space for constructive en-

agement across religious lines. Dr. Zafar, in his thought-provoking address, highlighted the role of inner contemplation in achieving societal peace. He elaborated on how spiritual introspection fosters empathy, patience, and understanding — virtues essential for a harmonious society. He urged individuals to reflect on their values and practice them collectively for a peaceful coexistence. Both speakers praised NRKNA's commitment to interfaith dialogue, emphasizing the importance of institutional support in fostering religious harmony. The session concluded with an engaging Q&A segment, where scholars, students,

Earthquake survivor conferred Pride of KP award

PESHAWAR: Aftab Ahmad, CEO of ASSORT TECH and a survivor of the 2005 Balakot earthquake, has been conferred with the Pride of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa award for his contributions to the IT sector, job creation, and philanthropy. The award was presented by Humayun Khan, Special Assistant to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Peshawar Agriculture University, part of the Metrix Pakistan Youth Summit. The recognition highlights Ahmad's role in economic development, education, and digital transformation. Ahmad's survival story is one of resilience and determination. During the devastating earthquake, nearly all his classmates lost their lives—out of his entire class, only three students survived, and he was one of them. This tragedy shaped his outlook on life, motivating him to rebuild not just for himself but for others as well. A native of Balakot, Mansehra, Aftab Ahmad has played a key role in establishing ASSORT TECH as a leading IT solutions provider in Pakistan. His company has created employment opportunities nationwide, empowering young professionals and contributing to the country's digital economy. Beyond his work in the IT sector, Ahmad is recognized for his philanthropic efforts, particularly in education. He has initiated programs to support orphaned children in Balakot.—APP

ISSI hosts roundtable on Kashmir with Malaysian civil society delegation

ISLAMABAD: The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted a high-level delegation from the Malaysian Consultative Council of Islamic Organization (MAPIM), led by its President, Mr. Mohd Azmi Bin Abd Hamid. A roundtable discussion was organized to evaluate the current status of the global movement for Jammu & Kashmir and explore strategies to highlight India's illegal occupation, its continued aggression against Kashmiris, and its denial of the right to self-determination, as enshrined in the UN Charter and relevant Security Council resolutions. The event was attended by academics,

researchers, diplomats, human rights activists, and youth mobilizers working on the issue. Dr. Khurram Abbas, Director of the India Study Centre at ISSI, welcomed the participants and introduced the visiting delegation. In his remarks on the occasion, Director General ISSI Ambassador Sohail Mahmood applauded MAPIM's commendable work under Mr. Azmi's leadership in advocating for the causes of the Muslim Ummah, particularly Palestine and Kashmir. He acknowledged MAPIM's efforts in drawing international attention to the plight of the Kashmiris and emphasized that the

delegation's visit to ISSI provided an opportunity to share insights as well as exchange views on the evolving global dynamics with reference to the Jammu and Kashmir dispute. Ambassador Sohail Mahmood emphasized that the Jammu and Kashmir dispute must be examined through legal, human rights, and peace and security perspectives. Legally, he asserted that the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination is enshrined in international law and UN resolutions, which India has historically evaded while now openly violating these obligations by claiming the territory as its 'integral part.—DNA

Islamabad gears up for Euro Village, Champions Trophy

ISLAMABAD: In preparation for the upcoming international events, Euro Village 2025 and the International Cricket Champions Trophy, Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) Muhammad Ali Randhawa held a high-level meeting with Inspector General (IG) Islamabad Police, Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi here Friday. The discussions centered on ensuring foolproof security, resolving traffic congestion and making parking arrangements during the events. The Euro Village 2025, a cultural festival organized by the European Union, and the International Cricket Champions Trophy are set to attract thousands of foreign delegates, cricket fans and local residents to the capital. With the city poised to host these prestigious events, the Islamabad administration and police are working tirelessly to ensure seamless arrangements. IG Islamabad Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi emphasized that the Islamabad Police is committed to providing top-tier security for the events. "We are taking all necessary measures to ensure the safety of foreign delegates and guests during their arrival and departure. Additionally, a comprehensive traffic management plan will be implemented to minimize inconvenience to citizens while maintaining smooth traffic flow," he stated. The IG also highlighted that a special traffic plan would be devised for the International Cricket Champions Trophy to accommodate the influx of visitors. Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa reiterated the administration's commitment to making the events a success. "We are fully prepared to welcome foreign guests and local residents with the best possible arrangements. The district administration, in collaboration with the Islamabad Police, will work round the clock to ensure the successful hosting of these international events," he said. Randhawa added that Deputy Commissioner Islamabad and relevant Assistant Commissioners would oversee administrative matters to ensure everything runs smoothly. The Euro Village 2025, a celebration of European culture, arts, and cuisine, is expected to draw significant attention alongside the cricket tournament, which will feature top teams from around the world. The dual events are seen as an opportunity to showcase Islamabad as a global city capable of hosting large-scale international gatherings. Residents of Islamabad have expressed optimism about the events, hoping they will boost the city's image and provide a platform for cultural exchange.—DNA



ISLAMABAD: A woman taking interest in beautiful red roses at F-6 Flowers Market as stuffed with different flowers in connection with Valentine Day in Federal Capital.

Punjab introduces Forensic Science Authority Act

LAHORE: The Punjab government has introduced the Punjab Forensic Science Authority Act 2024 in the Punjab Assembly, marking a significant step towards modernising forensic investigation systems in the province. A spokesperson for the Home Department Punjab said on Friday that under the proposed Act, the Punjab Forensic Science Agency will be elevated to the status of an Authority. The Punjab Forensic Science Authority Act 2024 provides a detailed definition of forensic science institution will be granted autonomy as an Authority. The Punjab Forensic Science Authority will be equipped with modern tools in line with the latest

field requirements. A special fund will also be established under the proposed Act for the "Punjab Forensic Science Authority." The chief minister Punjab will serve as the chairperson of the Authority and will appoint a vice-chairperson. Members of the Authority will include the secretary of Home Department, secretary Finance, secretary Law, secretary Planning & Development, secretary Public Prosecution, inspector general of Punjab Police, director general Forensic Science Authority and an expert each from the fields of audio-visual analysis, computer forensics, criminology, molecular sciences and pathology. According to the Act, the government of Punjab will appoint forensic experts as Authority members for a term of five years.

Under the new law, modern technology and equipment will enable forensic examination of all types of materials, documents and individuals brought in for forensic analysis. The Forensic Science Authority will present expert opinions and reports before relevant courts, tribunals and institutions. Following the approval of the Punjab Forensic Science Authority Act 2024, the Punjab Forensic Science Agency Act 2007 will be deemed repealed. The spokesperson added that the Provincial Cabinet has already approved the Punjab Forensic Science Authority Act 2024. He further mentioned that the Act has been referred to the Special Committee on Home Affairs of the Punjab Assembly.—APP

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Feb 04/Sri Lanka	National Day
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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



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Bomb Disposal.....15
Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad.....1122 & 16
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Hospitals

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RGH.....9290301-7
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RDA.....5555864
TMA.....5770886
Cantonment Board 9270151-3

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Cut in US aid to Afghanistan will have implications for Pakistan

The people of Afghanistan related with Pakistan in a way they did not with the people of any other neighbouring country, he added. Emphasizing the historical, cultural, and ethnic context of the Pak-Afghan relations, he urged the Government of Pakistan to also take a holistic sociocultural approach towards Afghanistan instead of treating it as a bureaucratic exercise. He countered the argument that Afghans did not like Pakistan

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Asif Durrani, Pakistan's former Special Representative for Afghanistan expressed serious concerns over the US decision to halt economic assistance to Afghanistan. While speaking at a roundtable discussion held at the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) here on Thursday, he shared that half of Afghans were dependent on international humanitarian assistance who might be forced to migrate to Pakistan because of extreme poverty with the stop to US economic assistance. "We need to be prepared for such an eventuality," he said. Ambassador Durrani further shared that the Taliban government had already informed its employees that they would not be getting salaries for the coming three months. Listing some positives coming out of the Taliban government, he mentioned that corruption and poppy cultivation had reduced but added that the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) had reported an increase of 19 per cent in poppy cultivation last year. He cautioned that poppy cultivation could rise further if the dire economic situation of Afghanistan remained unchanged. Ambassador Durrani shared that the immediate neighbours of Afghanistan and Russia were sustaining Afghanistan through currency swaps and border trade but warned that it was not enough for a full economic recovery of a country as large as Afghanistan.



Ambassador Durrani termed the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan as different from the relations either country had with any of its other neighbours. The people of Afghanistan related with Pakistan in a way they did not with the people of any other neighbouring country, he added. Emphasizing the historical, cultural, and ethnic context of the Pak-Afghan relations, he urged the Government of Pakistan to also take a holistic sociocultural approach towards Afghanistan instead of treating it

as a bureaucratic exercise. He countered the argument that Afghans did not like Pakistan. "If Afghans hate Pakistan, why do we issue 3,000 visas a day to Afghans?" he remarked. Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Aarish U. Khan, the Head of the Afghanistan Program at IRS, expressed his hope for improvement of economic relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Referring to the recent US announcement to rescind certain waivers to sanctions against Iran, including the ones accorded to the

Chabahar Port, he argued that it will make Afghanistan more reliant on Pakistan's ports for trade with the rest of the world. In his concluding remarks, President IRS Ambassador Jauhar Saleem emphasized the historical brotherly relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan and called on both the governments to tap into the potential of the people-to-people and business-to-business relations between the two countries rooted in the longstanding historical and cultural connections between the two countries.

Economic uplift efforts valuable but insufficient

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, the President of the Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, the President of All Karachi Industrial Alliance, the Chairman of the FPCCI Advisory Board, and the President and former provincial minister, Mian Zahid Hussain, said on Friday that the economic development efforts that are being made are valuable but not enough. He said it is disturbing to learn that corruption has been on the rise in Pakistan, and this should be taken seriously. Mian Zahid Hussain said that the government's operations must be digitized to eradicate corruption and pave the way for national development. Talking to the business community, the veteran business leader said that vigorous efforts are also needed to eliminate corruption to make sustainable development possible.

The business leader said that corruption has hollowed out society and that strict measures are necessary to combat it. In the current situation, Transparency International's report on the increase in corruption in Pakistan is worrying and should be noted. Mian Zahid Hussain said that according to the Corruption Perception Index recently released by Transparency International, corruption has increased in Pakistan. —APP

Naqvi oversees arrangements for Jashn-e-Baharan Festival

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has overseen the arrangements for Jashn-e-Baharan, a vibrant festival celebrating Pakistan's culture and heritage, scheduled to take place on February 25-27 in Islamabad. The festival will feature traditional food stalls offering Pakistani cuisine from across the country. Cultural performances will include Khattak, Kalash, and Kathak dance shows, as well as performances by the Rangers' camel squadron and archery teams. Pakistan Army bands will also perform, adding to the festive atmosphere. A spectacular fireworks show will light up the night sky. Interior Minister highlighted that for the first time, innovative programs will be introduced, breaking away from traditional events. He stated that the festival aims to showcase Pakistan's rich culture and heritage. The diplomatic community, CEOs of foreign companies in Pakistan, and the general public are invited to attend. Mohsin Naqvi inspected the rehearsal of the candlelight parade at Police Lines. —APP

Victoria talks about pertinence of China in Kashmir resolution

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Renowned British historian and author Victoria Schofield emphasized the complexities of the Jammu and Kashmir issue, urging policymakers and scholars to take a holistic and well-informed approach to understand the region. In a recent discussion held at the Institute of Regional Studies, Schofield underscored the historical and geopolitical intricacies that have shaped the conflict, cautioning against simplistic narratives. "The Jammu and Kashmir region has always been at a crossroads—geographically,

historically, and politically," Schofield stated. "While the Kashmir Valley remains central to the conflict, we must not ignore the complexities of the entire state, which also include the aspirations of the people in Gilgit-Baltistan and AJK." She reiterated that people in Gilgit-Baltistan don't consider themselves as Kashmiri. Addressing the impact of the 2019 abrogation of Article 370 by the Indian government, Schofield noted that this move has significantly altered the discourse surrounding the region. It was indeed a unilateral decision of India which negated the aspirations of the people of Indian Ad-

ministered J&K. Schofield also discussed the growing role of China in the region, particularly in Gilgit-Baltistan, highlighting Beijing's strategic interests through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). She suggested that China's involvement may eventually influence the resolution process, given its vested economic and territorial interests. On the issue of terminology and political representation, Schofield advised scholars and media professionals to use precise language to avoid misinterpretations. "It is crucial to recognize the diverse political dynamics within different parts of Jammu and

Kashmir. The aspirations of the people in these regions vary, and their voices must be included in any meaningful resolution process," she asserted. Concluding on a cautiously optimistic note, Schofield encouraged continued study and engagement on the issue, acknowledging that while peace prospects appear dim at present, shifting geopolitical dynamics could pave the way for renewed dialogue. "The tectonic plates of diplomacy may have shifted in recent years, but history has shown that situations evolve. It is imperative to be prepared for opportunities when they arise," she remarked.

HEC issues revised curricula for Zoology degrees

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan has issued revised curricula for Associate, Bachelor, and Master degrees in Zoology, developed in collaboration with the Pakistan Academy of Sciences. The National Curriculum Review Committee (NCRC), chaired by Prof. Dr. Amina Zuberi of Quaid-i-Azam University,

Islamabad, with Mr. Muhammad Ali Baig, Deputy Director at HEC as Secretary, developed the updated curricula. The committee included experts from leading universities including Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Federal Urdu University, Karachi, Government College University, Faisalabad, Government College University, Lahore, Jinnah University for Women, Karachi, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islama-

bad, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Sheringal, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Muzaffarabad, University of Baltistan, Skardu, University of Peshawar, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, University of Swat, University of the Punjab, Lahore, and University of Veterinary & Animal Sciences, Lahore. The revised Associate Degree requires 71 credit hours, while BS Zoology

now has 137 credit hours. New major courses include Diversity of Invertebrates, Diversity of Chordates, Animal Ecology, Marine Biology, and Fisheries & Aquaculture, whereas, interdisciplinary additions include Computational Biology, Microbiology & Immunology, Molecular Biology, Biochemistry, Genetics, Plant Physiology & Ecology, and Biostatistics. The BS Zoology curriculum also offers specializations in Animal Microbiology, Animal Physiology, Biotechnology, Entomology, Fisheries & Aquaculture, Mammalogy, Marine Biology, Parasitology, and Wildlife Biology.

1,000 Pak agri graduates to get training in China

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for National Food Security & Research, Rana Tanveer Hussain chaired a high-level meeting to review progress on Prime Minister's Initiative for Short-Term Training of 1,000 Agricultural Graduates in China. The initiative aims to enhance the skills of young professionals in nine priority areas of modern agriculture through three- and six-month training programs at leading Chinese institutions. According to Gwadar Pro, the first batch of 300 students is set to depart for China in March, 2025, followed by a second batch, while the selection process for the final 300 students is underway. The training will be conducted at Northwest Agriculture & Forestry University and Yangling Vocational & Technical College, Shaanxi Province, China. During the meeting, Minister Rana Tanveer Hussain emphasized the need to speed up the dispatch process and ensure maximum facilitation for students. The ministry is actively coordinating with Chinese authorities, stakeholders, and financial institutions to streamline logistical arrangements. The Pakistani government has ensured merit-based selection, with 10% additional quota for students from Balochistan. The meeting also discussed the Joint Working Group meeting with China, scheduled for next month, where further discussions on Pakistan-China collaboration in agricultural education and training will take place. This initiative will equip young agricultural professionals with modern knowledge in mechanization, biotechnology, AI, irrigation systems, and value chain development, strengthening Pakistan's agriculture sector for future growth. —DNA

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Briefs

Faithful seek forgiveness, visit graveyards at Shab-e-Barat

ISLAMABAD: Shab-e-Barat, the night of forgiveness and blessings, was observed with great religious zeal and reverence across the country, including the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Faithful gathered in mosques and homes to offer special prayers, seek divine blessings, and ask for forgiveness on this sacred night on Thursday night (February 13-14). The night holds significant spiritual value in Islamic tradition, as it is believed to be the night when destinies are written, and Allah Almighty's mercy is abundantly bestowed upon the believers. Faithful spent the night in prayer, recitation of the Holy Quran, and supplication, seeking absolution for their sins and the well-being of their loved ones. In major mosques across the country, special congregational prayers and religious gatherings were arranged. Religious scholars delivered sermons emphasizing the importance of self-purification, charity, and seeking forgiveness. They also highlighted the significance of Shab-e-Barat in Islamic teachings, urging people to reflect on their deeds and strive for righteousness. A large number of people also visited graveyards to pay homage to their departed loved ones. They offered Fateha and placed flowers on graves, praying for the eternal peace of their ancestors and relatives. Graveyards in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Lahore, Karachi, and other cities witnessed a high influx of visitors as people engaged in acts of remembrance and devotion. The authorities concerned ensured smooth security arrangements, with police personnel deployed around major mosques and graveyards to manage crowds and maintain order. Additionally, municipal administrations took measures to keep graveyards clean and well-lit, facilitating visitors during the late hours.—APP

Kitchen Items' prices decrease by 0.04pc

ISLAMABAD: The weekly inflation, measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), went down by 0.04 percent for the combined consumption groups during the week ended on February 13 and decelerated to 0.98 percent on a year-on-year (YoY) basis, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday. According to the PBS data, the SPI for the week under review in the above-mentioned group was recorded at 318.26 points as compared to 318.38 points during the past week. As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the combined consumption group in the week under review witnessed an increase of 0.98 per cent. The weekly SPI with the base year 2015-16 =100 covers 17 urban centres and 51 essential items for all expenditure groups. The SPI for the lowest consumption group of up to Rs 17,732 witnessed decrease of 0.23 per cent and went down to 308.24 points from last week's 308.96 points. The SPI for consumption groups of Rs 17,732 to 22,888; Rs 22,889-29,517; Rs 29,518-44,175 and above Rs 44,175, declined by 0.17 percent, 0.11 percent, 0.05 percent and 0.02 percent respectively.—APP

FJWU-Gallery 21 ink MoU to elevate Art and Culture in Education

The signing ceremony was attended by representatives from FJWU's Office of Research, Innovation & Commercialization (ORIC), the Department of Fine Arts, and The Gallery 21

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Fatima Jinnah Women University (FJWU) had inked an Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with The Gallery 21 to promote art and cultural exchanges. This partnership aims to bridge the gap between academia and the creative industry, offering students enhanced opportunities to engage with contemporary art and gain professional mentorship. The signing ceremony in this regard

Azerbaijan, Pak forge partnership for green energy corridor

The partnership between Azerbaijan and Pakistan marks a pivotal moment in the global effort to combat climate change

DNA

ISLAMABAD: In a significant move towards combating climate change and promoting sustainable energy, Azerbaijan and Pakistan have agreed to collaborate on renewable energy production, transmission, and trade. This partnership was formalized during a high-level meeting between Azerbaijan's Ambassador to Pakistan, Ali Alizadeh, and Pakistan's Coordinator to the Prime Minister for Climate Change, Romina Khurshid Alam, held here on Friday. The discussions centered on the urgent need to transition to sustainable energy sources to meet global decarbonization goals. Both nations emphasized the importance of green technologies, such as green hydrogen and green ammonia, in reducing carbon emissions and enhancing energy security. Green hydrogen, produced using renewable energy, offers a clean alternative for fuel and energy storage, while green ammonia technology



ogy provides a cost-effective solution to reduce reliance on fossil fuels. Romina Khurshid Alam highlighted the critical

role of regional collaboration in realizing the potential of green energy technologies. She stressed that forming a strategic

alliance between Azerbaijan and Pakistan could lead to the joint development and transmission of green energy, essential for

ensuring energy security and promoting a greener, more sustainable future for the region. Ambassador Ali Alizadeh underscored the significance of the Green Energy Corridor, a platform that currently includes Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. This initiative aims to create a renewable energy pathway that benefits both domestic markets and global partners. He described the collaboration as a major step towards achieving regional energy integration, fostering sustainable economic development, and ensuring a clean energy transition. Alam expressed Pakistan's keen interest in exploring potential participation in the Green Energy Corridor. She noted that this initiative would not only enhance the bilateral relationship between Pakistan and Azerbaijan but also help both nations meet their climate commitments for environmental sustainability. The partnership between Azerbaijan and Pakistan marks a pivotal moment in the global effort to combat climate change.

WWF-Pakistan calls for urgent action to save endangered pangolins

"The time to act is now. If we fail to protect pangolins, we risk losing them forever," the organization stated in its press release

ISLAMABAD: On the occasion of World Pangolin Day, observed on the third Saturday of February, the World Wide Fund for Nature-Pakistan (WWF-Pakistan) has issued a stark warning about the rapid decline of the Indian pangolin (Manis crassicaudata) population in Pakistan. The organization has urged immediate action to combat poaching, illegal trade, habitat loss, and other threats pushing this unique species toward extinction. The Indian pangolin, the only pangolin species found in Pakistan, is classified as endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List. According to WWF-Pakistan, the species has disappeared from 80% of its former range in the Potohar region, and its global population is predicted to decline by 50% over the next two decades if no action is taken. Pangolins face multiple threats in Pakistan, including poaching for their scales, which are highly valued in traditional medicine and illegal wildlife trade. Urbanization, agricultural expansion, and deforestation have further reduced their natural habitats. Additionally, Pakistan serves as a transit route for the international smuggling of pangolin scales, primarily to China and Southeast Asia, exacerbating the crisis. Despite being protected under federal and provincial wildlife laws and listed in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) since 2016, which bans all international trade of the species, enforcement remains a significant challenge. To address these challenges, WWF-Pakistan has proposed several measures, including strengthening law enforcement to halt illegal trade and poaching. Increasing penalties for wildlife crimes, enhancing monitoring of trade routes to prevent smuggling. Conducting scientific studies to assess pangolin population trends and distribution. Establishing community-based Pangolin Protection Zones (PPZs) in key areas like Rawalpindi and Mirpur. Launching reforestation projects and habitat protection initiatives in critical regions such as the Potohar Plateau, Margalla Hills, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Muhammad Janshed Iqbal Chaudhry, Senior Manager Research and Conservation at WWF-Pakistan, emphasized the ecological importance of pangolins. "These species play a vital role in maintaining ecological balance. We must combat illegal wildlife trade, protect their habitats, and ensure a future where these unique creatures can thrive," he said. WWF-Pakistan has already taken significant steps to conserve pangolins. The organization has collaborated with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Punjab Wildlife Departments to implement the "Saving the Pangolin of Pakistan" project. Surveys to map species distribution in KP have been completed, and a community-based Pangolin Protection Zone is being established in the southern districts of the province. Additionally, WWF-Pakistan has partnered with the Tikki Hywood Foundation from Zimbabwe to install radio transmitters for studying pangolin habitats and establish a rehabilitation center. The organization has also implemented the Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) in key pangolin habitats and developed SAFE Systems strategies to manage human-pangolin conflicts. WWF-Pakistan has called on provincial wildlife departments, law enforcement agencies, and local communities to join hands in protecting this critically endangered species. "The time to act is now. If we fail to protect pangolins, we risk losing them forever," the organization stated in its press release.—DNA

Women Gala celebrates women empowerment

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Women Gala (Bahar Rang) is set to bring a vibrant celebration of women empowerment, culture and entrepreneurship to the federal capital, making it a hub of culture, creativity, and commerce on February 15 and 16. This two-day extravaganza will bring together families, entrepreneurs, and community members to celebrate the women empowerment and local craftsmanship in a festive atmosphere. Under the inspiring slogan "Buy from your own-Apoun Sey Khareedain", the event promotes homegrown talent and businesses, encouraging the community to support Pakistani women entrepreneurs and artisans. The visitors can explore over 120 women-owned businesses, offering a diverse range of products, from fashion and jewelry to home decor and organic goods. A Food Arena will feature a variety of cuisines, showcasing traditional Pakistani flavors alongside international delights. The event will highlight the handmade Pakistani products, providing artisans with a platform to exhibit their craftsmanship. Families and children can enjoy interactive games, storytelling sessions, and creative workshops, while live entertainment, folk dance, and musical performances will add to the festive spirit. Entrepreneurs will also have the opportunity to network and grow their businesses, making the gala a valuable platform for professional and personal development. This family-friendly event is expected to attract a large audience from across Islamabad, offering a safe, enjoyable, and culturally enriching experience. Beyond shopping and entertainment, the gala serves as a step toward economic independence for women and strengthens community bonds. With its perfect blend of business, culture, and recreation, the Islamabad Women Gala is not just an event but it's a movement toward empowerment, local excellence, and economic sustainability.—DNA

AIUO Matric/FA exams to begin from March 3

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIUO) will hold annual exams (Autumn 2024) of its Matric, FA and I.Com programs simultaneously across all four provinces, including Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu & Kashmir from March 3. The date sheet has been made available on the university's website www.aiou.edu.pk, while roll number slips are being uploaded to students' CMS portals, said a press release on Friday. According to date sheet, the exams will continue uninterrupted from March 3 to March 28. There will be Eid-ul-Fitr holidays from March 29 to April 2. After Eid, the first exam will be held on April 3, and the examinations will conclude on April 11.—APP

SSP directs to avoid unnecessary checks on family vehicles

ISLAMABAD: Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations, Muhammad Shoaib Khan, had directed officers to adopt a professional approach, avoid unnecessary checks on family vehicles, and ensure a swift response to emergency calls. A public relations officer told APP on Friday that SSP Shoaib Khan issued these directives while briefing officers and personnel of the Quick Response Force (QRF) in the City Zone. SP City Zone and SP Dolphin were also present at the session. SSP Shoaib emphasized that professionalism must take precedence over traditional policing methods and urged officers to act promptly on incident-related calls to ensure a swift response. Officers were also reminded to perform their duties with honesty and integrity to curb crime in the federal capital. "Our responsibility is to safeguard the lives and property of citizens," Shoaib stated, stressing the importance of courteous conduct during security checks. "We must make people feel safe rather than uneasy," SSP Shoaib further reiterated that Islamabad Police would continue efforts to uphold law and order while ensuring public confidence in law enforcement remains strong.—APP

Cambridge education system to be introduced in FDE colleges: Naz

Parliamentary Secretary informed the National Assembly that the Higher Education Commission (HEC) is not considering any proposal for establishing a university exclusively dedicated to the field of Architecture

ISLAMABAD: Parliamentary Secretary for Federal Education and Professional Training, National Heritage, and Culture, Farah Naz Akbar, informed the National Assembly on Friday that the Cambridge Education System is being introduced in Federal Directorate of Education (FDE)-owned colleges. During the question hour, she said that the initiative is being launched as a pilot project and will be expanded to other institutions in phases. She added that the plan is currently in its initial stages, with a few selected educational institutions under the FDE set to implement

the system first. Meanwhile, Parliamentary Secretary for Federal Education and Professional Training, National Heritage, and Culture, Farah Naz Akbar, informed the National Assembly that the Higher Education Commission (HEC) is not considering any proposal for establishing a university exclusively dedicated to the field of Architecture. Responding to a question during the session, she said that no university or higher education institution (HEI) in the country offers a single-field or monodisciplinary program. Instead, HEIs provide a diverse range of disciplines and degree pro-

grams, including Architecture, as permitted by their respective Acts and Charters. She further highlighted that the Pakistan Council of Architects and Town Planners (PCATP), established under an ordinance in 1983, serves as the regulatory body for accrediting professional degree programs in Architecture and Town Planning. She said that it is mandatory for any institution wishing to launch an Architecture or Town Planning program to obtain a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from PCATP before announcing admissions.—APP

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China's AI and 'open source'

THE breakthroughs in China's artificial intelligence (AI) technology have sparked ongoing reverberations internationally. Sam Altman, chief executive of OpenAI, publicly praised DeepSeek in recent days, saying it did some "nice work." In a surprising 180-degree shift, he also expressed a desire to "work with China." At the recently concluded Paris AI Action Summit, the French startup Mistral, also using an open-source model, was placed under high expectations. Moreover, when news broke of Apple collaborating with Alibaba to develop localized AI functions, both companies experienced a surge in their stock prices. The fact is, China's AI companies' "embrace of open source" has not only paved new paths for their own growth but has also spurred demand for cross-border AI collaborations among enterprises. It is driving the global AI ecosystem to transform toward "open-source inclusivity." By offering some of its models for free, DeepSeek has ensured that the digital dividends of the AI era are shared equitably among all internet users. This decentralized, open-source strategy stands in stark contrast to the closed ecosystems, high resource barriers, and monopolization by a few players that have characterized AI technology in Western countries. It aligns with the global process of technological democratization. Silicon Valley venture capitalist Marc Andreessen wrote on social media platform X that as open-source, DeepSeek R1 is "a profound gift to the world." In recent years, China has been actively developing multiple national-level AI open innovation platforms, providing open access and shared computing resources. It can be said that the success of "open-source" large models is deeply rooted in the rich soil of "open source." We observe that the development of AI technology follows a spiral progression of "open source-innovation-iteration," a logic that also underpins global technological and economic development. Today, from DeepSeek's open-source ecosystem to Baidu's Apollo autonomous driving open platform, from cost reduction and efficiency improvement in the pharmaceutical industry to collaborative innovation among multinational enterprises, these practices collectively illustrate a fundamental truth: The future of AI belongs to openness and sharing. Open source and inclusivity can certainly become a model for collaborative win-win scenarios in the global AI field, empowering and promoting sustainable development in the era of intelligence. On February 12, The Conversation, a news website based in Australia, published an article stating that Chinese enterprises' embrace of open-source AI "promises to reshape the AI landscape almost overnight." The key drivers behind China's rise in AI, in addition to being "fast" and "collaborative," also include being "market-driven." Thanks to China's robust industrial supply chain, AI technology is being implemented at an astonishing pace. This is evident in the recent wave of adoption sparked by DeepSeek in China: Over a dozen local cloud-based AI chip manufacturers have announced compatibility or launched DeepSeek model services, several cloud computing giants have pledged support for DeepSeek, and industries such as telecommunications, automotive, brokerage,



Gaza and strategic interests

THE struggle over influence in Gaza reflects a broader geopolitical contest between global and regional actors, including Türkiye, "Israel", the United States, and various Arab states. This competition is driven by a myriad of security, economic, and ideological factors, with each actor seeking to advance its own strategic interests. Gaza, governed by the Palestinian Resistance—particularly Hamas—holds immense significance in these geopolitical dynamics, serving as both a focal point of resistance against Israeli occupation and a battleground for competing regional powers. Türkiye: Expanding influence through support for Palestine Under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Türkiye has positioned itself as a key supporter of Hamas and the Palestinian Resistance, aiming to enhance its influence in the Arab and Islamic world. By backing Hamas politically and financially, Ankara seeks to challenge Western dominance in the region and counter Israeli policies. Türkiye's stance on Gaza serves multiple purposes: it bolsters Erdoğan's image as a champion of the Palestinian cause, strengthens Türkiye's role as a leading Muslim power, and establishes leverage in broader Middle Eastern geopolitics. However, while Türkiye vocally supports Gaza, it also balances relations with Western powers to maintain its own strategic interests. For the Zionist entity, Gaza represents a security challenge, as it is home to armed Resistance movements that actively oppose Israeli occupation. Consequently, Tel Aviv's primary objective is to weaken the Palestinian Resistance through military aggression, economic blockade, and diplomatic pressure. "Israel" seeks to prevent any political shift in Gaza that might lead to the emergence of a unified Palestinian front, fearing this could strengthen the broader struggle for Palestinian liberation. With unwavering support from the United States and other Western allies, "Israel" employs military operations, sanctions, and international lobbying to suppress Hamas and maintain control over Gaza. As "Israel's" most steadfast ally, the United States considers the Palestinian Resistance in Gaza a threat to its regional hegemony. Washington provides extensive military aid and diplomatic backing to "Israel", to ensure its ability to suppress Palestinian Resistance and maintain dominance in the region. In addition, Washington supports regional actors who oppose Hamas, including certain Arab governments, in an effort to weaken Resistance forces and maintain control over Gaza's geopolitical trajectory. Arab states remain divided on their approach to Gaza. Some, like Egypt and Jordan, view the situation through a security lens, fearing instability along their borders. Egypt, which shares a border with Gaza, has historically played a mediating role, often facilitating ceasefires. In contrast, Qatar has positioned itself as a key financial supporter of Gaza, using humanitarian aid as a means to assert its influence in Palestinian affairs. By aligning with Türkiye, Qatar strengthens its role as a regional power invested in the Palestinian cause. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, prioritizes countering Iran's influence in the region and has increasingly aligned itself with "Israel". Rather than supporting Hamas, Riyadh focuses on normalization with Tel Aviv, seeing this as a means to secure its broader geopolitical and economic ambitions.

Cholistan jeep rally: Adventure, culture & heritage

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



Since its inception, the Cholistan Jeep Rally has grown significantly, becoming one of Pakistan's most prominent desert racing events. Held annually, it serves as a vital platform to highlight the unique geographical landscape of the Cholistan Desert, attracting both national and international attention. The rally not only tests the skill and endurance of drivers but also highlights the resilience and adaptability required to navigate the challenging desert terrain. Beyond the thrill of competition, the rally plays a key role

THE 20th annual Cholistan Jeep Rally is scheduled to take place from February 14 to 16, 2025, at the historic Derawar Fort. This highly anticipated event will draw participants and spectators from across Pakistan, with over 100 competitors expected to take part. More than just a sporting event, the rally is a celebration of the rich cultural heritage and history of South Punjab, bringing together sports enthusiasts, cultural admirers and adventure seekers. Since its inception, the Cholistan Jeep Rally has grown significantly, becoming one of Pakistan's most prominent desert racing events. Held annually, it serves as a vital platform to highlight the unique geographical landscape of the Cholistan Desert, attracting both national and international attention. The rally not only tests the skill and endurance of drivers but also highlights the resilience and adaptability required to navigate the challenging desert terrain. Beyond the thrill of competition, the rally plays a key role in promoting the cultural and historical identity of South Punjab. The selection of Derawar Fort as the venue emphasizes the organizers' commitment to blending sports with cultural appreciation. By hosting the event at this historic site, the rally draws attention to Pakistan's ancient and medieval history, encouraging efforts toward heritage preservation and tourism development. The 20th International Cholistan Desert Rally will feature a demanding 500-kilometer course through the shifting sands and rugged terrain of the Cholistan Desert. The challenging landscape, marked by dunes, hard tracks and sudden elevation changes, will test the technical skills and strategic planning of participants. Competitors will race in various vehicle categories, catering to different levels of expertise and technical specifications. These categories are expected to include stock and modified 4x4 vehicles, motorbikes and potentially even electric and hybrid vehicles as motorsport technology evolves. This diversity ensures inclusivity, attracting both experienced rally drivers and newcomers aiming to establish themselves in off-road racing. Given the scale of the event, security and logistical preparations are critical. Law enforcement agencies, including the police and other security forces, will ensure the safety of participants and visitors. Measures such as checkpoints, surveillance and emergency response units will be deployed along the

race route. Additionally, authorities will coordinate with medical teams to provide immediate assistance in case of accidents or injuries. Logistical planning involves participant registration, vehicle inspections, technical checks and medical assessments, all of which are essential to maintaining safety standards and ensuring compliance with regulations. While the jeep rally is the main attraction, the accompanying cultural and recreational activities make the event a holistic experience for visitors. A variety of cultural events have been planned to complement the rally, offering attendees a chance to engage with the region's traditions and artistic heritage. Highlights include a camel race, a centuries-old tradition of desert communities and traditional dance performances by local artists in vibrant attire. These performances provide a glimpse into the cultural richness of South Punjab. A cultural night featuring folk music will further immerse visitors in the region's musical heritage. The festivities will conclude with a fireworks display, adding a celebratory touch to the event. Additionally, an exhibition showcasing local handicrafts, textiles and cuisine will offer artisans and entrepreneurs a platform to present their work, supporting the local economy. The Cholistan Jeep Rally is expected to have a significant economic impact on the region, particularly in terms of tourism and local business growth. As one of Pakistan's largest desert rallies, the event attracts a substantial number of domestic and international tourists. The influx of visitors boosts revenue for the local hospitality industry, including hotels, restaurants and transportation services. The rally also serves as a platform for business networking and investment opportunities. With growing corporate sponsorships and media coverage, the event has the potential to attract further investments to South Punjab, particularly in adventure tourism, eco-tourism and cultural heritage conservation. Small businesses, especially those dealing in local handicrafts and cuisine, benefit from the increased footfall, helping sustain traditional craftsmanship and culinary arts. The rally also creates temporary employment opportunities in event management, security, hospitality and media production, fostering community engagement as local residents participate in various aspects of the event. A notable addition to this year's festivities

is a special gathering aimed at promoting knowledge and literature. This intellectual forum will encourage discussions on the historical and cultural narratives of the Cholistan region, fostering greater awareness and appreciation of its heritage. Scholars, historians and literary figures will participate, offering insights into the socio-cultural evolution of South Punjab and its relevance today. Panel discussions, poetry recitals and book launches focusing on regional history, folklore and literature will be key features of this gathering, aligning with broader efforts to integrate cultural heritage with academic discourse.

As the Cholistan Jeep Rally continues to grow in scale and popularity, there is potential for further enhancements to elevate its global standing. Incorporating technological advancements, such as GPS tracking and live-streaming, could enhance spectator engagement and provide real-time updates for global audiences. The event could also attract greater international participation, drawing rally enthusiasts and professional teams from around the world. Strengthening collaborations with international motorsport bodies could align the rally with global standards, potentially making it part of international off-road racing circuits. Environmental sustainability is another critical consideration. Given the fragile ecosystem of the Cholistan Desert, implementing eco-friendly measures such as waste management, reduced carbon emissions and awareness campaigns on desert conservation is essential. Promoting sustainable tourism alongside motorsports can ensure the event's long-term viability without compromising the region's ecological balance. The 20th Cholistan Jeep Rally promises to be a landmark event, transcending sports to become a multifaceted celebration of culture, history and adventure. With its challenging racecourse, vibrant cultural performances and economic opportunities, the rally is set to leave a lasting impact on the region. By blending tradition with modernity, the event highlights the richness of South Punjab's heritage while fostering tourism and economic growth. As preparations continue, excitement builds for another successful edition. Whether as a competitor, spectator, or cultural enthusiast, the Cholistan Jeep Rally offers something for everyone, making it a nationally significant event that truly embodies the spirit of Pakistan's desert heartland.

The crumbling pillars: Pakistan's medical system on the brink of collapse

Dr Imran Yousaf

This has led to widespread unemployment, underemployment, and frustration among medical professionals. At the same time, the perception of doctors in society has undergone a drastic shift over the last two decades. What was once considered a noble profession dedicated to serving the community has been tainted by materialism, skepticism, and unrealistic societal expectations

PAKISTAN'S medical system is on the verge of collapse, with a growing mismatch between the number of medical graduates and job availability. Every year, thousands of doctors enter the field, but the healthcare system lacks the capacity to absorb them. This has led to widespread unemployment, underemployment, and frustration among medical professionals. At the same time, the perception of doctors in society has undergone a drastic shift over the last two decades. What was once considered a noble profession dedicated to serving the community has been tainted by materialism, skepticism, and unrealistic societal expectations. False beliefs and misconceptions have undermined the trust between doctors and the public, turning medicine into a transactional service rather than a vocation rooted in compassion and commitment. Beyond the visible challenges lies an even greater unseen crisis. The backlog of unemployed doctors and the absence of long-term planning to integrate them into the workforce is a ticking time bomb. If the current trends continue, Pakistan will face a situation

where an oversupply of trained medical professionals will meet a healthcare system incapable of utilizing them effectively. This looming catastrophe remains largely unrecognized, much like the submerged portion of an iceberg—hidden from immediate sight but devastating in scale. Despite the clear warning signs, there are no structured programs in place to prevent this profession from spiraling further into crisis. The imbalance in the medical profession is a reflection of a broader societal disequilibrium. Public hospitals are overwhelmed, understaffed, and poorly funded, making quality healthcare inaccessible for a vast majority of the population. Meanwhile, private hospitals operate as businesses, catering only to those who can afford their exorbitant fees. The disparity in medical education is equally concerning. Private medical colleges charge exorbitant tuition fees, making it nearly impossible for middle-class families to afford medical education for their children. Even after years of financial sacrifice, these graduates struggle to find stable employment. The divide between government and private hos-

pital setups has also created deep-rooted complexities within the medical community, leading to resentment and professional conflicts. This situation remains unaddressed, Pakistan's healthcare system will eventually break down completely. The consequences will not just affect doctors but will extend to the entire population, leading to an even greater crisis in public health. A failing system will force talented professionals to seek opportunities abroad, further depriving the country of its skilled workforce. Urgent reforms are needed to bridge these gaps before the system reaches the point of no return. The government must take immediate steps to create employment opportunities for new doctors, regulate medical college fees, and ensure that medical training remains standardized across all institutions. A public-private partnership in healthcare can help balance the disparity between different hospital setups, while public awareness campaigns are needed to restore the respect and dignity of the medical profession. Without these measures, the future of healthcare in Pakistan is destined for an inevitable collapse.

Briefs

Pakistan's reference in joint India-US statement...

FROM PAGE 01
The spokesperson reiterated Pakistan's commitment to contributing constructively to regional and global efforts to promote peace and stability and bringing the fight against terrorism to its logical conclusion. He also expressed Pakistan's concerns over the planned transfer of advanced military technologies to India as it could cause military imbalances in the region and undermine strategic stability. He urged the international partners to take a holistic and objective view of the issues of peace and security in South Asia and refrain from endorsing positions that are one-sided and divorced from ground realities. Apprising the media of a boat tragedy in Libya involving Pakistani nationals, he said that so far 16 dead bodies had been recovered, and the Pakistani nationality of the victims had been confirmed based on their passports. "There are 37 survivors, including one in the hospital and 33 in police custody. Around 10 Pakistanis were reported missing in the accident, and three of the survivors are in Tripoli and are being looked after by the embassy."

India involved in smuggling...

FROM PAGE 01
four Indian IEDs were recovered from the Battal sector and Rawalakot. On February 12, Indian forces also violated the ceasefire in Deva and Bagasar sectors. Pakistan has protested to India over these destabilising actions and the movement of IEDs, the AJK minister said, adding that Islamabad had also shared evidence of India's activities with the United Nations. Nour further accused Indian forces of conducting false flag operations and staged encounters to justify their actions. He also said that India uses its military resources to smuggle narcotics and arms across the border, contributing to regional instability. On the other hand, sharing information about Indian forces and intelligence agencies' involvement in terror activities and ceasefire violations, the security sources told The News that two Pakistani security forces personnel got wounded as Indian military personnel committed ceasefire violations at Bagasar and Deva sectors along the LoC on February 12.

Justice Mansoor says 'not...'

FROM PAGE 01
"writing letters on every issue containing critical remarks" and "leaking it to the media". However, the premier's adviser clarified his statement days later, saying that his remarks about filing a reference against the judges were neither an announcement nor a threat. Federal Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar also further elucidated that the premier's aide never talked about filing a reference against the judges except for presenting his point of view on "misconduct" by some of the judges amid growing tensions over the nomination and transfer of senior jurists.

CJP administers oath to...

FROM PAGE 01
ex-PhC chief justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim, whose appointments had been approved by President Asif Ali Zardari. Meanwhile, CJP Afridi also administered an oath to Justice Mian Gul Hassan Aurangzeb as an acting apex court judge. The Ministry of Law and Justice had notified the elevation of these six judges on Thursday after their appointment by the Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP) and the president's approval. Separately, Sindh Governor Kamran Tessori administered the oath to acting SHC Chief Justice Junaid Ghaffar in an oath-taking ceremony in Karachi. His appointment was also notified by the law ministry.



ISLAMABAD: Justice Yahya Afridi, Chief Justice of Pakistan administering the oath of offices to Justice Muhammad Hashim Khan Kakar, Chief Justice, High Court of Balochistan, Justice Muhammad Shafi Siddiqui, Chief Justice High Court of Sindh, Justice Salahuddin Panhwar, Senior Puisne Judge, High Court of Sindh, Justice Shakeel Ahmad, Judge, Peshawar High Court, Justice Aamer Farooq, Chief Justice, Islamabad High Court and Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim, Chief Justice, Peshawar High Court as Judges of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. — DNA

Mbappe to return to France squad in March

Mbappe missed Nations League squads in October, Nov after joining Real Madrid in July

PARIS: France coach Didier Deschamps sees Zinedine Zidane as a "natural" candidate to take over when he steps down from the national team. Deschamps announced last month that he will stop after the 2026 World Cup, ending a successful reign which began in 2012 and saw France win the 2018 World Cup and reach the 2022 final. Speculation has been high — even before Deschamps made his announcement — that Zidane would take over eventually. Many see the former midfielder great as the people's choice and Deschamps does not disagree. "Zizou (Zidane) is a very good candidate, a natural and an expected one," Deschamps said in an interview with sports daily L'Equipe published Friday. "But then again, I don't know if he will want it."

The 52-year-old Zidane has not coached since ending his second spell in charge of Real Madrid, leading the Spanish giant to three Champions League and two La Liga titles. Zidane and Deschamps played together in midfield — as magical creator and tough enforcer — when Les Bleus won the 1998 World Cup and the European Championship two years later. France lost to Spain at the semifinal stage of last year's Euros, where Kylian Mbappé broke his nose and failed to score enough goals. "But at the Euro (Mbappé) wasn't the only one," Deschamps said. "Most of the attacking players weren't at their best for different reasons, and that impacted our competition." Amid a difficult start to his Real Madrid career Mbappé was left out of two squads by Deschamps, prompting talk

of a rift. In December, a rape investigation in Stockholm that Swedish media said focused on Mbappé was dropped. In an interview that aired on French TV station Canal Plus, Mbappé said that he had not even been contacted by Swedish authorities and that he reacted with disbelief when reports emerged following his visit to Stockholm. Mbappé has found his form again and is scoring regularly. Deschamps said he will be called back into the squad in March for Nations League games against Croatia. "He will be there," Deschamps said. "He is very attached to the French team, even if he had a complicated period." Deschamps could not guarantee he will still be captain, because it also depends on what Mbappé wants. "For my part, yes, he will

be captain," he said. "But I will talk with him, as we often do." Deschamps added in the interview that he does not regret his decision to step down next year. "I am not tired or worn out, but I feel that I have done my time. All good things must come to an end," he said. "The French team is a very good thing, because it represents twenty-five years of my professional life when I combine my two lives." He ruled out taking over another national team but remains open to resuming his career at club level. Before taking charge of France, he guided Monaco to the 2004 Champions League final and won the Ligue 1 title with Marseille in 2010. "I will decide based on what is offered to me," he said. "There are plenty of possibilities." — Agencies

Babar Azam achieves multiple records during tri-series final

Babar Azam becomes 11th Pakistan cricketer to score 6,000 ODI runs

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Pakistan's star batter Babar Azam on Friday, etched his name in the cricketing history books during the final of the tri-series against New Zealand at the National Bank Stadium. The 30-year-old is now the latest Pakistan cricketer to join the exclusive 6,000 ODI runs club. His career tally includes 34 half-centuries and 19 centuries, showcasing his consistency and dominance in the format. This achievement makes him the 11th Pakistani cricketer to score 6,000 ODI runs, joining an elite group of players. Leading this prestigious list is Inzamam-ul-Haq with 11,701 runs, followed by Mohammad Yousuf (9,554 runs) and Saeed Anwar (8,824 runs). In addition to this impressive milestone, the right-handed batter also equalled the record of former South African great Hashim Amla for being the joint-fastest to 6,000 ODI runs. Both Babar and Amla achieved this landmark in just 123 innings.

- Babar Azam (Pakistan): 123 innings
- Hashim Amla (South Africa): 123 innings
- Virat Kohli (India): 136 innings
- Kane Williamson (New Zealand): 139 innings
- Warner (Australia): 139 innings

The former captain already holds the record for the fastest 5,000 ODI runs, having achieved the feat in just 97 innings. Apart from the 6,000-run landmark, Babar is now just one century away from equalling Saeed Anwar's record of the most ODI centuries by a Pakistani batter. Anwar holds the record with 20 centuries, while Babar currently has 19.

Pakistan beat Japan to reach Asian Junior Squash semis

DNA

KARACHI: Pakistan secured a spot in the semifinals of the 22nd Asian Junior Squash Team Championships 2025 with a hard-fought 2-1 victory over Japan in the quarterfinals on Friday. Anas Ali Shah gave Pakistan an early advantage, defeating Japan's Renshi Makino in a thrilling encounter. The match lasted 53 minutes, with Shah winning 11-4, 11-6, 7-11, 11-8. Japan responded strongly, as Shu Takahashi levelled the tie after a gruelling 57-minute battle against Pakistan's Sakhi Ullah Khan Tareen. Takahashi won 11-9, 11-6, 2-11, 7-11, 11-8, forcing the match into a deciding third match. The pressure was on Abdullah Nawaz to deliver, and he did so with style. Nawaz produced a dominant performance, defeating Shunsaku Kariyazono 11-7, 11-5, 12-10 in just 30 minutes to secure Pakistan's progression to the semifinals. Pakistan will now face South Korea in the semifinals tomorrow, continuing their pursuit of the championship.



Australia thrashed in final before Champions Trophy

WEB DESK

COLOMBO: Australia were thrashed by 174 runs by Sri Lanka in their final one-day international before their Champions Trophy opener against England. The injury-hit world champions were bowled out for 107 in pursuit of 281 in Colombo, sealing a sorry 2-0 series defeat against a side who did not qualify for the tournament in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates. After Travis Head, Matt Short and Jake Fraser-McGurk fell to seamer Asitha Fernando inside seven overs, Australia reached 79-3 before losing their final seven wickets for 28 runs - all to Sri Lanka's spinners on a slow, turning pitch. Left-arm spinner Dunith Wellalage initiated the collapse by bowling Josh Inglis

for 22 and ended with figures of 4-35. All-rounder Aaron Hardie was caught at slip off leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga for a four-ball duck in the next over and Glenn Maxwell was bowled for one by a turning Wellalage five balls later. Hasaranga added the wicket of Australia captain Steve Smith, lbw for 29, and finished with 3-23. Only a final-wicket partnership of 13 between Adam Zampa and Tanveer Sangha ensured Australia reached three figures. It was Australia's heaviest defeat against Sri Lanka in terms of runs and their fifth-heaviest against any opposition. Kusal Mendis hit 101 from 115 runs and Charith Asalanka 78 not out from 66 in Sri Lanka's 281-4. "We have been outplayed but used a lot of players and got a lot out of it," said Smith, who is standing in as skipper for injured bowler Pat Cummins.

Education is the only way



TANVEER HUSSAIN

THERE was a time when the world was drowning in the darkness of ignorance, while the Muslim world was shining with the light of knowledge and wisdom. On one side, scholars and spiritual leaders were teaching people high moral values, and on the other side, Muslim scientists were showing the world the path to the conquest of the universe. In every field; medicine, physics, mathematics, chemistry, astronomy, and many more Muslim scientists were guiding the whole world. When the Mongols ravaged the Muslim countries, they not only committed mass murder but also destroyed the scientific treasures of the Muslims. The Mongol armies flooded the Muslim territories with rivers of blood. The treasure of knowledge also could not escape the savagery of the

Mongols. Thousands of libraries were set on fire, and millions of books were thrown into rivers. The few remaining books were transferred to Europe, where they were translated into many languages. This led to the transfer of knowledge to Europe, and Europeans took this knowledge forward, introducing humanity to new stages of development. After military victories, Muslims built mosques and educational institutions, guiding people toward knowledge and wisdom, which led to mass conversions to Islam. The role of Muslims in scientific inventions and advancements is unforgettable. They have earned recognition for their intellectual and creative abilities through countless scientific and scholarly contributions. At a time when the West was far from the Education, Muslim scientists opened new doors of wisdom and knowledge. Muslims made significant contributions in the fields of mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, medicine, and physics. Jabir ibn Hayyan, the father of chemistry has conducted in-depth research on chemical experiments and principles. His writings helped in the preparation of numerous chemical compounds. His contributions brought revolutionary changes in the fields of medicine and chemistry. Ibn Sina revolutionized the principles of health. Ibn

al-Haytham conducted research on optics and explained the principles of reflection and refraction of light. Al-Khwarizmi laid the foundation of algebra and introduced new mathematical principles, which sparked the scientific revolution in Europe. Al-Razi made valuable contributions to the field of chemistry and developed various medicines. Ibn Rushd presented significant theories in philosophy and medicine. Thanks to these scientific services by Muslims, the path for scientific progress in Europe was paved. The downfall of the Muslim Ummah began when our scholars divided knowledge into religious and worldly (deeni and dunyawi) categories. Initially, books on the Qur'an, Hadith, and Fiqh were considered religious knowledge. Over time, the list of religious knowledge grew, and practices like Sufism, mysticism, and talismans also came to be classified as religious knowledge. Meanwhile, fields such as chemistry, biology, medicine, engineering, astronomy, and economics were placed in the category of worldly knowledge, and their pursuit was discouraged. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "Seek knowledge even if you have to go to China." It is worth noting that he referred to China, which at that time was considered the farthest corner of the world and there was no division between

religious or worldly education. Unfortunately, most of our religious leaders have failed to understand the fundamental message of Islam, and this is the result we all are facing today. The disastrous consequence of dividing education into religious and worldly knowledge has been profound. Those who attend English-medium educational institutions live in a world vastly different from those who study in religious seminaries. One group views the other as backward, extremist, and an enemy of progress, while the other views the first as irreligious, secular, and a traitor to Islam. Islam does not differentiate between men and women when it comes to seeking knowledge, but those who consider women's education to be secular or modern have committed a major sin by depriving half the population of knowledge. Those who vehemently oppose women's education seem to forget that when their own sisters or daughters fall ill, they may need to seek treatment from a well-educated female doctor. Those who label every new scientific invention by non-Muslims as a heresy have kept Muslims from progressing. This is why it took three hundred years after the invention of the printing press before it was used in Muslim states. Fatwas declaring blood transfusion as forbidden set Mus-

lims back many centuries in the field of medicine. If we analyze ourselves, the fundamental flaw in our society is the contradiction between our words and actions. On one hand, we proudly declare to the world that Islam is a religion that aligns with the demands of the modern world, yet we, as Muslims, fail to demonstrate this to the world through our actions. Muslims, who once taught the world the value of equality, are now the ones most affected by inequality. We call cleanliness half of faith, but our cities and neighborhoods are piles of filth. In a country that prohibits adulteration of food, pure items are almost non-existent. The Ummah that once rejected the notions of caste, race, and ethnic superiority now finds itself divided on the basis of wealth and nationality. The people who once taught the world civilization and ethics now exhibit in their daily conversations that they have learned nothing from their religion. Due to the rapid development of media and easy access to information technology, the trend of education is rising. People are now making efforts to provide higher education to their children within their means. It is to be hoped that very soon, the Muslim Ummah will rise again and reclaim its lost position among the nations of the world.

Afghan Taliban continue...

FROM PAGE 01
provinces while enhancing recruitment within the group's cadres, including from the Afghan Taliban. Also reported was an increase in collaboration between TTP, Afghan Taliban, and al-Qaeda in the Sub-continent, conducting attacks under the banner of Tehrik-e-Jihad-e-Pakistan. "Greater facilitation among these groups and TTP in terms of provision of suicide bombers and fighters and ideological guidance might transform the latter into extra-regional threat and an umbrella organization for other terrorist groups operating in the region," the report said. "With over two dozen terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan, the security threat emanating from the country is a continuing driver of instability in the region and beyond," it said.

Harnai blast kills 11 labourers...

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Harnai Deputy Commissioner Hazrat Wali Kakar confirmed the casualties. The local levies said that the explosives, potentially an Improvised Explosive Device, were planted on the road. The security officials cordoned off the area after shifting the bodies and the injured to medical facilities. The condition of some of the injured labourers is reportedly critical. Arrangements are being made to shift the injured to Quetta. It may be noted that multiple bomb blasts have been reported lately in the Shahrag area, which is home to coal mines. However, the loss incurred in the latest is reportedly quite bigger than the previous explosions.

PM lauds IFC's role in fostering...

FROM PAGE 01
with its unprecedented commitment of US\$40 billion. It would include sovereign lending of US\$ 20 billion by the International Development Association (IDA) and International Bank for Reconstruction & Development (IBRD). IFC will mobilize another US\$ 20 billion to foster private sector investments in Pakistan. The Prime Minister lauded IFC's role in fostering private sector investments and expanding portfolio in Pakistan. He encouraged IFC to enhance its support under the key areas including infrastructure and logistics, outsourcing of large airports, Agriculture, Information Technology, Mining, Climate Resilience, Healthcare and Water & Sanitation.

PM Shehbaz calls for stronger...

FROM PAGE 01
Mohamed Yahya, Sharif reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to combating climate change, highlighting the need for continued partnership with the international community and the UN. The prime minister commended the valuable work being carried out by the UN Country Team in Pakistan, particularly their efforts during the country's climate-related challenges. Sharif also extended his warm regards to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, recalling his leadership and the vital support he garnered for Pakistan during the devastating floods of 2022. A key point of discussion was the need for climate financing, which Sharif emphasised as a crucial component in addressing the impacts of climate change.

NZ ease past Pak...

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Following the early hiccup, Kane Williamson put together an anchoring 71-run partnership for the second wicket with Devon Conway to put his side in a comfortable position. All-rounder Salman Ali Agha broke the threatening partnership in the 18th over by getting rid of Williamson, who scored a sensible 34 off 49 deliveries with the help of three fours and a six. Conway was then involved in a brief 31-run partnership with Mitchell before falling victim to Naseem just before the halfway mark.

Briefs

SBP injects over Rs 1.9t in market

KARACHI: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) injected Rs 1,901.7 billion in the market through reverse repo purchase and Shariah Compliant Mudarabah based Open Market Operations (OMO) on Friday. The SBP, during the Open Market Operation, Reverse Repo Purchase (Injection) for 7-day and 28-day tenors on February 14, 2025 and accepted an amount of Rs 1,508.2 billion offered through 22 bids. The central bank received 14 bids for 7-day tenor cumulatively offering an amount of Rs 1,198.7 billion at the rate of return ranging between 12.03 to 12.08% while 10 bids were received for the 28-day tenor amounting to Rs 508.7 billion at the rate of return ranging between 12.03 to 12.10%. The SBP accepted 13 quotes for 7-day tenor cumulatively amounting to Rs 1,000 billion at 12.05% rate of return. Total amount offered at 12.05% was Rs 417.5 billion, out of which SBP accepted Rs 219.3 billion on a pro-rata basis. The SBP also accepted 9 bids for 28-day tenor amounting to Rs 508.2 billion at 12.05% rate of return.—APP

Six days of pre-Budget, consultative sessions to be held

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Commerce will organise, six-day 'Pre-Budget 2025-26' consultative sessions and seminar on tariff-related proposals from February 10th to 15th, 2025.

The Ministry of Commerce, in preparation of the coming budget exercise for FY 2025-26, is conducting pre-budget (2025-26) consultative sessions on tariff-related proposals and the draft new National Tariff Policy (NTP 2025-30) from 10th to 15th February 2025, at Pakistan Institute of Trade and Development (PITAD) Islamabad, said a press release issued here on Friday. The purpose of these sessions is to disseminate information on the Draft National Tariff Policy (NTP 2025-30), and also to sensitize the private sector about the process of tariff rationalization for seeking any changes in the current tariff structure of various products.—APP

Rupee gains 06 paise against dollar

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani rupee on Friday depreciated by 06 paise against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs279.20 against the previous day's closing of Rs279.26. However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs 279.75 and Rs 281.25, respectively. The price of the Euro increased by 91 paise to close at Rs292.26 against the last day's closing of Rs291.09, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).—APP

Bangladesh says in talks with Musk for Starlink rollout

DHAKA: Bangladesh said on Friday it had asked tech billionaire Elon Musk to bring satellite internet service Starlink to the South Asian country, as its fragile interim government seeks US diplomatic support. Musk has a highly visible White House role as President Donald Trump's right-hand man, where his meetings with foreign leaders have raised questions over the blurring of his official roles and business interests. The world's richest man spoke on Thursday with Nobel peace laureate Muhammad Yunus, who is leading a caretaker administration in Bangladesh following a student-led revolution last year. They discussed during a lengthy video call bringing Starlink, which provides internet access to remote locations by low Earth orbit satellites, to Bangladesh.—APP

Pak for effective diplomacy to resolve Yemen's crisis

Pakistan Thursday called for restructuring the outdated international tax cooperation architecture, saying it has long hampered efforts to mobilize adequate tax revenues

UNITED NATIONS: A top Pakistani diplomat has called for resolving the conflict in Yemen through "effective diplomacy and a collective response", noting that it had graduated from the local to the regional and ultimately a crisis with global implications. Speaking in the United Nations Security Council, Ambassador Munir Akram, permanent representative of Pakistan to the UN, warned that resumption of military operations will further exacerbate the conflict. The crisis in Yemen, which worsened in 2014 after Houthi rebels (known officially as Ansar-Allah) seized the capital, Sanaa, has been marked by complex political and military tensions. More than 17 million people — half the country's population — remain dependent on humanitarian assistance and protection. The Pakistani envoy said the progress made at the December 2023 negotiations must be preserved and consolidated, ensuring the full implementation of commitments toward lasting peace. Supporting the ongoing mediatory efforts by the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, Ambassador Akram said he shared his view that the roadmap remains a viable path

towards a nationwide ceasefire, a structured political process, and addressing critical economic and humanitarian challenges facing the strife-torn country. While welcoming the release of the crew of the seized vessel 'Galaxy Leader', he strongly condemned the arbitrary detention of UN personnel and the staff of international and national NGOs and diplomatic missions by Ansar-Allah. "We are appalled at the tragic death of a World Food Programme staff member in Houthi custody in Sanaa and extend our deepest condolences to his family and loved ones," the Pakistani envoy said. "These actions are a blatant violation of international humanitarian law," he added. Ambassador Akram urged the international community to ensure the safety and security of UN personnel and called for accountability for such actions. He also demanded the immediate and unconditional release of all detained UN personnel. Referring to Yemen's acute humanitarian crisis, he said while 17 million people, faces acute food insecurity, climate change-induced disasters, including floods and droughts, have displaced approximately 4.5 million individuals. Ambassador Akram

emphasized that "this crisis necessitates a well-coordinated and robust international response", urging States to enhance their contributions to Yemen's 2025 Humanitarian Response Plan. Pakistan, he said, also condemned the Houthi attacks on commercial and merchant vessels, but noted from a UN report that no new incidents of attacks on shipping have been recorded in the past month. "This development is obviously related to the ceasefire in Gaza," he said. "It is imperative therefore to ensure that the ceasefire in Gaza continues and all three phases of the ceasefire agreement are implemented, for the sake of peace in the occupied Palestinian territories as well as in the broader region, including Yemen." In conclusion, Ambassador Akram voiced Pakistan's solidarity with the people of Yemen in their pursuit for peace, stability and prosperity. Briefing the 15-member Council, Grundberg — the UN envoy for Yemen — said that a lasting peace is still possible in the country but requires commitment, courage, and action from all sides. He briefed on latest political developments in Yemen, where Houthi rebels, and Government forces, backed

by a Saudi-led coalition, have been battling for power for more than a decade. He spoke alongside UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher who updated on the "perilous" humanitarian situation there and the need to protect aid workers. Grundberg highlighted recent events that have occurred in the region. "We have witnessed a significant, albeit fragile, development in the Middle East with the ceasefire in Gaza," he said. "We have also seen a cessation of attacks by Ansar Allah on vessels in the Red Sea and targets in Israel. This tentative reduction in hostilities, along with the release of the crew of the Motor Vessel Galaxy Leader, is a welcome relief." He urged the international community to build on this opportunity for further de-escalation, while also acknowledging the magnitude of remaining challenges. Meanwhile, Pakistan Thursday called for restructuring the outdated international tax cooperation architecture, saying it has long hampered efforts to mobilize adequate tax revenues. "Today, the top 10% of the global population holds around 85% of global wealth," Senator Faisal Saleem Rehman told the Annual Parliamentary Hearing, a joint initia-

tive between the President of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). The topic of the session was 'Raising domestic resources for the SDGs: A case for tax reforms'. Senator Rehman said that higher taxes lead to various problems including tax evasion, money laundering and smuggling, which can, in turn, also feed terrorism. He highlighted the role of parliaments in ensuring better compliance with national and global tax rules by creating a conducive legal and institutional framework, which oversees government action and promotes transparency and accountability. At the international level, Senator Rehman said, a fragmented global tax system enables base erosion and profit shifting by multi-national corporations, which allows them to exploit loopholes in national tax systems to move profits to low or no tax jurisdictions. He said that through a proactive role, parliaments can ensure continuous updates of tax laws, establish committees, such as Public Accounts Committees, focusing on overseeing the tax administration and provide a platform for public investigation into tax evasion cases and fraud.

Facilitating business community gov't top priority -Zulfiqar

ISLAMABAD: Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of Commerce, Dr. Zulfiqar Ali Bhatti, has affirmed that the business community is the true driving force behind Pakistan's economy, and the government is committed to addressing its challenges on a priority basis. He made these remarks during an interaction session titled 'Uraan Pakistan Vision'—Export Regulatory Challenges and Capacity Building for the Ecosystem—held at the Chamber House. Dr. Bhatti highlighted that, despite significant challenges, the country has emerged from difficult times through the steadfastness of the government and the cooperation, hard work, and dedication of the business community under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.—APP

UBG demands govt President SWCCI immediate recovery

ISLAMABAD: The Patron-in-Chief of the United Business Group (UBG), S.M. Tanveer, Secretary-General Zafar Bakhtawari, and UBG Islamabad President Abdul Rauf Alam have strongly condemned the abduction of the President of the South Waziristan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Saif-ur-Rehman, along with two customs officials in South Waziristan. They termed the incident extremely alarming and dangerous for the country's business environment and the trader community. In their joint statement, the UBG leaders stated that such incidents not only shake the confidence of the business community but also harm the national economy. They emphasized that economic stability in the country is impossible without ensuring the security of businesspersons. S.M. Tanveer urged the government and security agencies to take immediate notice of the incident and ensure the safe and swift recovery of Saif-ur-Rehman and all abductees. He warned that if such incidents are not prevented, a growing sense of insecurity will further discourage investors and businesspersons. Zafar Bakhtawari remarked that Pakistan is already facing economic challenges, and such incidents further hinder economic activities. He stressed the need for serious governmental measures to promote business development in regions like South Waziristan, ensuring the restoration of traders' and investors' confidence. Abdul Rauf Alam stated that the business community and chamber leaders play a crucial role in economic progress.—APP

CCP reviews merger of Telenor with PTCL before spectrum auction

ISLAMABAD: State Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja informed the National Assembly on Friday that the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) had been approached to review the merger of Telenor with PTCL before the spectrum auction. Responding to a query during the session, she said that the Competition Commission of Pakistan is conducting a detailed review of the matter. She added that the spectrum auction is expected to take place in the middle of the current year, and the government has urged the Commission to expedite its decision to enable stakeholders to plan their future strategies. She said that the government is taking steps to attract more investors to the telecom sector. As part of these efforts, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) has initiated a public consultation process on the draft Fixed Satellite Services (FSS) license, inviting stakeholders to review and provide feedback.—APP



ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari administering the oath of office to Mr Justice Sardar Muhammad Sarfraz Dogar as the Acting Chief Justice of Islamabad High Court, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

Usman advocates for Industrial Zone in Rawalpindi

RAWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Usman Shaukat attended a high-level meeting as a special invitee at the Lahore Chamber of Commerce & Industry (LCCI), where Lt. Gen Sarfraz Ahmed, National Coordinator of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), engaged with key stakeholders to discuss strategies for promoting industrialization in Pakistan. During the meeting, Usman Shaukat emphasized the urgent need for establishing an industrial zone with the status of a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Rawalpindi, alongside the Rawalpindi Ring Road Project. He highlighted how such a development would play a crucial role in boosting economic activity, attracting investment, and creating employment opportunities in the region. Lt. Gen Sarfraz Ahmed reiterated his commitment to supporting the initiative, recognizing its potential to enhance Pakistan's industrial landscape. In response to an invitation extended by Usman Shaukat, Lt. Gen Sarfraz Ahmed graciously agreed to visit the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce & Industry (RCCI) in the near future to engage with the local business community.—DNA

India seen seeking global bids this year for 114 fighters

BENGALURU: India is likely to seek bids this year for 114 multi-role fighters, two sources said, marking a major step in a process to bolster the country's stock of combat aircraft that has gone on for nearly two decades. The project is critical for the Indian Air Force, whose squadrons of mainly Russian and ex-Soviet aircraft have fallen to 31 from an approved strength of 42 at a time when rival China is expanding its air force rapidly. On the sidelines of the Aero India aerospace exhibition in Bengaluru, many of the companies who expressed interest in 2018 — when the government last sought planemakers for the project — said they were still in the hunt. "The Chinese are inducting modern fighters and Pakistanis are also getting some Chinese support whereas the Indian Air Force, in terms of combat squadrons, is deficient. There is no doubt about it," said Laxman Behera, a defence expert at government-funded Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. "We'll have to wait and watch." Potential competitors for the Multi-Role Fighter Aircraft (MRFA) contract include U.S. defence firms Lockheed Martin and Boeing, Russia's United Aircraft Corporation (UAC), France's Dassault Aviation, Sweden's Saab AB, and Germany's Eurofighter Companies are preparing supply chain blueprints, scouting for local partners, and ensuring cost effectiveness of their offerings, two executives and three sources told Reuters this week at the exhibition. Lockheed Martin is trying to sell its F-21, an India-specific variant of its widely used F-16 fighter, to New Delhi for the MRFA, which will be a 4.5 generation aircraft made in India with a local partner.—DNA

Bank Alfalah strengthens Qist Bazaar with Rs 55m equity

ISLAMABAD: Bank Alfalah, one of Pakistan's leading financial institutions, has reinforced its commitment to financial inclusion by increasing its investment in Qist Bazaar, Pakistan's rapidly growing buy-now-pay-later (BNPL) platform catering to essential purchases of people with minimal and easy instalments. As part of the latest funding round, Bank Alfalah has invested an additional Rs 55 million as part of Qist Bazaar's Series A raise of around Rs 800 million, further solidifying its confidence in Qist Bazaar's vision and exponential growth, according to a press release issued here on Friday. Qist Bazaar has seen remarkable expansion, now operating 40 branches across seven cities, primarily serving Pakistan's unbanked and underbanked populations. By offering easy instalment-based payment solutions, the platform has enabled thousands.—APP

France says EU working toward 'rapid' easing of Syria sanctions

PARIS: France's Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said Thursday that the EU was working toward swiftly easing Syria sanctions as Paris hosted a conference on the transition in the war-torn country after President Bashar Assad's fall. Opposition fighters toppled Assad in December after a lightning offensive. The new authorities, headed by interim leader Ahmad Al-Sharaa, have sought to reassure the international community that they have broken with their jihadist past and will respect the rights of minorities. They have been lobbying the West to ease sanctions imposed against Assad to allow the country to rebuild its economy after five decades of his family's rule and almost 14 years of civil war. "We are working with my European counterparts toward a rapid lifting of sectorial economic sanctions," Barrot said, after EU foreign ministers agreed last month to ease them, starting with key sectors such as energy. Syria's Foreign Minister Asaad Al-Shaibani is in Paris for the conference, in his first such official visit to Europe for talks after he attended the World Economic Forum in Davos last month. The French presidency said earlier that the United States, Germany, Britain, the European Union and the United Nations were also to be represented, as were several Gulf nations and Syria's northern neighbor Turkey. French President Emmanuel Macron is due to address attendees. There has been concern among Western governments over the direction the new Syrian leadership will take in particular n religious freedom, women's rights and the status of the Kurdish minority in the northeast of Syria. Shaibani on Wednesday said a new government would take over next month from the interim cabinet, vowing that it would represent all Syrians in their diversity. German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, ahead of the Paris meeting, emphasized the need for "all actors" in Syria to be included. "It is essential that women be represented," she said. Several diplomatic sources had said the conference also aimed to focus on protecting Syria from destabilizing foreign interference and coordinating aid efforts. Turkish-backed factions launched attacks against Kurdish-held areas in northern Syria at around the same time as the offensive that overthrew Assad, and have since seized strategic areas.—DNA

Syria's new leaders zero in on Assad's business barons

DAMASCUS: Syria's new rulers are combing through the billion-dollar corporate empires of ousted President Bashar Assad's allies, and have held talks with some of these tycoons, in what they say is a campaign to root out corruption and illegal activity. After seizing power in December, the new administration that now runs Syria pledged to reconstruct the country after 13 years of brutal civil war and abandon a highly-centralized and corrupt economic system where Assad's cronies held sway. To do so, the executive led by new President Ahmed Al-Sharaa has set up a committee tasked with dissecting the sprawling corporate interests of high-profile Assad-linked tycoons including Samer Foz and

Mohammad Hamsho, three sources told Reuters. Days after taking Damascus, the new administration issued orders aimed at freezing companies and bank accounts of Assad-linked businesses and individuals, and later specifically included those on US sanctions lists, according to correspondence between the Syrian Central Bank and commercial banks reviewed by Reuters. Hamsho and Foz, targeted by US sanctions since 2011 and 2019 respectively, returned to Syria from abroad and met with senior HTS figures in Damascus in January, according to a government official and two Syrians with direct knowledge of the matter, who spoke on condition of anonymity. The two men, who are reviled by many ordinary

Syrians for their close ties to Assad, pledged to cooperate with the new leadership's fact-finding efforts, the three sources said. Accused by the US Treasury of getting rich off Syria's war, Foz's sprawling Aman Holding conglomerate has interests in pharma, sugar refining, trading and transport. Hamsho's interests, grouped under the Hamsho International Group, are similarly wide-ranging, from petrochemicals and metal products to television production. Hamsho, whom the US Treasury has accused of being a front for Assad and his brother Maher, did not respond to a Reuters request for comment. Foz could not be reached. The establishment of the committee, whose members are not public, and the conversations

between Syria's new government and two of the Assad government's closest tycoons who control large parts of Syria's economy have not been previously reported. The new Syrian government's approach toward powerful Assad-linked businesses, yet to be fully clarified, will be key in determining the fate of the economy as the administration struggles to convince Washington and its allies to remove sanctions, Syrian analysts and businessmen say. Trade Minister Maher Khalil Al-Hasan and Syrian investment chief Ayman Hamawiye both confirmed to Reuters the government had been in contact with some Assad-linked businessmen, but did not identify them or provide further details. Khalidoun Zoubi, a long-term partner of Foz,

confirmed his associate had held talks with Syrian authorities but did not confirm if he had been in the country. "Foz told them he is ready to cooperate with the new administration and provide all the support to the Syrian people and the new state," Zoubi said from the gilded lobby of the Four Seasons hotel in central Damascus, which Foz's group majority owns. "He is ready to do anything asked of him." The two Syrian sources said Foz, who holds a Turkish citizenship, had left Damascus after the talks. Reuters could not ascertain Hamsho's whereabouts. The US has sanctioned Foz, Hamsho and others with a prominent economic role, including Yasser Ibrahim, Assad's most trusted adviser.—Agencies

Briefs

DPM to visit USA for UNSC meeting

Meeting would be chaired by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar will visit the United States of America to participate in the high-level meeting of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), scheduled to be held on 18th of this month. According to Foreign Office, the meeting would be chaired by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. On the sidelines of the meeting, Deputy Prime Minister is also expected to hold bilateral meetings with his counterparts and senior UN officials.

PTI spreading propaganda through social media

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Advisor to Prime Minister on Political Affairs Rana Sanaullah on Thursday said that PTI is spreading propaganda through social media.

Rana Sanaullah said that PTI founder is playing different tactics to gain personal interest. Everyone knows about the tactics and politics of PTI founder, he said while talking to a private television channel. In reply to a question about the letter written to the head of a national institution, he said narrative adopted by PTI founder in a letter was against the democratic norms. He said that PTI founder must seek apology for May 9 riots. About dialogue with opposition, he said dialogue is the only way to resolve political issues.

JCP meeting on 18 for LHC judges' appointments

DNA

LAHORE: Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Yahya Afridi has convened a Judicial Commission meeting on February 28 to finalise appointments for Lahore High Court (LHC) judges. Out of eight nominated sessions court judges, four will be appointed as additional judges of the LHC. The proposed names included Session Judge Raja Nazir Ghazanfar Ali Khan, Qaiser Nazir Butt, Muhammad Akmal Khan, and Tajveer Ahmed Sheikh. Additionally, Session Judges Jazeela Aslam, Tariq Mehmood Bajwa, Shahid Saheed, and Abhar Gul Khan are also under consideration. The commission will review these nominations before finalising the appointments.

Starmer backs Ukraine's Nato bid

LONDON: Sir Keir Starmer has reaffirmed the UK will continue to back Ukraine's "irreversible path" to joining Nato despite leading figures in President Trump's administration appearing to rule out membership. The prime minister told Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky he stood by a pledge made alongside ex-president Joe Biden at last year's Nato summit in Washington, to support Ukraine's bid for membership. The two leaders spoke on the phone ahead of global leaders meeting at the Munich Security Conference. Sir Keir's comments are in stark contrast to those of the Trump administration, which has said this week that Nato membership for Ukraine is not a "realistic prospect". In a readout of the call, a Downing Street spokeswoman said: "The Prime Minister began by reiterating the UK's concrete support for Ukraine, for as long as it's needed. "He was unequivocal that there could be no talks about Ukraine, without Ukraine. "Ukraine needed strong security guarantees, further lethal aid and a sovereign future, and it could count on the UK to step up, he added. - Agencies

"Beautiful Japan"

Photo exhibition showcases Japan through Pakistani diplomat's lens

Ambassador AKAMATSU expressed his admiration for Mr. Amil's work, noting that his deep understanding of Japanese society is evident in the photographs as each photograph is a testament to Mr. Amil's keen eye and deep affection for Japan

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: A captivating photo exhibition titled "Beautiful Japan- Through the Eyes of an Ambassador" opened here today at the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) that showcases a remarkable collection of photographs capturing the various facets of Japanese life, including Japanese culture, its people, landscapes, technology while reflecting the essence of beauty and intricacies of Japan. The former Ambassador of Pakistan to Japan, Mr. Farukh Amil, who played a significant role in forging deep connections between the two nations over the years, captured these photographs displayed in the exhibition during his diplomatic service in Japan.

The exhibition, which runs until February 19th, was inaugurated by Mr. Hassan Nasir Jami, Secretary, National Heritage & Culture Division, and H.E. Mr. Akamatsu Shuichi, the Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan. Also present were Mr. Ayoub Jamali, Director General PNCA, and other distinguished guests. The exhibition is a collaborative effort between the Embassy of Japan, the MEXT Alumni Association of Pakistan (MAAP), and the PNCA.



The exhibition, featuring around 40 selected photographs, aims not only to showcase the beauty of Japanese society and culture

but also reinforces the ties between Japan and Pakistan fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of Japan's rich heritage and contemporary society among Pakistani audiences. It is pertinent to mention here that Mr. Faruk's talent was even

recognized in Japan itself, where he won the prestigious Grand Prix in the Ambassador's Photo Exhibition competition. While speaking at the inaugural ceremony, Ambassador AKAMATSU expressed his admiration for Mr. Amil's work, noting that his deep understanding of Japanese society is evident in the photographs as each photograph is a testament to Mr. Amil's keen eye and deep affection for Japan. He added that as Japan's Ambassador to Pakistan, he is delighted to see Japan through the lens of someone who knows our country so well. "I believe this exhibition powerfully connects our two nations. It allows us to share Japan's beauty and complexity with the people of Pakistan, fostering deeper understanding and appreciation. It reminds us that despite distance, we share the values, respect for traditions, love of beauty, and appreciation for the human experience", remarked Ambassador Akamatsu. The Ambassador expressed his deep gratitude for Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) and MEXT Alumni Association Pakistan (MAAP) for their very valuable support in co-organizing the exhibition.

COAS, Maryam unveil high-tech agri solutions

25 Green Agri Malls have already been established across Punjab

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir and Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz visited the Strategic Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) Green Corporate Initiative, where the CM inaugurated the Smart Agri Farm and Agri Research Facility Centre. The visit was attended by high-ranking government officials, including federal and provincial ministers. During the tour, participants were given an overview of modern agricultural machinery being utilised to enhance the growth of the agriculture sector. According to the report, under the Green Corporate Initiative, farmers will have access to modern agricultural machinery on easy rental terms instead of making expensive purchases.

Pak joins BRICS' NDB with \$582m investment

ECC Meeting Approves Key Financial Decisions

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: A meeting of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet was held under the chairmanship of the Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb. The meeting was attended by Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan, Minister for Power Sardar Awais Ahmad Khan Leghari, Minister of State for Finance and Revenue Ali Parvez Malik, Federal Secretaries, and senior officers from relevant ministries and divisions. The ECC approved a proposal from the Ministry of Commerce regarding the inclusion of PCT/HS codes for newly notified mandatory items of the Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority (PSQCA) in the Import Policy Order (IPO), 2022. The decision incorporates specific PVC and polymer-based products into the mandatory regulatory framework, ensuring compliance with Pakistan Standards. The ECC also approved Pakistan's membership in the New Development Bank (NDB), established by BRICS member countries. The committee endorsed the purchase of 5,882 capital shares in the

NDB, amounting to USD 582 million, with USD 116 million as paid-in capital. The ECC also deliberated on the transfer of shares of DISCOs in the name of the President of Pakistan as proposed by the Ministry of Energy (Power Division). The Committee approved the transfer with the observation that the approval is subject to confirmation that the transfer will have no financial implications.

The ECC also approved the incorporation of an International Joint Trading Company in Singapore by Pakistan State Oil (PSO) and the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR). The Committee instructed the Ministry of Petroleum to ensure due diligence regarding specific investment approvals, particularly equity injections, as well as timeline for operationalization of the company. To ensure financial support for key initiatives, the ECC approved the following Technical Supplementary Grants (TSGs): Rs. 19.15 billion under the Finance Division for 133 PSDP schemes of the defunct Pakistan Public Works Department (Pak-PWD). The funds will now be transferred to respective ministries, divisions, and provincial governments.

Customs officials kidnapped in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Unidentified assailants kidnap two Pakistan Customs officials and the president of a local Chamber of Commerce in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) on Thursday, escalating the region's ongoing security challenges. The abductions occurred in the South Waziristan district, an area known for its increasing instability amid a deteriorating security situation in the region. According to Deputy Commissioner Nasir Khan, the incident took place in the Sholam area while the victims were returning from Angor Adda. The kidnapped individuals were identified as Customs Superintendent Nisar Abbasi, Inspector Khushal, and Saif-ur-Rehman, the president of the Waziristan Chambers of Commerce. The motive behind the kidnapping remains unclear, but authorities suspect the involvement of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a militant group that has been increasingly active in KP since the collapse of a fragile truce between the Taliban and the Pakistani state in November 2022. The TTP, along with other militant groups, has been targeting security personnel, government officials, and civilians in a series of violent attacks, including targeted killings and abductions. The kidnapping of these officials is the latest in a series of incidents that have plagued the region.

Pakistan, IFC discuss \$20bn private investment plan

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: In what analysts see as a step toward unlocking the World Bank's \$20 billion private sector investment, an International Finance Corporation (IFC) delegation met Finance Division officials on Thursday to discuss policies to spur industry-driven growth, particularly via export-led expansion. The visit follows a first-of-its-kind agreement with the World Bank for a plan to focus \$20 billion in lending to the nation over the coming decade on development issues like the impact of climate change as well as boosting private-sector growth. This commitment of IFC is over and above the \$20 billion committed by the WB through IDA (concessional finance window) and IBRD. Taking the cumulative investment of the WB group to \$40 billion over the next decade. "IFC is committed to working closely with Pakistan and providing support in key areas such as green energy, data centres, agricultural supply chain improvements, the telecom sector, and digitisation," Makhtar Diop, Managing Director & Executive Vice President of the IFC said in a high-level meeting at the Finance Division. During the meeting with Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb and his team, Diop, leading the delegation of top IFC officials, commended Pakistan's CPF with the World Bank, calling it a global best practice. The IFC top executive was accompanied by Hela Cheikhrouhou, Regional Vice President (MCT Region), Khawaja Aftab Ahmed, Regional Director (Middle East, Pakistan, and Afghanistan), Najib Benhassine, Country Director (World Bank Pakistan), and Zeeshan Sheikh, Country Manager (IFC Pakistan & Afghanistan). He noted that private sector stakeholders in Pakistan had expressed confidence in the government's economic policies and were appreciative of the progress being made. Aurangzeb was joined by Dr Syed Tauqeer Hussain Shah, Executive Director (Pakistan) at the World Bank Group, the Finance Secretary, Imdad Ullah Bosal and senior officers from the Finance Division. The finance minister highlighted the government's recent declaration of warehouse as an industry and reaffirmed its commitment to public-private partnerships (PPPs) in infrastructure, IT, data centres, and AgTech. Speaking to The News a day earlier, IFC Pakistan's Dr Shah said that the recently approved \$40 billion country partnership framework for the next decade is a huge expression of confidence by the group in Pakistan's reform agenda and economic consolidation during last two years, and MD IFC visit almost after a decade is further endorsement of this confidence.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif presented souvenirs to the President of Türkiye H.E. Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Islamabad. - DNA

Israeli military readying to withdraw from Lebanon

Hezbollah was also expected to vacate its positions in the south, near the Israeli border, during that timeframe

US making "wrong calculations" in Mideast: Erdogan

Erdogan said he expected Trump to realize his election campaign promises of taking steps for peace, rather than create new conflicts

NEWS DESK

JERUSALEM: The Israeli military is prepared to withdraw from Lebanese territory and hand over areas to the Lebanese army "within the timeline" set by a US-French-mediated ceasefire agreement, a senior Israeli security official said. Under the ceasefire that took effect November 27, Lebanon's military was to deploy in the south alongside United Nations peacekeepers as the Israeli army withdrew over a 60-day period, later extended until February 18. Hezbollah was also expected to vacate its positions in the south, near the Israeli border, during that timeframe. "We are still deployed in accordance with the US monitored agreement and we are working closely with the US to make sure that handing over responsibility to the Lebanese army will happen within the timeline," the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in accordance with protocols, said on Thursday. His comments came as Israeli fighter jets overnight hit what the army said were Hezbollah military sites "containing weapons and launchers, which pose a direct threat to the Israeli home front."

FOREIGN DESK

ANKARA: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said the administration of US President Donald Trump was making "wrong calculations" regarding the Middle East, adding that heeding "Zionist lies" would only exacerbate conflicts. Turkey has rejected Trump's plan to remove the more than 2 million Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, claim US control of it and turn it into the "Riviera of the Middle East." It has also said Israel's assault on Gaza amounted to a genocide, while calling for international measures against its government. "Unfortunately, United States is making a wrong calculation about our region. One should not be engaged in an approach that disregards region's history, values, and accumulation," he said, according to a transcript of comments to journalists on a return flight from Malaysia, Indonesia and Pakistan.

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ICU

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OPERATION THEATRES

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NEONATAL INTENSIVE CARE UNIT (NICU)

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