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Briefs

Islamabad POST
A Credible Daily Newspaper

2022 HAPPY NEW YEAR
FROM THE ENTIRE TEAM
CENTRELINE & DNA
Foreign Diplomatic News Agency

Daily Islamabad Post extends its warmest greetings to all its readers, wishing you a very Happy New Year 2026!

Ishaq Dar to visit China

DNA

ISLAMABAD: At the invitation of Mr. Wang Yi, Member of the Politburo of the Communist Party of China, Director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs, and Minister for Foreign Affairs of China, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar will undertake an official visit to China to co-chair the 7th Round of the Pakistan-China Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue, scheduled to be held in Beijing on 4 January 2026. The Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue represents the highest consultative mechanism between Pakistan and China. It provides a structured platform for both sides to review the entire spectrum of bilateral cooperation, as well as regional and international developments of mutual interest. During the Dialogue, the two Foreign Ministers will announce a series of initiatives and commemorative activities to mark the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and China in 2026.

Chinese drills irk the Philippines

NEWS DESK

MANILA: The Philippines' defense department said Wednesday it was "deeply concerned" over Chinese drills around Taiwan that threatened to "undermine regional peace and stability." "The Department of National Defense is deeply concerned by China's military and coast guard actions around Taiwan that undermine regional peace and stability, further creating cracks in an already fragile geopolitical environment," defense chief Gilberto Teodoro said in a statement. "(The) heightened scale of coercion has implications that extend beyond cross-strait relations and into the broader Indo-Pacific community," he added.

Govt Slashes fuel prices to ring in new year

DNA

ISLAMABAD: In a major relief for consumers, the government has announced a significant cut in petroleum prices effective from the New Year. Diesel price reduced by Rs 8.57 per liter, bringing the new rate to Rs 257.08. Petrol price reduced by Rs 10.28 per liter, now available at Rs 252.17. The decision has been widely welcomed across the country, with citizens hailing it as a timely move to ease inflationary pressures and provide financial relief at the start of 2026.

'Historic' Handshake

Sadiq and Jaishankar connect in Dhaka

NA Speaker, Indian FM exchange pleasantries at residence of former Bangladeshi premier, per sources

CENTRELINE REPORT

DHAKA: National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq and Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar held a meeting in Dhaka on Wednesday at the residence of former Bangladeshi prime minister Khaleda Zia. According to sources, the National Assembly speaker and the Indian external affairs minister shook hands and exchanged pleasantries. Zia, the first female prime minister of Bangladesh, passed away on Tuesday at the age of 80. Flags were lowered to half-mast, and thousands of security personnel lined the streets as her body was carried through Dhaka in a vehicle draped with the national flag. World leaders, including Sadiq and Jaishankar, also traveled to Dhaka to attend the funeral ceremonies of the former Bangladeshi leader. The meeting marks the first such interaction since May 2025, when Pakistan and India fought a brief but intense war. It comes months after the Pahalgam incident, which led to cross-border clashes between the two nuclear-armed neighbours. The conflict between Pakistan and India

was sparked by an attack on Hindu tourists in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), which New Delhi, without evidence, said was backed by Pakistan. Pakistan has denied involvement, with the foreign ministry having questioned the credibility of India's account of the events, saying it was "replete with fabrications". Both sides used fighter jets, missiles, artillery and drones during the four-day conflict, killing dozens of people, before agreeing to a US-brokered ceasefire. In the immediate aftermath of the conflict, Pakistan said it took down seven Indian fighter jets during the conflict, including the French-made Rafale. New Delhi acknowledged "some losses" during the conflict but denied losing seven jets. Political tensions between the two neighbouring countries were reflected on the cricket field during the ACC Men's Asia Cup 2025, as Indian players reportedly refused to shake hands with their Pakistani counterparts. The two teams met on three occasions during the tournament, including the final, yet India's sportsmanship

Continued on Page 06

Saudi-UAE tensions

PM Shehbaz, Saudi Crown Prince discuss bilateral relations

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman thanked the Prime Minister for the call and reiterated Saudi Arabia's desire to expand cooperation with Pakistan across all areas of mutual interest

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif held a telephone conversation this evening with His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. During the warm and cordial discussion, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif conveyed his respectful regards and best wishes to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Both leaders reaffirmed their shared commitment to further strengthening the historic and fraternal bonds between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, noting that bilateral relations had reached new heights in recent months. The Prime Minister thanked

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Govt policies push inflation down to 4.5%, says PM

"More than one million new taxpayers have been brought into the tax net," says premier

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Wednesday that inflation has fallen sharply from 29.2% to 4.5% over the past two years, crediting his government's economic measures. Addressing a ceremony in Islamabad regarding economic reforms,

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Turkiye steps up anti-Daesh raids, arresting 125 suspects

The latest arrests raised to nearly 600 the total number detained over the past week

NEWS DESK

ISTANBUL: Türkiye on Wednesday detained another 125 Daesh group suspects in a string of nationwide raids, a minister said, following warnings that Daesh militants were planning attacks over the holidays. The latest arrests raised to nearly 600 the total number detained over the past week. "We captured 125 Daesh suspects in simultaneous operations carried out in 25 provinces this morning," Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya wrote on X. On Christmas Day, the security forces arrested 115 Daesh suspects following intelligence warning that the extremist group was "planning attacks during Christmas and New Year celebrations," the Istanbul's prosecutor's office said. During another nationwide arrest operation on Monday, Daesh militants opened fire on police in the northwestern coastal town of Yalova, killing three officers and wounding nine others, the interior minister said.

Continued on Page 06

Four killed in Russian attack on Odesa

NEWS DESK

MOSCOW: Russia launched an overnight drone attack on Ukraine's Odesa region, damaging residential buildings and infrastructure and injuring four people, including three children, regional authorities said on Wednesday. Odesa, a major Black Sea port, has been repeatedly targeted by Russian missiles and drones during nearly four years of war, with strikes frequently hitting energy, transport and port infrastructure as well as residential areas. "Strike drones attacked residential, logistics and energy infrastructure in our region," Oleh Kiper, governor of the Odesa region, said on Telegram messaging app.

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DKAHAK: National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq and Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar held a meeting in Dhaka. – DNA

Pakistan concerned at Yemen violence

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Wednesday voiced deep concern over the resurgence of violence in Yemen amid escalating tensions in the Middle East. In a statement, Foreign Office spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said that Pakistan expresses complete solidarity with Saudi Arabia and reaffirms its commitment to the security of the kingdom. He said that Islamabad reiterates its support for the unity and territorial integrity of Yemen. The spokesperson said that Islamabad would support all efforts aimed at establishing lasting peace and stability in the country. Tensions gripped the Middle East after a Saudi-led coalition carried out an airstrike on the southern Yemeni port of Mukalla,

Continued on Page 06

National workshop

CDF pledges to thwart inimical designs of enemy

Field Marshal Munir appreciates resilience and patriotism of people of Balochistan

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) and Chief of Defence Forces (CDF), Field Marshal Asim Munir, on Wednesday vowed to foil attempts by Indian-sponsored proxies to spread violence and disrupt development in Balochistan. Addressing the participants of the 18th National Workshop on Balochistan at General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi, Field Marshal Munir affirmed that such "inimical designs" by Indian-sponsored proxies "will be thwarted through stern actions" by security forces. In a statement, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that the CDF appreciated the resilience and patriotism of the people of Balochistan while highlighting the province's pivotal importance for Pakistan's



prosperity and development. He lauded the wide-ranging initiatives being undertaken by the federal and provincial governments, underscoring a people-centric approach that aims to improve the socio-economic conditions of the province and unlock its vast economic potential for the benefit of its people.

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APNS urges government to allocate ad quotas for Journals

DNA

KARACHI: The All Pakistan Newspapers Society (APNS) has expressed deep concern over the deteriorating financial condition of magazines, which it describes as a vital pillar of the print media. In an official statement, APNS highlighted that government institutions have completely sidelined journals in their advertising campaigns, exacerbating their

economic woes. Senator Sarmad Ali, President of APNS, stated that the lack of government attention has pushed journals into severe hardship. Not only have they been deprived of public sector advertisements, but Pakistan Post has also drastically increased postal service rates, further straining their finances. He noted that the process of receiving payments from Pakistan Post has become increasingly difficult, with unnecessary conditions

now imposed on sending and receiving money orders. The statement also pointed out that the privatization of many Pakistan Railways trains has led to a sharp rise in distribution costs for journals and magazines across the country, placing an additional burden on publishing houses. APNS has called on the Pakistan Post administration to reduce postal service rates to help alleviate some of the challenges faced by newspapers and journals.

Awareness walk against kite flying, aerial firing

RAWALPINDI: An awareness walk was held in the limits of New Town Police Station on Wednesday to discourage kite flying and aerial firing on the eve of the New Year, with participation from the trader community and the police. The walk was organised jointly by the Rawalpindi Anjuman-e-Tajran Commercial Market and the New Town Police to sensitise citizens about public safety, respect for the law and social responsibility. According to the organisers, the walk was led by General Secretary of Anjuman-e-Tajran Commercial Market Raja Zafar Yousaf and Station House Officer (SHO) New Town Police Station Malik Shahid Mahmood. Vice Chairman Hamad Qureshi, executive body member Haji Mumtaz Ahmed, Joint Secretary Tahir Ismail, Mehfooz Khan, Vice President Raja Rashid Mahmood, Zubair Abbasi, Arshad Mughal, Sheikh Raheel, Waqar Bhatti, Abbas, Owais Butt, Chaudhry Imran, Iftikhar Ali, Ali Raza, Qari Sahib, other trader leaders and local citizens also took part. Addressing the participants, speakers said illegal and life-threatening practices such as kite flying and aerial firing endangered human lives and disturbed social harmony and public order. They urged citizens to celebrate the New Year responsibly, with caution and strictly within the bounds of the law. On the occasion, the police and the trader community reaffirmed their resolve to further strengthen mutual cooperation and continue joint efforts to ensure peace, law and order, and the safety of citizens across the city.—APP

Punjab bans oral land transfer

MULTAN: The Punjab Board of Revenue has imposed a complete ban on registration and approval of land transfers based on oral transactions. According to a notification issued on December 30, 2025, no land transfer will be approved on the basis of verbal claims or dealings, except inheritance cases. The notification makes it mandatory to submit registered documents for land sale, gift, mortgage, and exchange. Inheritance-related mutations will continue to be approved under existing laws. Multan Commissioner Aamir Karim Khan has directed all revenue officers to strictly implement the orders. He warned that departmental action would be taken against officers found violating the instructions. The ban has come into force with immediate effect. In this regard, the Commissioner Multan Office has formally conveyed the instructions to all revenue officers, including deputy commissioners, assistant commissioners, and tehsildars. Commissioner Aamir Karim Khan said the decision would ensure transparency in the land mutation system and help eliminate land mafia and fraudulent practices.—APP

Policy dialogue held on transforming fisheries, aquaculture sector

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) here on Wednesday organized a policy seminar on Pakistan's Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy 2025-2035 to deliberate on a long-term framework for green growth, food security, export development, and sustainable livelihoods. The seminar was moderated by Dr Muhammad Faisal, Research Fellow at PIDE and attended by policymakers, researchers, and sector experts, according to PIDE's press release. The seminar underscored the strategic importance of fisheries and aquaculture within Pakistan's agricultural economy, noting that despite its significant contribution to employment and nutrition, the sector has remained underdeveloped due to governance gaps, fragmented legislation, weak value chains, outdated financing mechanisms, and limited integration of climate risks into policy planning.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Kanwar Muhammad Javed Iqbal, Senior Policy Specialist at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), highlighted that the policy represents one of Pakistan's most comprehensive and participatory reform efforts in recent years. Developed through a bottom-up consultative process involving provinces, federal institutions, international experts, and technical working groups, the policy seeks to establish coherence across federal and provincial mandates. Iqbal emphasized that responsible resource use and sound governance form the foundation of the policy, aligning Pakistan's fisheries management with international standards, including FAO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. He stressed the urgent need to address data deficiencies, overfishing, illegal and unreported fishing practices, and inadequate infrastructure that have

constrained the sector's sustainability and export competitiveness. The seminar highlighted the policy's strong focus on revitalizing aquaculture as a key driver of alternative livelihoods and export growth, particularly in response to declining marine fish stocks. Successful pilot initiatives in freshwater and marine aquaculture were cited as evidence of the sector's commercial viability when supported by modern infrastructure, research, and regulatory clarity. Participants were also briefed on major institutional reforms proposed in the policy, including the declaration of fisheries and aquaculture as an industry, tax and duty exemptions to encourage investment, the establishment of an Apex Council for coordination, the introduction of integrated e-governance systems, and strengthened monitoring, control, and surveillance mechanisms to curb illegal fishing.—APP



ISLAMABAD: A delegation of 53rd CTP probationary officers of the civil services academy visiting Senate museum at Parliament House.

KP CM orders issuance of 117,000 pending driving licences

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister (CM) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Muhammad Sohail Afridi, has directed the completion of printing of more than 117,000 pending driving licence cards across the province within one month. According to an official hand-out, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Transport Department has issued a division-wise and district-based schedule for the printing and delivery of driving licence cards. The CM has instructed the concerned authorities to strictly ensure delivery of the licence cards in accordance with the prescribed dates. As per the schedule, printing and delivery of pending driving licence cards in Hazara Division will be completed in the first week of January 2026. In Malakand Division, including Swat, Dir and Buner districts, the pending licences are expected to be cleared by mid-January 2026. In Peshawar Division, the process will be completed between January 23 and 26, 2026, while Kohat Division is expected to complete the task by January 29, 2026. The printing and delivery in Bannu Division will be finalized by January 30, 2026. Similarly, the pending driving licence cards in Mardan and Dera Ismail Khan divisions will also be completed by January 30, 2026. The CM emphasized that provision of public services is the top priority of the present provincial government, adding that no negligence or delay in this regard will be tolerated.—APP

National Vaccine Policy ready for PM's approval

ISLAMABAD: In a significant step toward strengthening Pakistan's health security and achieving industrial self-reliance, the National Vaccine Policy is now ready to be presented to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for approval in the coming days. In this regard, a meeting co-chaired by Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Industries and Production Haroon Akhtar Khan and Federal Minister for National Health Services, Regulations, and Coordination, Mustafa Kamal focused on the local manufacturing of vaccines, said a news release here on Wednesday. The meeting was attended by the Federal Secretary, Ministry of National Health Services, and the Chairman, Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP). Detailed deliberations

were held on the formulation and implementation framework of the vaccine policy, it added. During the meeting, it was announced that the Policy has been finalized and is now set for submission to the Prime Minister. The policy aims to reduce Pakistan's dependence on imported vaccines by encouraging the local production of essential vaccines. Haroon Akhtar emphasized that the policy is in line with prime minister's vision of making Pakistan self-reliant in vaccine manufacturing. "This policy will initiate local vaccine production, which will ensure sustainable capacity building in both the health and industrial sectors," he added. He further noted that the policy will guarantee local production of vaccines, reduce reliance on imports, and serve as a milestone for Pakistan's

public health system and pharmaceutical industry. The policy, he added, will deliver long-term benefits for the public, including affordability, accessibility, and national preparedness against future health emergencies. Mustafa Kamal termed the Policy a critical need of the time, stating that it will help end Pakistan's dependence on external sources for essential vaccines. He assured that vaccine manufacturing under this policy will be carried out in accordance with international standards and global best practices. The meeting concluded with the announcement that the National Vaccine Policy will be presented to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in the coming days for approval and onward implementation.—APP

FIA Immigration Lahore processes over 5.1m passengers

LAHORE: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Immigration at Lahore Airport successfully processed over 5.1 million international arrival and departure passengers during 2025, while arresting 242 wanted accused involved in serious crimes, according to the agency's annual performance report. According to an FIA spokesperson, during 2025, 2.6 million passengers departed Lahore Airport through 12,357 international flights, while 2.5 million passengers arrived from abroad via 12,338 flights. The spokesperson said that FIA Immigration Lahore arrested 242 accused wanted in serious

criminal cases during the year. Of these, 73 accused were arrested while attempting to flee abroad, whereas 169 were apprehended upon arrival in Pakistan. All the arrested individuals were on the Stop List, spokesperson added. Among the arrested accused, 130 were wanted by Punjab Police, 105 by Anti-Human Trafficking Circles, six by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police, and one by Islamabad Police. The spokesperson further said that 121 passengers were offloaded during 2025 for attempting to travel abroad on forged and fake documents. Special measures were taken to curb the

heinous crime of human smuggling, resulting in improved detection and prevention. To enhance professional capacity, 28 training programmes were conducted for immigration officials posted at Lahore Airport with the support of international organisations. In addition, more than 200 immigration officers received specialised training focused on the prevention of human smuggling. The spokesperson said that strict monitoring and capacity-building initiatives would continue to ensure secure, transparent and efficient immigration operations at Lahore Airport.—APP

COURT NOTICE

In the Court of Sunia Safi, Additional Deputy Commissioner (Revenue) Jhelum Application for transfer of mutation Case Title: Amanullah vs Revenue Department etc Against: Sohail Mahmood son of Abdul Aziz, resident of Shahpur dakhali Bhagwal Tehsil Sohawal District Jhelum. (Currently Residence Abroad). As there is not possible to call the respondents through Summons in the instant Application so through proclamation in Newspaper, you are directed to appear in the court on 15.01.2026 at 09:00 AM, otherwise ex-parte proceedings will be initiated

Over 7,000 youth gained skills, income pathways in KP

PESHAWAR: Metrix Pakistan, a youth-led organisation working in technology, education and social development, has claimed educating more than 7,000 young people across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2025, with a growing number of participants transitioning from training into paid digital work, freelancing and entrepreneurial activity. According to the organisation, its programmes were conducted across multiple districts, including Mansehra, Haripur and Peshawar, and were designed to respond to two interlinked challenges facing young people in the province: limited access to quality skills education and shrinking traditional employment opportunities. Unlike short-term awareness initiatives, Metrix Pakistan said its focus throughout the year remained on financially viable skills Training modules were developed around sectors where income generation is increasingly possible through remote work and online markets, allowing participants to earn beyond local economic constraints. Founder and Chief Executive Officer Hassan Nisar said that 2025 marked a decisive shift towards measurable economic outcomes. "Our priority was not just education in theory, but education that leads to earning. Many of the young people we trained have gone on to secure freelance work, internships, or independent clients, creating new income streams for themselves and their families," he said. The organisation's core training areas included cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, digital marketing and blockchain technologies. These fields were selected due to sustained global demand and their relevance to Pakistan's growing freelance and remote-work economy. Metrix Pakistan stated that participants were guided not only in technical skills but also in practical aspects such as client acquisition, digital platforms and professional ethics. Strategic partnerships were central to expanding both credibility and reach. In 2025, Metrix Pakistan became a listed partner in Pakistan of Resecurity, a leading international cybersecurity firm. The collaboration aims to strengthen advanced cybersecurity education, with plans to scale training programmes in 2026 that could place Pakistani youth in higher-value technical roles. The organisation also deepened its partnership with RankingGrow, a well-known South Asian digital marketing company. Aamad Ali, CEO of RankingGrow, said the collaboration with Metrix Pakistan is enabling young people to move beyond basic online skills and towards services that can be directly monetised in competitive markets.—APP

Section 144 imposed for banning illegal gold mining

DNA

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government on Wednesday took strict measures against illegal gold mining in the province by imposing section 144 for 60 days. The gold mining and its excavation along the banks of the Indus and Kabul Rivers in the districts of Karak, Kohat, Nowshera, and Swabi were banned. In this regard, a formal notification has been issued by the Home and Tribal Affairs Department. The action was taken on re-

liable reports received from the relevant departments, district administration, and other institutions indicating that the likelihood of illegal and unregulated placer gold mining along the riverbanks in the said districts is increasing, which could pose serious threats to the environment, water resources, and public safety. The notification said that illegal mining can cause severe damage to riverbanks, water pollution, destruction of the natural environment, and risks to human health. In addition, such activities may lead to disputes among

local communities, unrest, illegal transportation, fuel smuggling, and a deterioration of the law-and-order situation. The order further revealed that certain elements are involved in illegal mining in an organized manner with substantial financial resources, which not only poses a challenge to law enforcement agencies but can also endanger the safety of the public and government officials. In light of the directives of the provincial cabinet, the department of mines has been tasked with conduct-

ing coordinated operations in cooperation with the district administration and police, and instructions have also been issued to deploy additional personnel to deal with any potential untoward situation. Under the order issued by Additional Chief Secretary Home and Tribal Affairs Muhammad Abid Majeed, a complete ban will remain in place on all kinds of mining and illegal gold excavation along the banks of the Indus and Kabul rivers during the enforcement of Section 144. In case of violation, the

machinery, vehicles, equipment, and other materials used may be confiscated and seized in favor of the government. Legal action will be taken against violators under Section 188 of the Pakistan Penal Code. This order will remain in force for 60 days from the date of its issuance. The district administration and police have been directed to strictly ensure the implementation of the ban, while the public has also been urged to comply with the law, refrain from illegal activities, and inform the relevant authorities in case of any violations.

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

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Jan 01 / CUBA
Revolution Day

Jan 01 / Palestine
Palestine Revolution Day

Jan 01 / Sudan
National Day

Jan 04 / Myanmar
Independence Day

Jan 06 / Iraq
Armed Forces Day

Jan 12 / Tanzania
Armed Forces Day

Jan 14 / Uzbekistan
Armed Forces Day

Jan 15 / Nigeria
Armed Forces Day

Jan 20 / Mali
Armed Forces Day

Jan 20 / Laos
Armed Forces Day

Jan 25 / Thailand
Armed Forces Day

Jan 26 / Australia
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Jan 26 / India
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Rector NUML, Minister for collaboration in fields of language, culture

ISLAMABAD: Rector National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Major General (R) Shahid Mahmood Kayani called on Federal Minister for National Heritage and Culture Division, Aurangzeb Khan Khichi, on Wednesday to discuss matters of mutual interest and avenues for collaboration in the fields of language and culture. During the meeting, both sides discussed and agreed on strengthening bilateral collaboration between the National Heritage and Culture Division and NUML in the areas of language promotion, cultural exchange, academic cooperation, and joint cultural initiatives. The Rector briefed the Federal Minister on the academic and institutional functions of NUML and highlighted the university's potential role in supporting national cultural policies through education, research, and outreach programmes. Major General (R) Shahid Mahmood Kayani shared that NUML is exploring options to acquire land or rent a building in Gilgit-Baltistan to extend its educational services to the region. He further stated that currently around 9,000 students are receiving free education across NUML campuses. The Rector emphasized that NUML operates as a welfare-oriented institution and generates its own funds to meet financial requirements. He also noted that the Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) is the Chairman of the Board of Governors (BOG) NUML, and in line



with his vision recognizing languages as an integral part of culture the university plans to rename its Languages Department as "Languages & Culture" in the upcoming BOG meeting scheduled for the end of January 2026. He added that NUML organizes an annual Summer Gala every April, where students showcase their native cultures. The objective of this initiative, he said, is to preserve and promote local cultures and languages across

Pakistan. The Rector expressed his desire to launch a cultural programme at NUML in collaboration with the National Heritage and Culture Division, aimed at introducing students to Pakistan's diverse regional cultures and raising cultural awareness. Federal Minister Aurangzeb Khan Khichi appreciated the initiative and suggested organizing a Cultural Event Week at NUML, similar to Lok Mela, to be held in April. He said that artisans,

crafts, and cultural exhibits from across the country could be brought to the university to educate students about Pakistan's rich cultural heritage, museums, arts, and traditional craftsmanship. The Federal Minister also informed the Rector that the National Heritage and Culture Division had organized 31 programmes related to Marka-e-Haq during August. Secretary National Heritage and Culture Division, Asad Rehman Gillani, was also present during the meeting.—DNA

Ahsan assures market-competitive salaries for TTS faculty

ISLAMABAD :Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Professor Ahsan Iqbal said here on Wednesday that the salaries of teachers recruited under the Tenure Track System (TTS) would be revised and made market-competitive, a move aimed at retaining competent and talented faculty in educational institutions. The minister was chairing the 7th meeting of the Task Force established to review the pay scale system for recruitment in higher educational institutions. He said that during the tenures of Pakistan Muslim League (N) governments, substantial funds were provided to the Higher Education Commission; however, provincial governments would also need to assume

greater responsibility in the higher education sector. Ahsan directed that an effective strategy be developed to provide performance-based incentives to capable and talented teachers, adding that concrete measures are also being taken to retain talented faculty in educational institutions. He stated that the quality of universities is directly linked to the quality of their faculty, and that higher education institutions must play an active role in addressing the country's economic challenges. He said that the promotion system is being fully restructured on a competitive basis, while the current higher education enrollment rate is below 13 percent, which needs to be

increased at least threefold.

Ahsan Iqbal said that the establishment of the US-Pakistan and UK Knowledge Corridors was aimed at improving the quality of human resources, and that arrangements are being made, in collaboration with China and other global partners, to develop a highly skilled workforce. He stated that the education sector has now become an important element of soft power, and efforts are underway to attract international students to Pakistani universities. Professor Ahsan Iqbal added that from 2026 onwards, a formal system of performance audits and ranking of universities will be launched to improve the quality of education.—APP

ISSI accords warm farewell to DG envoy Sohail

ISLAMABAD: In a gracefully hosted event, the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) bid a warm and respectful farewell to Ambassador Sohail Mahmood upon the completion of his term as Director General of the Institute. Ambassador Sohail Mahmood took charge as the Director General of the ISSI on 1st January 2023, following his retirement from the Foreign Service of Pakistan. He served with distinction as the 30th Foreign Secretary of Pakistan. During his tenure at ISSI, the Institute underwent far-reaching reforms aimed at strengthening its research capacity, institutional efficiency, and national and international outreach. Several new initiatives including: establishment of dedicated 'ASEAN Corner', 'China Corner' and the 'Kashmir Resource Centre' were undertaken by the Institute under his visionary leadership; further reinforcing ISSI's role as a leading policy advocacy and strategic research institution. Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Talat Shabbir, Director (Administration) and Director of the China-Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC), Malik Qasim Mustafa, Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Centre (ACDC), along with other members of the Research faculty shared their enriching professional experiences of working with Ambassador Sohail Mahmood. They highlighted the notable progress achieved in research output, dialogue initiatives, and institutional visibility under his stewardship. Chairman of ISSI's Board of Governors, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, paid rich tribute to Ambassador Sohail Mahmood's transformative contributions for the ISSI. He lauded his pivotal role in enhancing the quality and relevance of the Institute's research, expanding its outreach, and strengthening its policy input at national and international levels. He also appreciated Ambassador Sohail Mahmood's tireless efforts in elevating ISSI's institutional profile with commitment and vision, noting that his leadership and dedication would be greatly missed. In his farewell address, Ambassador Sohail Mahmood stated that it was a great privilege and honour for him to serve as the Director General ISSI.—DNA

Crime declines in twin cities, public safety remains concern

ISLAMABAD: Piyass International, a human rights and social justice platform, on Wednesday released a comprehensive crime situation report for 2025, noting an overall decline in major crime categories in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, while cautioning that public safety concerns persist in several localities.

According to the report, Islamabad recorded encouraging trends during the early months of 2025, with police data showing a 20 percent reduction in overall crime compared to the corresponding period last year. The report highlighted a sharp decline of 74 percent in burglary cases, along with reductions of 19 percent in robberies and 17 percent in murder cases. Incidents of vehicle and motorcycle theft also fell by 22 percent, reflecting improved policing and enforcement measures. However, the report noted that sporadic incidents of street crime, snatching and theft continued to be reported by residents.

In Rawalpindi, the report pointed to a decline in serious crimes such as robbery-murder, kidnapping for ransom and vehicle snatching, attributing the improvement to intensified police operations and better recovery of stolen vehicles. Despite these gains, Piyass International observed that street crime, mobile snatching, drug-related offences and property crimes remained pressing challenges in many neighbourhoods.—APP

Police nab kite supplier, recover 200 kites

RAWALPINDI:The Gujjar Khan Police have arrested a kite supplier and recovered 200 kites along with 25 spools of string during a crackdown on the illegal activity, a Rawalpindi Police spokesman said on Wednesday. According to the spokesman, the suspect was taken into custody during an operation in the Gujjar Khan area, where the prohibited items were seized from his possession. A case has been registered against the accused. Superintendent of Police (SP) Saddam Anam Sher, in a statement, said kite flying had been declared a non-bailable offence and warned that those involved in what she described as a dangerous and deadly pastime would not escape the law. She said strict action would continue against suppliers and facilitators of kite flying to ensure public safety.—APP

NADRA's new citizen facilitation initiative

ISLAMABAD :Due to age or certain medical conditions, the fingerprints of many citizens gradually fade over time. When such citizens approach banks, SIM card franchises, housing societies or seek services related to property transfer and other transactions where biometric verification through fingerprints is mandatory, they often face significant difficulties. Moreover, at many service points, biometric verification is also not possible due to the use of substandard or low-quality fingerprint readers. Although the State Bank of Pakistan and the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority have prescribed facilitative mechanisms for such citizens, in practice, individuals continue to face considerable challenges in availing these services. To ensure an immediate and effective resolution of this issue, the Prime Minister of Pakistan and the Federal Minister for Interior and Narcotics Control have issued directives to NADRA. In compliance with these directives, NADRA has undertaken the following key measures. First, on the recommendation of NADRA, the Federal Government has amended the National Identity Card Rules to expand the definition of biometrics. In addition to fingerprints, facial photographs and iris scans have now been legally recognised as valid biometric identifiers. This amendment provides a robust legal foundation for the implementation of a multi-biometric verification system in Pakistan. Based on this legal framework, NADRA has introduced technical innovations enabling contactless fingerprint and facial recognition-based biometric verification. This system is currently available both at NADRA Registration Centres and on the Pak ID mobile application for services falling within NADRA's jurisdiction. It is already being utilised for biometric verification in the transfer of Islamabad-registered vehicles and online passport applications. In the near future, proof-of-life certificates for Federal Government pensioners will also be issued under this system, while the scope of these digital services is being expanded in phases. Insha Allah, with effect from 20 January 2026, NADRA will commence the issuance of facial recognition-based biometric verification certificates at all its registration centres for those citizens whose fingerprint-based verification is not possible. Wherever any institution requires such verification, citizens may obtain this certificate from any NADRA Registration Centre upon payment of a nominal fee of Rs 20. Under this procedure, if fingerprint-based biometric verification fails at the service provider's end, the citizen will visit the nearest NADRA Registration Centre to have a fresh photograph taken. This photograph will be matched with the image already available in NADRA's records. Upon successful verification, NADRA will issue a certificate containing the purpose of verification, the citizen's recent photograph alongside the photograph on record, CNIC number, name, father's name, a unique tracking ID and a QR code. The certificate will be valid for seven days. The citizen will submit it to the relevant institution where biometric verification was required and the concerned institution will incorporate the certificate into its records and verify it online through NADRA. In the future, facial image-based biometric verification certificates will also be available through NADRA's e-Sahulat franchises. Following the formal launch of the Digital ID, this facility will be made available for all services through the PakID application. NADRA is fully prepared to implement this system. However, for its effective execution, NADRA has requested all regulators, relevant public institutions and private sector organisations to progressively upgrade their hardware and software in accordance with approved standards to enable the use of this biometric verification service. —APP

Naqvi announces major police welfare reforms

ISLAMABAD: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Wednesday paid an official visit to the National Police Foundation (NPF) in Islamabad, where he chaired a high-level meeting and reviewed the institution's ongoing welfare initiatives for police personnel. The visit marked a significant step toward expanding support programs for members of the police force across Pakistan. During the briefing, Acting Managing Director of the National Police Foundation, Ali Nasir Rizvi, presented a detailed overview of the foundation's overall performance, development projects, and welfare schemes aimed at improving the lives of police employees. He highlighted recent achievements and ongoing reforms that have helped strengthen the institution's capacity and financial standing. In a series of major announcements, Minister Naqvi unveiled new welfare measures designed to support police officers at all ranks. He approved a plan to provide residential plots on easy, low-installment plans to Assistant Superintendents of Police (ASPs) currently undergoing train-

ing at the National Police Academy. The initiative aims to provide young officers with long-term financial security early in their careers. The Minister also announced that 10 Inspectors, Sub-Inspectors, and Assistant Sub-Inspectors (ASIs) from various regions of Pakistan will be sent abroad each year on fully funded scholarships to attend specialized courses focused on policing and security. This step is expected to enhance professional development and bring international best practices to the country's police force. In another key welfare measure, the National Police Foundation will cover the complete educational expenses of 15 sons or daughters of constables who secure admission to Pakistan's top-ranking universities. This initiative seeks to provide equal academic opportunities to the children of lower-ranked police personnel. Furthermore, Naqvi approved an annual scholarship program under which five SP and SSP-rank officers will be sent abroad to pursue advanced degrees in Artificial Intelligence (AI), a move aimed at modernizing policing methods

and promoting the use of emerging technologies in law enforcement. Calling for a comprehensive plan to further expand the foundation's resources, the Interior Minister emphasized the need for sustainable financial growth. He commended the NPF management for successfully steering the institution out of deficit and generating a surplus, noting that this positive shift reflected the team's dedication and effective governance. "We want to transform the National Police Foundation into a highly active and dynamic institution focused entirely on the welfare of police employees," Naqvi said while addressing the meeting. The session was attended by all directors, deputy directors, and senior officials of the National Police Foundation, who briefed the Minister on future projects and ongoing reforms aimed at strengthening welfare programs for the police force. The new initiatives announced by the Interior Minister are expected to bring significant improvements in the professional, educational, and personal welfare of police employees across Pakistan.—DNA

Briefs

First lady advises citizens against aerial firing

ISLAMABAD: First Lady Aseefa Bhutto Zardari on Wednesday urged the citizens to celebrate the New Year responsibly and refrain from aerial firing, as "senseless shooting" claimed innocent lives every year. "As we bid farewell to this year and welcome 2026, let's remember to celebrate responsibly. Aerial firing costs innocent lives every year," the first lady wrote on her X timeline. She said that a senseless shooting could turn moments of joy into tragedy, urging the people to enjoy the festivities without risking the lives of others. "Be responsible and celebrate safely," First Lady Aseefa added.—APP

Probationary officers visit Ministry of Railways

ISLAMABAD: The probationary officers of the 53rd Common Training Programme (CTP) on Wednesday visited the Ministry of Railways as part of their professional exposure and training. During the visit, Additional Secretary Railways, Shoaib Adil, briefed the trainee officers on various aspects of railway affairs, said a news release. The officers were given an overview of the administrative and operational framework of Pakistan Railways, including its role in national connectivity and public service delivery. The briefing also highlighted the responsibilities of national institutions and the importance of efficient governance. The emphasis was placed on the role of public servants in ensuring improved public service delivery and institutional performance.—APP

Rawalpindi police finalise New Year security plan

RAWALPINDI: On the instructions of City Police Officer (CPO) Syed Khalid Hamdani, Rawalpindi Police have finalised a comprehensive security plan to ensure public safety and curb aerial firing, fireworks and one-wheeling on the eve of the New Year, a police spokesman said on Wednesday. More than 5,000 police officers will be deployed across the city, including over 850 personnel assigned to traffic management. At least 70 special pickets have been established at key locations to prevent one-wheeling, while additional pickets have been set up in the limits of all police stations to deter aerial firing and fireworks. A complete ban on aerial firing, fireworks and one-wheeling has been imposed, and strict legal action will be taken against violators, the spokesman said, adding that cases would be registered under terrorism provisions against those found involved in aerial firing. The Dolphin Force, security squads and police station mobile units will remain on continuous duty throughout the night, he said. Effective security arrangements have also been put in place for worship services of the Christian community.—APP

Pakistan envoy, students join Beijing heritage tour

ISLAMABAD: A Pakistan embassy official and Pakistani students joined diplomats and foreign students on a day-long tour of Beijing, organisers said, as China promotes youth exchanges through heritage-themed visits and dialogue. The group visited a photo exhibition at Longfu Temple, stopped at the Bell and Drum Towers — part of Beijing's "Central Axis" that was added to UNESCO's World Heritage List in July 2024 — and ended the day at the Beijing Enamel Factory, home to Jingtailan cloisonné enamelware, a craft recognised in China as national-level intangible cultural heritage. Manzoor Ali Memon, minister-counsellor at Pakistan's embassy in China, said the programme gave participants a better understanding of Beijing.—APP

ALP hosts dialogue on inclusive governance and youth engagement

The dialogue concluded with remarks by Dr. Baqir Husnain, Director, Quality Enhancement and External Linkages, RWU, who reaffirmed the university's commitment to building stronger connections between institutions and youth, and to promoting transparent and accountable governance in Pakistan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Accountability Lab Pakistan (ALP) organized a dialogue on Inclusive Governance and Youth Engagement at Rawalpindi Women University (RWU) on Tuesday. The dialogue was held under the Integrity Innovation Lab initiative, funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). It brought together students, youth leaders, and senior public sector professionals for an open and inclusive discussion on governance and civic participation. The dialogue aimed to promote youth voices in governance and create direct engagement between young people and public decision makers. Through a panel discussion followed by an interactive question and answer session, participants explored how youth can play a more active role in shaping inclusive policies, promoting integrity in public institutions, and contributing to accountable governance processes. Students shared their experiences, concerns, and expectations, making the discussion both relevant and grounded. The Integrity Innovation Lab focuses on advancing ethical and inclusive governance by promoting citizen centered approaches, including design thinking. The dialogue reflected this approach by encouraging open conversations, active listening, and co creation between institutions and young citizens.



The panel included speakers from the development, education, and government sectors, who shared their perspectives while engaging directly with students. While sharing her views, Javeria Masood, a development practitioner from UNDP, shared that young people remain excluded due to structural barriers, including limited awareness of their rights and responsibilities, lack of skills and unemployment. Highlighting recent crises, she recalled the pivotal role youth played during the COVID 19 pandemic, floods, and other emergencies. She stressed the importance of creating enabling environments for youth by easing business registration processes and supporting entrepreneurship and startup initiatives. During the panel discussion, Ghulam Ali Mallah, Executive Director of the Inter Board Coordination Commission (IBCC),

highlighted the gap between rhetoric and action on inclusivity. He noted that youth are often treated as beneficiaries rather than active partners. He stressed that education systems and policies must be updated to remain flexible and relevant. He also emphasized the need to encourage critical thinking, promote ethical use of artificial intelligence (AI) and information technology, and ensure accessibility and transparency in policymaking. Addressing the participants, Mukhtar Paras, Joint Secretary at the Cabinet Division, emphasized the importance of decentralization in strengthening inclusive governance. He noted that inclusive systems promote stability, which supports growth. Highlighting that women constitute more than half the population and youth more than 60%, he questioned whether these groups are meaningfully represented in policy processes. He stressed

the need to strengthen local governance, promote youth participation in political parties and parliamentary processes, and ensure that inclusivity is embedded in governance structures to support sustainable development. Panelists highlighted the importance of meaningful youth engagement in policy processes and emphasized the need for inclusive and transparent governance practices. They encouraged students to remain informed, engaged, and proactive in civic spaces. The dialogue concluded with remarks by Dr. Baqir Husnain, Director, Quality Enhancement and External Linkages, RWU, who reaffirmed the university's commitment to building stronger connections between institutions and youth, and to promoting transparent and accountable governance in Pakistan.

Tanveer reviews wheat sowing, stocks, policy progress

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research, Mr. Rana Tanveer Hussain chaired 2nd meeting of the National Wheat Oversight Committee to review the wheat sowing progress for Rabi 2025–26, current wheat stock position, and implementation mechanisms under the INWP. During the meeting, all provinces have been advised to constitute Provincial Implementation Units to ensure effective implementation of the INWP in a coordinated manner. The Committee reviewed province-wise wheat sowing progress. In Punjab, wheat sowing has been completed in a timely manner with 90% early sowing. The province has also witnessed a significant increase in the use of certified wheat seed, along with higher uptake of urea fertilizer, largely due to improved availability and comparatively lower prices. These factors are expected to contribute to higher yields and a bumper wheat crop, reflecting the supportive role of the Federal Ministry in facilitating access to quality seed and fertilizers. In Sindh, wheat sowing progress was satisfactory and has surpassed sowing targets. In Balochistan, sowing is currently lower due to insufficient rainfall; however, the shortfall is expected to be covered following upcoming rains. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a substantial portion of sowing has been completed, though sowing in snowbound areas is late. Overall, wheat sowing targets across all provinces are expected to be achieved. The Committee was also briefed on the current wheat stock position. The Federal Minister assured that there is no shortage of wheat in the country, and sufficient stocks are available to meet national requirements for the current food year. Mr. Rana Tanveer Hussain emphasized continued coordination between the federal and provincial governments to ensure food security, stabilize markets, and support farmers through timely policy interventions.—DNA

ITP deploys 350 officers, restricts heavy traffic on new year's night

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) has finalised a comprehensive traffic plan for New Year's Night, deploying more than 350 traffic officers across the federal capital to ensure smooth traffic flow and public safety during celebrations. An ITP spokesperson told APP on Wednesday that all kinds of heavy traffic will be barred from entering Islamabad from 7:00 pm on December 31 until 3:00 am on New Year's Day. He said that due to New Year's events and gatherings, heavy traffic pressure is expected on Expressway, Jinnah Avenue, Srinagar Highway, Club Road, Murree Road and Park Road. Jinnah Avenue Flyover, Zero Point, Khanna and PWD Underpass are also likely to witness congestion. To prevent violations and ensure safety, the spokesperson said that eight special traffic squads have been constituted to curb one-wheeling, reckless driving

and rash driving. Strict legal action will be taken against car skating and dangerous driving. He urged parents to prevent minors from underage driving and one-wheeling, warning that violators will face strict enforcement. The spokesperson added that special traffic squads will remain deployed at recreational spots, while citizens are advised to use alternative routes between 7:00 pm and 3:00 am to avoid inconvenience. Parking on roads will not be allowed under any circumstances, and enforcement teams will remain active throughout the night to ensure compliance. He said Islamabad Traffic Police will take all possible measures to maintain traffic flow and facilitate citizens, urging the public to celebrate responsibly while strictly observing traffic laws. For further updates and guidance, citizens may contact the Traffic Helpline 1915 or Pucar-15. —APP

Kashgar trade fair inks 19.6m Yuan in deals

ISLAMABAD: The Kashgar Featured Products Promotion and the 2nd Trade Fair was held in Kashgar, Xinjiang, bringing together overseas buyers and local enterprises to deepen economic and trade cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative, China Economic Net (CEN) reported on Wednesday. The event attracted more than 40 purchasing representatives and heads of chambers of commerce from countries including Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Iran, alongside over 150 local companies from Kashgar. At the signing ceremony, eight cooperation intentions were reached with a total value of more than 19.6 million yuan (about USD 2.8 million). The agreements covered a wide range of sectors, including new energy, industrial and mining machinery and equipment, building materials, furniture and hardware, as well as home appliances and

daily consumer goods. Ali, a business representative from Pakistan, said the promotion event offered valuable opportunities for international partners. "Taking this event as an opportunity, we have come to Kashgar, a fertile land for investment and development," he said. "As a core hub of the Silk Road Economic Belt, Kashgar has not only built a broad bridge for trade, but also enabled us to closely connect with partners in Central Asia, South Asia and beyond. This promotion event has undoubtedly provided an excellent platform for exploring cooperation opportunities and expanding development space." Designed as a practical platform for cooperation, the event aimed to facilitate more efficient trade links among Belt and Road partner countries while opening new channels for mutually beneficial international trade.—APP

30,241 emission stickers issued in 2025

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Transport Authority (ITA) has released its annual performance report for 2025, reporting the issuance of 30,241 emission stickers, enforcement action against 2,376 vehicles, and the granting of 72 route permits during the year. The annual report was issued at the close of 2025 and outlines the authority's work across public transport regulation, emission control, and enforcement against rule violations in Islamabad. According to the report, the Islamabad Transport Authority issued 30,241 emission stickers to vehicles during the year. These stickers were provided after emission checks conducted under the vehicle emission testing system. The authority stated that the aim of the program is to monitor

vehicle emissions and reduce harmful output from transport operating within city limits. The report stated that enforcement teams carried out actions against 2,376 vehicles during different operations in 2025. These actions were taken for violations related to transport rules, vehicle fitness, emissions, and route compliance. The authority did not specify the breakdown of each category but confirmed that enforcement was conducted across multiple sectors of the city. During the year, the Islamabad Transport Authority issued 72 route permits, according to the annual report. These permits were granted to transport operators to regulate movement on approved routes. The authority stated that route permits are issued to ensure organized trans-

port flow and to manage passenger services within designated corridors. The report further noted that 144 vehicles were fined for violating route permit conditions. These violations included operating outside approved routes or failing to comply with permit terms. Heavy fines were imposed as part of enforcement measures to ensure compliance with transport regulations. In another category of enforcement, 108 vehicles were penalized and shifted to police stations after being declared unfit. The report states that these vehicles were found to be unsafe for operation on roads. The authority said such actions were taken to reduce the risk of accidents caused by mechanically unfit vehicles. The report also highlighted actions taken against vehicles

contributing to air pollution. According to the figures, 185 vehicles identified as sources of air pollution were shifted to police stations during various operations. These actions were part of efforts to control emissions and improve air quality in the city. As a result of different enforcement actions, the Islamabad Transport Authority imposed total fines amounting to Rs234,500 during the year, the report states. The fines were collected from violations related to route permits, vehicle fitness, and emission standards. Chairman Islamabad Transport Authority, Irfan Nawaz Memon, stated that the authority carried out focused actions to protect the city's air from pollution. He said operations were conducted to check emissions.—APP

435 women qualify for training at Gwadar Pak-China institute

Separately, PCT&VI approved additional skill-based programmes this year, including boat making, boat engine repair, solar electrical work and mobile phone repairing, Gwadar Pro reported in October

ISLAMABAD: The Pak-China Technical and Vocational Institute (PCT&VI) at the University of Gwadar said that 435 applicants had qualified for admission to its diploma and short-course programmes, with women accounting for 191 of the successful candidates. Candidates qualified for three-year diploma programmes in e-commerce, maritime and port management, mechatronics, software technology and tourism management, Gwadar Pro reported quoting the institute. A total of 217 candidates qualified for one-year programmes, including 127 for an advanced English diploma and 60 for a diploma in artificial intelligence and data science, while 92 qualified for six-month technical courses. Female participation was highest in the advanced English diploma (80 women) and the six-month crane-operator and car-driving course (32 women), the institute said. PCT&VI is part of Pakistan-China cooperation linked to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, according to the CPEC secretariat's official website, which lists the institute among Gwadar projects. The institute said it offers scholarships, fee waivers and merit-based support to encourage enrolment, particularly from low-income families. Separately, PCT&VI approved additional skill-based programmes this year, including boat making, boat engine repair, solar electrical work and mobile phone repairing, Gwadar Pro reported in October.

SCP takes up bail plea in alleged US visa scam

DNA

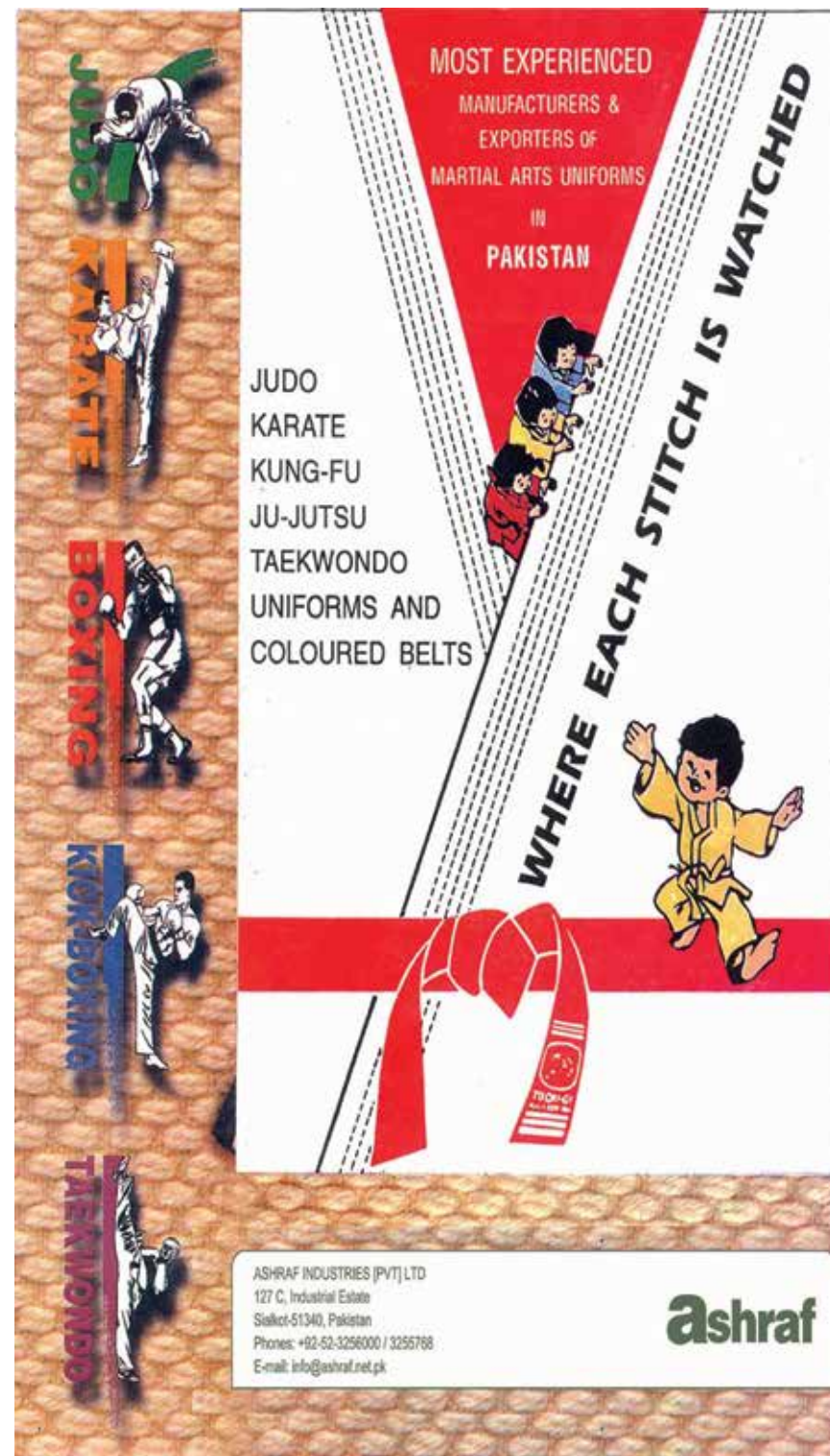
ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Wednesday heard a bail plea filed by a woman accused of applying for a US visa using forged documents, during which Justice Jamal Mandokhail remarked that women are held in high regard in Pakistani society, but a woman must also exercise caution to safeguard her own dignity.

Justice Mandokhail observed that since the woman's name had surfaced in the matter, the court was issuing notices. During the hearing, Justice Musarrat Hilali also commented that a woman has to ensure respect for herself. Counsel for the accused informed the court that a total of 20 individuals had applied for US visas, out of which action was taken against six persons after their documents were found to be forged. The lawyer further submitted that the accused is a retired government employee and was travelling abroad as a trainee. The court issued notices to the parties on the bail application and adjourned further hearing for an indefinite period.

Federal Minister launches roadmap

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training, Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, launched the FDE quality education and innovation roadmap based on five interconnected pillars. Federal Secretary for the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training Nadeem Mahbub, Director General, Federal Directorate Education (FDE), Syed Junaid Akhlaq, along with senior officials and representatives of the Project Coordination Unit (PCU), were also present on the occasion, said a press release. Speaking on the occasion, Federal Secretary Nadeem Mahbub stated that the roadmap is aligned with the national vision of ensuring equity and quality in education. He explained that the roadmap is structured around five interconnected pillars designed to ensure systemic and sustainable reforms. These pillars included Digital and Innovative Learning, Policy Formulation and Review, Enabling Learning Environment.



Historic breakthrough

Dr. ABDEL AZIZ ALUWAI SHEG

THE last year has been pivotal for Middle Eastern security in several meaningful ways. It has witnessed several crises and breakthroughs: Syria topped the list, but there were also key developments in Gaza, the West Bank, Iran, Yemen and Sudan. The reverberations from these hot spots are likely to continue into 2026. Syria witnessed the most profound transformation in its recent history following the fall of the Assad regime after decades of a ruthless dictatorship, which turned the country into a narco-state, a haven for terrorists and a vassal for Iran. All that changed thanks to Syria's new leader, Ahmad Al-Sharaa. When US President Donald Trump met Al-Sharaa in Riyadh in May, at the behest of Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Trump announced the lifting of sanctions against Syria. The two clicked. They met again in September in New York and at the White House in November, each time Trump heaping praise on the young leader, which is remarkable considering that, until recently, the US had a bounty on his head as a leader affiliated with Al-Qaeda, America's nemesis. His redemption was complete in the eyes of Washington. But that message escaped Benjamin Netanyahu and Israel, which launched hundreds of attacks against Syria with the clear intent of destabilizing the new government. Syria's efforts to integrate into the regional and international orders as a normal state will contribute significantly to the Middle East's security and stability, and eventually its prosperity. Israel intensified its genocidal war against Gaza in 2025, taking advantage of the transition period following the arrival of the Trump administration in January. The new administration appeared sympathetic to Israel, entertaining the idea of emptying Gaza of its Palestinian inhabitants and turning it into a giant beach resort. It tried to persuade other countries to take them in, with little success. Syria's efforts to integrate as a normal state will contribute significantly to the Middle East's security and stability. In March, Israel tightened its blockade of Gaza, blocking all aid and causing mass starvation. The pressure of world opinion grew, including in the US and among Trump's base, which in 2025 shifted decidedly against Israel. Repeated UN resolutions, which the US voted against but failed to stop, highlighted Washington's isolation on this issue. After Israel attacked Qatar, a close ally of the US, in September, the administration decided to act. Later that month, Trump met with Arab and Muslim leaders in New York and announced his 20-point plan for peace in Gaza, followed by a ceasefire on Oct. 10 and the Sharm El-Sheikh summit three days later. The US then persuaded the UN Security Council to adopt the plan, which it did last month, despite the misgivings of China and Russia. There was another major alignment during 2025 in favor of the two-state solution and recognition of the state of Palestine, despite the Trump administration's attempts to scuttle the efforts exerted by Saudi Arabia, France and other countries to mobilize support for the initiative. The vote at the UN in September was overwhelmingly supportive and the White House finally backed down. After some of its major allies rec-

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ognized the Palestinian state, the administration stopped threatening those that planned to take that step with sanctions. This has not been a good year for Iran. Following the loss of Syria and decimation of Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iran and its proxies continued to suffer severe blows during 2025. The 12-day war Israel waged on Iran in June, which included American strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities, marked a dangerous escalation not seen in decades. The strikes did not lead to a breakthrough in the nuclear talks; Tehran continued its defiance of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, of which it is a party, and the International Atomic Energy Agency. Instead, Iran attacked Qatar, one of its few remaining friends, setting back regional diplomatic efforts for reconciliation between the two shores of the Gulf. In March, the US launched intensive air and naval strikes against the Houthis in Yemen, another Iranian proxy, in response to the group's attacks on international shipping. The UK joined in but the strikes stopped abruptly in May through Oman's mediation. Attacks on shipping stopped for two months, but then the Houthis struck again in July. Just like the first time the US and UK launched such strikes against the Houthis in 2024, there was no political component to the attacks. The UN, which owns the political track, did not intervene. It all but stopped its mediation in Yemen following the start of the Gaza war in 2023. After scores of its staff were detained by the Houthis, it decided to leave Sanaa altogether in 2025. With the UN mediation on life support and the Houthis riding high on anti-Western sentiment in Yemen, they launched repeated incursions into government-controlled areas, without much success. The lines have remained largely unchanged since a truce was announced more than three years ago. However, the Southern Transitional Council, a group seeking independence for the south of the country but formally part of the governing Presidential Leadership Council led by Dr. Rashad Al-Alimi, kept the pressure on government forces, making gains at times, thus weakening the government camp and emboldening the Houthis. In Sudan, the war between the armed forces and the Rapid Support Forces militia raged during 2025. After a streak of victories for the Sudanese army in the east of the country, liberating major cities including the capital Khartoum, it suffered big losses in the west, as the rebel group gained the upper hand in the battle for El-Fasher, which resulted in untold losses among civilians. The UN has described the situation in Sudan as a "crisis of staggering proportions, with civilians paying the highest price." It estimated that more than 30 million people, almost two-thirds of Sudan's population, are in need of humanitarian assistance. There was a glimmer of hope when Trump announced in November that, at the behest of the crown prince, he had decided to engage more on Sudan. Through what is known as the Jeddah Platform, Saudi Arabia and the US have been working together for some time to mediate the conflict in Sudan. Trump's announcement made it clear that he intended to reenergize US mediation efforts. The year has seen several remarkable successes for Saudi diplomacy, starting with the fact that Trump made Riyadh his first foreign destination following his return to the White House in January. In May, Saudi Arabia hosted a GCC-US summit and a Saudi-American investment summit, both of which were attended by Trump. In September, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signed a landmark strategic mutual defense agreement, stipulating that any attack on either country would be considered as an attack on both. The agreement formalized long-standing ties going back almost 80 years, including in defense cooperation.

Power Over Peace: The Trump–Netanyahu Equation

Qamar Bashir



Parallel to Gaza, Netanyahu used the Washington stage to revive and intensify a familiar and increasingly toxic narrative about Iran. Despite more than fifteen years of sanctions, covert operations, regional confrontations, and direct military attacks—including recent U.S. strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities that Trump openly defended as having “obliterated” Iran’s nuclear program—Netanyahu showed no sign of restraint. He once again warned that Iran remains on the brink of producing a nuclear bomb and is expanding missile capabilities that could allegedly reach the United States itself, framing Iran not only as a regional threat but as a direct danger to American security

IN the closing days of December 2025, a surge of diplomatic and political activity in the United States once again placed Israel at the center of global controversy. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, under severe legal and political pressure at home, traveled to Florida to meet U.S. President Donald Trump in an encounter that went far beyond routine diplomacy. What emerged was not merely a reaffirmation of alliance, but a troubling fusion of personal political survival with the fate of nations, carrying consequences that extend well beyond Gaza and into the broader Middle East. Netanyahu arrived in the United States facing corruption charges, public discontent, and an increasingly fractured Israeli political landscape. President Trump's public embrace of him as an indispensable “wartime prime minister” elevated Netanyahu's domestic crisis into an international narrative. By suggesting—implicitly and at times explicitly—that Israel's very existence is inseparable from Netanyahu's leadership, Trump blurred a fundamental democratic boundary, placing individual political longevity above institutional accountability. His subsequent claim that he had urged Israel's president to pardon Netanyahu, though promptly denied, reinforced the perception that legal norms were being subordinated to geopolitical convenience. During their talks, Trump and Netanyahu once again proclaimed commitment to advancing a Gaza “peace plan,” yet the substance of that plan exposed familiar and deeply troubling rigidity. Trump reiterated that Hamas's disarmament is a non-negotiable prerequisite for any second phase involving reconstruction or governance, a position Netanyahu echoed forcefully, declaring that no political future for Gaza is conceivable so long as Hamas retains weapons. This absolutist framing reduces peace to a military checklist and leaves little room for addressing the deeper political roots of the conflict or the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. What sharpened concerns further was Trump's categorical dismissal of accusations that Israel is violating the ceasefire or sabotaging the very peace plan he claims was endorsed by dozens of nations. When pressed, Trump absolved Israel entirely, insisting it is “doing its part” and placing sole responsibility for violations on Hamas. More strikingly, when asked who would confront Hamas during the implementation of the peace plan, Trump explicitly excluded both Israel and the United States. Instead, he suggested that Muslim-majority coun-

tries contributing troops to a future international stabilization force would be responsible for neutralizing Hamas in Gaza and the West Bank. This maneuver effectively shifts the unfinished business of the war onto Muslim armies, insulating both Israel and the United States from further direct confrontation. The irony is stark. After years of overwhelming Israeli military force, backed unconditionally by Washington, Hamas remains intact, operational, and central to negotiations that produced the ceasefire itself. Unable to dismantle Hamas militarily, the architects of the war now appear intent on outsourcing the risk, bloodshed, and political fallout to others. The consequences of such a strategy could be profound. Hamas has already made clear that it will not disarm unless Israel fully complies with the ceasefire and pursues the peace plan objectively and without violations—conditions Israel has historically resisted. If Muslim forces are deployed under these circumstances, they risk being drawn into direct confrontation with Hamas, igniting backlash not only on the battlefield but within their own societies. What is presented as an international stabilization effort thus carries the seeds of a broader regional rupture, transforming a Palestinian struggle into an intra-Muslim conflict while those who failed to resolve it step aside. Parallel to Gaza, Netanyahu used the Washington stage to revive and intensify a familiar and increasingly toxic narrative about Iran. Despite more than fifteen years of sanctions, covert operations, regional confrontations, and direct military attacks—including recent U.S. strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities that Trump openly defended as having “obliterated” Iran's nuclear program—Netanyahu showed no sign of restraint. He once again warned that Iran remains on the brink of producing a nuclear bomb and is expanding missile capabilities that could allegedly reach the United States itself, framing Iran not only as a regional threat but as a direct danger to American security. This rhetoric is strikingly familiar. Similar claims were made about Iraq, Libya, Syria, and other states, each time serving as justification for intervention, destabilization, or regime collapse. In each case, the aftermath brought prolonged chaos rather than security. Yet the pattern appears to be repeating. Netanyahu's renewed alarmism suggests that another chapter is already being written, one aimed not merely at containment but at regime change in Iran. Recent developments inside Iran add weight to these concerns. Widespread strikes and protests have erupted over sharp economic deterioration,

with Iran's currency reportedly losing around 40 percent of its value in the wake of the recent Israel-Iran confrontation. While Iran's internal economic challenges are complex and longstanding, the timing underscores how economic pressure is increasingly being weaponized as a tool of coercion. The tightening grip of sanctions, financial isolation, and strategic pressure points to a coordinated effort by the United States and Israel to use economic collapse as a lever to provoke internal unrest and ultimately reshape Iran's political order. Globally, reaction to this convergence of military threats and economic warfare has been far from uniform. European governments and international institutions have called for de-escalation and renewed diplomacy, warning that perpetual coercion undermines global stability and the non-proliferation regime itself. Several Arab states, once cautiously open to normalization with Israel, are growing increasingly uneasy with policies that appear dismissive of humanitarian law and regional balance. Within the United States, divisions are also sharpening. While Trump's political base applauds his unyielding support for Israel, critics argue that unconditional backing and escalating threats weaken America's credibility and entangle it in conflicts with no clear exit. The gap between Washington's rhetoric and the broader international mood continues to widen. The Trump–Netanyahu nexus thus represents more than a personal alliance; it reflects a strategic mindset that prioritizes force over diplomacy, personalities over institutions, and short-term political survival over long-term regional stability. By personalizing national destiny, outsourcing unresolved wars, and reviving discredited threat narratives, this approach risks deepening instability rather than resolving it. If the Middle East is to escape its cycle of destruction, the international community—particularly the Muslim world and multilateral institutions—must resist being drawn into this trap. National interests cannot be subordinated to individual political preservation, nor can peace be built on coercion alone. Without a genuine commitment to accountability, political inclusion, and humanitarian justice, the region will remain hostage to alliances that promise security but consistently deliver ruin.

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Journalism, Technology and Trust in Pakistan

Dr. Muhammad Rizwan Bhatti

Yet despite frequent criticism, social and digital media are not inherently harmful. Indeed, they have exposed corruption, amplified marginalized voices and enabled real-time reporting during emergencies. In Pakistan, citizen journalism has at times filled critical information gaps. Nevertheless, research consistently shows that false information spreads faster than verified news, particularly when it provokes fear or outrage. This dynamic has tangible repercussions, including public panic, reputational...

PAKISTAN is reaching a turning point in its information journey as it prepares to enter 2026. Journalism today operates in an environment markedly different from that of even a decade ago. Rapid technological advancement, expanding internet access and an increasingly polarized public discourse have reshaped this Information landscape. Consequently, the processes of news gathering, distribution and consumption are evolving at a pace that is simultaneously disrupting established conventions and creating unprecedented opportunities for transparency and accountability. Central to this transformation is Pakistan's digital expansion. Official statistics indicate that the country now has over 190 million mobile subscribers and more than 130 million internet users, with social media platforms serving as the primary source of news for a substantial segment of the population. On the one hand, this shift has lowered barriers to entry in the information space, empowering independent voices and ordinary citizens alike. On the other hand, it has weakened traditional editorial gatekeeping, enabling misinformation, partial facts and emotionally charged narratives to circulate with alarming speed. Within Pakistan's sociopolitical context; where democratic institutions remain under strain and public trust is often fragile, journalism, long regarded as a public trust, assumes an especially critical role. When practiced responsibly, reporting can enhance accountability, facilitate informed civic participation and ease social tensions. Conversely, sensationalized or inaccurate reporting risks deepening polarization and eroding confidence not only in the media but also in state institutions. Compounding these challenges are the economic realities confronting news organizations. Declining advertising revenues, coupled with intense competition from digital platforms, have intensified the race for clicks and engagement. As a result, speed frequently supersedes verification, while reporting increasingly blurs into opinion. The consequences are evident in the growing prevalence of misleading headlines, selective framing and media trials that undermine ethical standards and due process. Yet despite frequent criticism, social and digital media are not inherently harmful. Indeed, they have exposed corrup-

tion, amplified marginalized voices and enabled real-time reporting during emergencies. In Pakistan, citizen journalism has at times filled critical information gaps. Nevertheless, research consistently shows that false information spreads faster than verified news, particularly when it provokes fear or outrage. This dynamic has tangible repercussions, including public panic, reputational harm, and complications for legal and administrative processes. As the country approaches 2026, technological interventions are poised to play an increasingly decisive role in shaping journalism and the broader news ecosystem. Globally, artificial intelligence tools are already being deployed to assist journalists with data analysis, fact-checking, transcription and investigative reporting. In Pakistan, AI-assisted verification systems could help newsrooms detect deepfake videos, manipulated images and coordinated disinformation campaigns before they reach the public. When applied judiciously, automated fact-checking tools can strengthen editorial accuracy rather than replace human judgment. At the same time, algorithmic transparency is emerging as a critical concern. Social media algorithms currently prioritize engagement, often amplifying sensational or divisive content. A more equitable news ecology will therefore require greater accountability from digital platforms regarding content promotion and monetization. Without addressing algorithmic bias, technological innovation risks reinforcing existing distortions instead of correcting them. Similarly, blockchain-based content authentication represents another emerging intervention with the potential to enhance public trust in journalism. By enabling verification of original sources and timestamps, such technologies could help distinguish credible reporting from altered or recycled content. Although still in their early stages, these tools may prove particularly valuable in Pakistan's election coverage and conflict-sensitive reporting. However, technology alone cannot remedy ethical shortcomings. Adopting new tools, while necessary, is insufficient unless they are embedded within a framework of professional values. The core principles of journalistic ethics—accuracy, balance, verification, and harm minimization remain as relevant in 2026 as ever. Technology should rein-

force these principles, not supplant them. The evolving relationship between the media and law enforcement further illustrates the need for balance. Although often portrayed as adversarial, this relationship is, in reality, interdependent. Misinformation can jeopardize investigations and public safety, while the absence of timely official information creates space for speculation. Going forward, structured digital communication channels, real-time press briefings and verified information portals can help reduce misunderstandings and build trust without compromising press freedom. Perhaps the most consequential intervention for the coming years lies in investment in digital media literacy. A society capable of critically evaluating information is inherently more resilient to manipulation. In Pakistan, where a large proportion of social media users are under the age of 30, media literacy must extend beyond journalists to include educators, students and the broader public. Understanding how algorithms function, how misinformation spreads and how to distinguish fact from opinion is essential to sustaining democratic discourse. Freedom of expression remains a constitutional right and a cornerstone of journalism. Yet freedom without accountability risks becoming counterproductive. Rather than framing the debate in simplistic terms of regulation versus censorship, Pakistan must focus on ethical self-regulation, professional responsibility and public-interest journalism. Credibility, once lost, is exceedingly difficult to restore. Ultimately, as Pakistan steps into 2026, the future of journalism will be shaped not only by technology but by collective choices. Depending on how they are deployed, digital tools can either deepen polarization or contribute to a more informed and cohesive society. Ethical journalism, supported by intelligent technology and an informed public, offers a viable path toward a fairer and more resilient news ecosystem. In an era of information overload, truth remains the most valuable currency. Protecting it is a shared responsibility. Dr Muhammad Rizwan Bhatti holds a PhD in Political Science and writes regularly on terrorism, counter terrorism, countering violent extremism, and policing affairs. He can be reached at rizwanbh79@gmail.com.

Briefs

Sadiq and Jaishankar connect in Dhaka

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remained under scrutiny throughout. The saga began in the group-stage clash, continued through the Super Four, and culminated in the final, where India defeated Pakistan but chose not to personally accept the trophy from Mohsin Naqvi, the PCB Chairman and head of the Asian Cricket Council. Similar handshake controversies were reported in the Women's World Cup match between the two sides, the Hong Kong Super Sixes, and other ACC events, including junior tournaments where teams also avoided customary greetings.

Turkiye steps up anti-Daesh raids...

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Six Daesh militants were also killed in the hours-long gunbattle in Yalova, which lies on the shores of the Sea of Marmara about 90 kilometers (55 miles) southeast of Istanbul. A day later, another 357 suspects with ties to Daesh were arrested in 21 different provinces, the minister said. The anti-Daesh raids began just days after Türkiye's intelligence agency captured a Turkish national who holds a senior role within IS in a raid on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, state news agency Anadolu reported on December 22. The suspect, Mehmet Goren, had allegedly been tasked with organizing suicide attacks in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Türkiye and Europe. In the early hours of January 1, 2017, Daesh militants staged a deadly New Year attack on a nightclub in Istanbul that left 39 people dead, mostly foreigners. The Uzbek gunman, who survived, was sentenced to 40 life sentences. In his post on X, Yerlikaya issued a warning to anyone seeking to attack Türkiye, saying they would "face the might of our state and the unity of our nation."

Four killed in Russian attack on Odesa

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In Odesa city, which is the administrative center of the broader Odesa region, four people were injured, including a seven-month-old infant, two other children, and a 42-year-old man, Serhiy Lisak, the head of Odesa's military administration, said on Telegram. He said that drone debris and direct hits damaged facades and windows of several high-rise apartment buildings. Lisak posted images showing smoke billowing from a multi-story apartment building at night, with flames visible in several windows and what appears to be a firefighter's water jet aimed at the facade. Reuters could not independently verify the reports. There was no immediate comment from Russia about the attacks on Odesa.

PM Shehbaz, Saudi Crown Prince...

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the Crown Prince for his enduring warmth, affection, and steadfast support towards Pakistan. The conversation also encompassed the regional situation and current developments. Emphasizing the importance of Muslim unity, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif stressed the need to maintain harmony within the Ummah amidst contemporary challenges. He expressed Pakistan's complete solidarity with the Kingdom and underscored the imperative of maintaining regional peace and stability through dialogue and diplomacy. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman thanked the Prime Minister for the call and reiterated Saudi Arabia's desire to expand cooperation with Pakistan across all areas of mutual interest.



ISLAMABAD: A stunning view of the Faisal Mosque during rainy weather in Federal Capital. – Online

Bulgaria readies to adopt the euro, nearly 20 years after joining EU

“There will be challenges, but we are counting on the tolerance and understanding of both citizens and businesses,” said Jeliazkov

SOFIA: Bulgaria was preparing to switch to the euro on Wednesday night to become the 21st eurozone member, amid concerns the move could usher in higher prices and add to political instability rattling the Balkan country. At midnight (2200 GMT Wednesday), Bulgaria will wave goodbye to both 2025 and its lev currency, which has been in use since the late 19th century. While successive governments in the country of 6.4 million people have advocated joining the euro currency over hopes it will boost the economy of the EU's poorest member, reinforce ties to the West and protect against Russia's influence, some have been opposed to the switch. Bulgaria, which joined the EU in 2007, faces unique challenges, including anti-corruption protests that recently swept a conservative-led government from office, leaving the country on the verge of its eighth election in five years. Outgoing Prime Minister Rossen Jeliazkov said on Tuesday that he nonetheless felt his cabinet had accomplished a milestone. “Bulgaria is ending the year with a gross domestic product of 113 billion euros (nearly \$133 billion) and economic growth of more than three percent, which places us among the top five countries in the EU,” he said before a government meeting. He added that inflation in the Black Sea country, which hovers around 3.6 percent, was “linked to increased purchasing power” and a less corrupt economy, and not in any way to the introduction of the euro. Some Bulgarians worry the introduction of the euro could lead to price increases. Those fears were fuelled in part by a protest campaign that emerged this year to “keep the Bulgarian lev”, which tapped into a generally negative view of the single currency among much of the population. According to the National Statistical Institute,

food prices rose by five percent year-on-year in November, more than double the eurozone average. “Unfortunately, prices no longer correspond to those in levs (...) 40 levs is not 20 but 30 euros for certain products,” pastry shop owner Turgut Ismail, 33, told AFP, saying that prices have already begun surging. Some people, including business owners, have complained that it has been difficult to get their hands on euros, with shopkeepers saying they haven't received the euro starter packages they ordered. Banks have already warned of possible disruptions to card payments and ATM withdrawals on New Year's Eve. On Tuesday, people queued outside the Bulgarian National Bank and several currency exchange offices in the capital Sofia to obtain euros, an AFP journalist observed. Elena Shemtova, 37, who owns a small gallery and jewellery shop in the city centre, said she is optimistic. “We will experience

difficulties at first, there will be problems with giving change, but within a month we will have gotten used to it,” she told AFP. According to the latest Eurobarometer survey, 49 percent of Bulgarians are against the single currency. As political instability has been rocking the country, any problems with euro adoption would be seized on by anti-EU politicians, said Boryana Dimitrova of the Alpha Research polling institute. “There will be challenges, but we are counting on the tolerance and understanding of both citizens and businesses,” said Jeliazkov. He stressed that introducing the euro will have “a positive long-term effect on the Bulgarian economy and on the environment in which the country is developing”. The euro was first rolled out in 12 countries on January 1, 2002. Croatia was the last to join in January 2023. Bulgaria's accession will bring the number of Europeans using the euro to more than 350 million. – APP

Century from Andries Gous powers Desert Vipers into ILT20 final

ABU DHABI: An unbeaten century from Andries Gous propelled Desert Vipers into the final of the International League T20 with a commanding 45-run victory over MI Emirates in Qualifier 1 at the Zayed Cricket Stadium in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday. His remarkable 120 not out spearheaded a clinical, all-round display as the Vipers secured a place in their third final in four seasons. Gous and Fakhar Zaman, who hit a fluent 69 off 50 balls, laid the foundation for an imposing Vipers total as they stitched together a record-breaking 157-run partnership, the highest opening stand in the four-season history of the DP World ILT20. Debutant Usman Tariq was then the star with the ball, claiming three wickets to derail the chase by MI Emirates. Sent in to bat first, the Vipers got off to a measured start before accelerating the pace sharply. After a watchful opening, Gous let loose in the fifth over, smashing Romario Shepherd for two sixes and a four in a 20-run burst. He reached his half-century from just 29 balls, including three fours and three sixes, as the opening stand raced past 100 runs in only 65 deliveries. Fakhar, who similarly began steadily, also shifted gears in the middle overs, reaching his 50 from 36 balls after targeting Kieron Pollard. The opening pair were finding the boundary with ease and pushed their combined total beyond 150 before Fakhar was finally dismissed in the 16th over by Allah Ghazanfar. Sam Curran then joined Gous to provide a blistering finish. Gous completed his century, the first of the season and the first by a player from an associate nation in the history of the ILT20, from 53 balls. Curran, meanwhile, smashed an unbeaten 38 off just 12 balls, including 20 runs in the final over, as the Vipers surged to a season-high 233 for the loss of a single wicket. Gous finished the day with seven fours and nine sixes, and registered the highest individual score in the history of the tournament. – APP

Arshad Nadeem meets FIFA President Gianni Infantino in Dubai

Olympic javelin champion Arshad Nadeem meets FIFA president Gianni Infantino in Dubai as global recognition, record-breaking Paris gold, and World Sports Summit honors highlight Pakistan's rising sporting stature worldwide pride

DUBAI: Olympic javelin champion Arshad Nadeem met FIFA President Gianni Infantino in Dubai during the World Sports Summit in Dubai, where the football chief acknowledged familiarity with the Pakistani athlete's achievements. The interaction took place on the sidelines of the summit, where Infantino asked Nadeem about his throwing distance. “It was a 92-metre throw, and now I want to break that record,” Nadeem told the FIFA President. Infantino expressed goodwill for the Pakistani athlete and posed for photographs with him during the meeting. The FIFA chief's awareness of Nadeem's accomplishments pleasantly surprised the Olympic champion. Earlier this week, Arshad Nadeem was honoured with the Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Sports Award in the Global Breakthrough Athlete category at the World Sports Summit. Nadeem received the accolade in recognition of his historic performance at the Paris Olympics, where he clinched the gold medal with a record-breaking throw of 92.97m, setting new Olympic and world records. His effort surpassed the previous Olympic mark held by Norway's Andreas Thorkildsen for 16 years and marked



Pakistan's first-ever Olympic gold medal in javelin throw. Speaking after the ceremony, Nadeem described the award as a moment of immense pride for himself and the country, stating that international recognition would inspire young athletes and help promote javelin throw in Pakistan. He added that his next major targets are the 2026 Commonwealth Games and the Asian Games, noting that receiving a prestigious sports award from the Dubai government had given him renewed confidence and motivation. In an interview with media on the sidelines of the World Sports Summit, Nadeem echoed his previous remarks, stressing that the recognition alongside global sports stars was a source of pride for Pakistan. “The encouragement I have received here strengthens an athlete's belief. Confidence and motivation are what a sportsman needs the most,” he said, adding that such recognition plays a crucial role in pushing athletes to aim higher. – DNA

Global ‘fragmentation’ fuelling world’s crises: United Nations refugee chief

Grandi acknowledged it was “very painful” to be leaving when his agency is going through a profound crisis

GENEVA: The outgoing United Nations refugee chief fears an increasingly fragmented world is fuelling global conflicts and crises, and inflaming hostility towards people desperately fleeing for safety. Reflecting on his decade at the helm of the UNHCR, Filippo Grandi told AFP that one of the most worrying developments had been how divisions had left the world seemingly incapable of resolving conflicts – and increasingly unwilling to deal with the repercussions. “This fragmentation of geopolitics that has caused the emergence of so many crises is perhaps the most worrying thing,” the Italian diplomat said in his final interview as UN High Commissioner for Refugees. “This world is unable to make peace; has become totally unable to make peace.” Grandi meanwhile lamented a “race to the bottom” in terms of countries tightening laws and practices to keep asylum seekers and refugees out. He noted “a growing hostility, a rhetoric by the populist politicians targeting and scapegoating people on the move”.

Speaking at UNHCR's Geneva headquarters a day before the end of his tenure, Grandi said he had been inspired over the past decade by how regular people worldwide showed kindness and hospitality to people on the move. “In spite of all the politics, in spite of the real challenges that these movements represent,” he said, there is still a “deeply entrenched sense that if somebody flees from danger, one has the responsibility to help”. He also highlighted inspiring moments, including in 2021 when he witnessed former Colombian president Ivan Duque grant legal status to 1.7 million Venezuelans. And more recently, “at the border between Lebanon and Syria and talking to people who had made the choice to go back just a few weeks after the fall of the Assad regime”. But the exhilaration felt in such moments had been matched by the “anger and profound sadness” felt in others. “The worst is always when you witness an exodus that is caused by the most horrifying violations of human rights,” he said,

pointing to Myanmar and Sudan. On Thursday, Grandi, 68, will be handing over the UNHCR reins to Barham Salih, 65, Iraq's president from 2018 to 2022, who was once a refugee himself. “He will be an excellent leader for this organisation,” Grandi said, adding though that he had warned Salih: “It will be tough”. Grandi acknowledged it was “very painful” to be leaving when his agency is going through a profound crisis. The UNHCR, like many other UN agencies, has been clobbered by international aid cuts since US President Donald Trump returned to office in January, and numerous other leading donors have also tightened their purse-strings. The deep cuts have forced the agency to reduce aid and shutter services – at a time when global displacement is surging. In June, the UNHCR estimated that more than 117 million people have fled from their homes – a figure that has nearly doubled in the past decade. “We had to reduce the organisation by

about a third,” Grandi said, adding that “even more painful” was that the agency “had to reduce what we deliver to refugees, to displaced people, to stateless people around the world significantly”. Washington, traditionally the UN's biggest donor, has branded the United Nations bloated and inefficient, and on Monday warned its agencies to “adapt, shrink or die”. Grandi said reforms could be beneficial but fears that the current “criticism of multilateralism and the UN focuses on the wrong target”. “States need institutions that help them work together,” he said, warning that the very concept of international cooperation appeared to be evaporating. “What worries me most is this ‘my country first’ rhetoric,” he said, stressing: “It's not just Washington – it's global”. “When that slogan is applied to international challenges, it is weak.” Grandi insisted that “no country can do any of this alone, not even the United States”. “The challenges will hit us all, including those countries first... We need to work together.” – APP

Govt policies push inflation down to...

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PM Shehbaz, while highlighting his government's achievements, said that Pakistan made real, measurable progress during the past two years. “More than one million new taxpayers have been brought into the tax net. Tax revenues rose by 26% in 2025,” the premier added. Tax-to-GDP ratio has increased from around 8% to over 10%, the PM said, adding that the long-delayed privatisation of the Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) and the First Women Bank has been successfully completed. The premier further said that the current account has turned into a surplus of \$1.9 billion from a deficit of \$3.3 billion. Foreign exchange reserves have more than doubled from 9.2 billion to \$21.2 billion during the past two years, he added.

Pakistan concerned at Yemen violence

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targeting what it described as foreign military support for UAE-backed southern separatists. The United Arab Emirates expressed its displeasure over the statement issued by Riyadh and announced that it had voluntarily ended the mission of its counterterrorism units in Yemen. Reacting to the evolving situation in the Middle East, the spokesperson said that Islamabad strongly opposes unilateral steps by any Yemeni party that may further escalate the situation, undermine peace efforts, and threaten the peace and stability of Yemen as well as that of the region. “Pakistan welcomes regional efforts for de-escalating the situation and maintaining peace and stability in Yemen,” he added. Pakistan maintains its firm support for the resolution of the Yemen issue through dialogue and diplomacy, he added. The spokesperson hoped that Yemen's people and regional powers would work together towards an inclusive and enduring settlement of the issue, safeguarding regional stability.

Ronaldo's Al-Nassr drop first points of season in dramatic draw at Al-Ettifaq

RIYADH: Al-Nassr's perfect start to the Saudi Pro League season came to an end on Tuesday night as a late Georginio Wijnaldum goal earned Al-Ettifaq a thrilling 2-2 draw at a packed EGO Stadium in Dammam. Saad Al-Shehr's side became the first team to take points off Jorge Jesus' league leaders, halting Al-Nassr's 11-game winning run in a match that swung repeatedly from the opening minutes. The contest began with early controversy when Al-Nassr left-back Saad Al-Nasser was shown a straight red card for a challenge on Madallah Al-Olayan just six minutes in. Following a VAR review, the decision was overturned and reduced to a yellow card. Al-Ettifaq seized the initiative and went close through Moussa Dembele before taking the lead in the 16th minute. Georginio Wijnaldum found space on the edge of the area and curled a precise finish into the far corner, rewarding the hosts' early pressure. Goalkeeper Marek Rodak then produced a string of outstanding saves to preserve the lead, denying Al-Nassr on several occasions before the break, while Sultan Al-Ghannam struck the crossbar from distance to the frustration of the visiting supporters. Al-Nassr emerged with greater intent after half-time and levelled just two minutes in. Joao Felix firing low into the corner after a neat midfield move involving Angelo. The visitors pressed on and took the lead in the 67th minute when Felix's effort deflected off Cristiano Ronaldo and into the net, taking both players to 13 league goals for the season. Despite dominating possession and registering 26 shots, Al-Nassr were unable to kill the game off. Al-Ettifaq capitalized in the 80th minute when a long ball released substitute Radhi Al-Otaibi, who squared for Wijnaldum to tap home his second of night. – APP

Briefs

France's homeless wrap up to survive at freezing year's end

PARIS: In the biting cold, homeless friends Danish and Sylvain walked briskly in the dark toward a hot meal distribution point, rubbing their hands together, their huge backpacks weighing down on their shoulders.

"If you stop, the cold seeps into your bones. As long as we're walking, we're producing heat," said 50-year-old Danish, a Pakistani who asked to withhold his surname to avoid embarrassing his France-based family. Temperatures in France have dropped in recent weeks and are expected to hover around zero in many areas on New Year's Eve. Several French regions including Paris have increased shelter beds to help the homeless, but reports have already emerged of some appearing to have frozen to death Sylvain, 52, said he and his companion checked the weather forecast on their phones every night to best prepare. —APP

Gold price falls by Rs 2,500 per tola

ISLAMABAD :The price of 24-karat gold decreased by Rs2,500 per tola and was sold at Rs456,962 on Wednesday as compared to Rs459,462 on the previous trading day. All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association reported. The price of 10 grams of 24-karat gold also declined by Rs2,143 to Rs391,771 from Rs393,914, while 10 grams of 22-karat gold dropped by Rs1,964 to Rs359,136 from Rs361,100. In the international market, the price of gold fell by \$25 to \$4,346 from \$4,371 per ounce. Likewise, the price of silver per tola decreased by Rs212 to Rs7,718, while the price of 10 grams of silver went down by Rs182 to Rs6,616. International silver prices also dropped by \$2.12 to \$72.43 per ounce.—APP

Rupee gains 03 paise against US Dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Wednesday appreciated by 03 paise against the US Dollar in interbank trading and closed at Rs 280.12 compared to the previous day's closing at Rs 280.15. According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs 281 and Rs 283, respectively. The price of the Euro decreased by Rs0.79 to close at Rs 328.85 from the previous day's close of Rs 329.64, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese Yen came down by 01 paise and closed at Rs 1.78, whereas the exchange rate of the British Pound witnessed a decrease of Rs 1.27 and closed at Rs 377.17 compared to the previous day's Rs 378.44. The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham came down by 01 paise to close at Rs 76.27 and the Saudi Riyal remained stagnant at Rs 74.69.—APP

Export of sport goods increases to 15.86%

ISLAMABAD :The export of sport goods from the country witnessed an increase of 15.86 percent during the first five months of the current financial year (2025-26) as compared to the export of corresponding months of last year. The country exported sport goods worth US\$ 179.334 million during July-November (2025-26) as opposed to the export of US\$ 154.791 million during July-November (2024-25), showing growth of 15.86 percent, according to the data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS). Among the sports products, the exports of footballs rose by 23.64 percent, surging from US\$ 91.911 million last year to US\$ 113.638 million during the current year.—APP

CDA chief, Uzbek envoy pledge to deepen strategic partnership

Chairman CDA said that steps should be taken regarding granting the status of Sister Cities to the Federal Capital Islamabad and Tashkent

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, met with Uzbekistan Ambassador, Alisher Tukhtayev, at the CDA Headquarters on Wednesday. The meeting discussed matters of mutual interest and strengthening bilateral relations. Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa said that Pakistan views its relations with brotherly country Uzbekistan with great regard and respect. Uzbek Ambassador said that Pakistan and Uzbekistan share many commonalities in cultural, social and religious aspects. Chairman CDA said that steps should be taken regarding granting the status of Sister Cities to the Federal Capital Islamabad and Tashkent. Uzbek Ambassador proposed Chairman CDA to allocate an area related to Uzbekistan in Islamabad's F-9 Park. Chairman CDA said that an area for Uzbekistan could be allocated in any park, including Sector F-9 Park and Gardenia Hub. Uzbekistan's Ambassador Alisher Tukhtayev, appreciating the measures taken by the CDA for the beauty and development of the Federal Capital Islamabad, said that Islamabad is an exceptionally green, lush and naturally beautiful City. He added that the beauty, greenery and cleanliness of the Federal Capital Islamabad are commendable. The meeting also discussed the possibilities



of relocating the Uzbek Embassy to the Diplomatic Enclave. Chairman CDA said that proposal should be made through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for relocating the Embassy of Uzbekistan to the Diplomatic Enclave. During

the meeting, Chairman CDA also informed about the beautification and upgradation of the Diplomatic Enclave. The Uzbek Ambassador proposed naming a highway in the Federal Capital Islamabad as "New Uzbekistan." Chairman

CDA said that the matter of naming a highway after Uzbekistan would be taken up with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He said that in this regard, CDA would fully facilitate the process. Chairman CDA said that both countries

should fully benefit from each other's experiences and capabilities. The meeting also reaffirmed the commitment to enhance cooperation in further areas of mutual interest and strengthen city level relations.

Dar reiterates Pakistan's adherence to one-China principle

After Ambassador Jiang Zaidong briefed him on the current situation across the Taiwan Strait and the legitimate measures taken by China, DPM&FM said that Pakistan has always firmly adhered to the one-China principle, clearly recognized that the government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government representing the whole of China, and that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Jiang Zaidong called on Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Pakistan Muhammad Ishaq Dar. The two sides had a comprehensive exchange of views on advancing China-Pakistan all-weather strategic cooperation, and reached wide consensus on implementation of the action plan to foster the China-Pakistan community with a shared future. After Ambassador Jiang Zaidong briefed him on the current situation across the Taiwan Strait and the legitimate measures taken by China, DPM&FM said that Pakistan has always firmly adhered to the one-China principle, clearly recognized that the government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government representing the whole of China, and that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory. Pakistan's above-mentioned position is unwavering and consistent. As the ironclad friend and all-weather strategic cooperative partner of China, Pakistan will continue to firmly support China on all issues concerning China's core interests. Action Plan to Foster an Even Closer China-Pakistan Community with a Shared Future in the New Era between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan(2025-2029) The Pakistani side reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the one-China principle. It is of the view that Taiwan is an inalienable part of the territory of the People's Republic of China and the Taiwan question is at the core of China's core interests. It firmly supports all efforts made by China to achieve national reunification, and resolutely opposes any form of "Taiwan independence." Pakistan will firmly support China on issues related to Xinjiang, Xizang, Hong Kong and the South China Sea. The Chinese side reaffirms its unwavering support for Pakistan in defending sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity, and its support for Pakistan's efforts to safeguard national security, stability, development and prosperity.

Abu Dhabi govt issues new HR legislation, modernising employment

ABU DHABI: Abu Dhabi Government issues new HR legislation, modernising employment, embedding meritocracy in public sector Abu Dhabi Government has enacted comprehensive human resources legislation to modernise its employment framework, positioning the government as an employer of choice for high-performing professionals, and embedding meritocracy across its workforce of more than 25,000. The law takes effect on 1st January 2026. The 2026 Human Resources Law transforms how Abu Dhabi Government attracts, develops, and retains talent. It establishes merit-based systems for recruitment and advancement, introduces competitive benefits that appeal to top performers, and creates clear pathways for career progression based on capability and results rather than tenure. The legislation reflects a strategic shift toward building a high-performing, agile workforce equipped to deliver modern public services. By aligning government employment with best practices in talent management, the law strengthens Abu Dhabi's ability to compete for skilled professionals and experts in critical fields including AI, technology, policy, and specialised services. Ahmed Tamim Hisham Al Kuttab, Chairman of the Department of Government Enablement (DGE), said, "This law fundamentally modernises how we approach human resources in government. We're creating an environment where exceptional talent chooses public service, where merit drives advancement, and where high performers are recognised and rewarded." The best professionals seek organisations that invest in their development, reward excellence, and provide clear career pathways. This legislation ensures we meet those expectations. It's about attracting the calibre of talent that will drive our continued progress towards an AI Native Government." Ibrahim Nassir, Under-Secretary of DGE, said, "This legislation addresses a practical reality: the most talented professionals have options. They can work anywhere. Government must compete not just on mission, but on how we develop careers and support employees throughout their journey with us. "We've built comprehensive learning programmes that ensure our people stay ahead of technological change. We've introduced accelerated pathways, so high performers aren't held back by rigid timelines. We've created work-life balance provisions that recognise employees have lives, families, and ambitions beyond their desks. This is how modern organisations attract and keep exceptional people, through this law, that is how Abu Dhabi Government operates." The law establishes merit-based systems across the employee lifecycle. High performers benefit from accelerated promotion pathways that recognise exceptional work rather than requiring standard tenure periods.—APP

Economy expands 3.71% despite fiscal tightening: Usman

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan's economic performance in 2025 marks a decisive shift from stabilization toward a sustained, productivity-driven expansion, achieved despite fiscal tightening and climate-related shocks. The latest growth indicators are highly encouraging, with 3.71% GDP growth recorded in the first half of FY2026, reflecting continuity of the recovery momentum built during 2025. These views were expressed by President of the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce & Industry (RCCI), Usman Shaukat, during his appearance on Pakistan TV Global's flagship current affairs program "Beyond Borders." The RCCI President shared an in-depth assessment of Pakistan's economic turnaround and future outlook.

Speaking on the program, Mr. Shaukat emphasized that macroeconomic stability was a prerequisite for micro-economic improvement, noting that recent data now clearly demonstrates the trickle-down impact of stabilization measures, with industry-led growth becoming increasingly visible. Highlighting key economic indicators, he noted 2.7% real GDP growth in 2025, historically low inflation touching 0.3% in April 2025, and the current account transitioning from deficit to surplus in FY2025—a major milestone for Pakistan's economy. He further pointed out that foreign exchange reserves reaching USD 21 billion marked the highest level in many years, significantly strengthening external confidence. Referring to capital markets, Mr. Shaukat stated that strong macroeconomic fundamentals have translated into robust corporate earnings, with the Pakistan Stock Exchange crossing 174,000 points, emerging as one of the

best-performing markets in Asia and reflecting renewed investor confidence. The RCCI President also welcomed progress on long-pending privatization initiatives, citing movement on PIA privatization as a positive signal for long-awaited structural reforms. He acknowledged that while fiscal discipline under the IMF program remained tight, achieving growth under such conditions underscores the return of economic confidence. On monetary policy, Mr. Shaukat observed that interest rates, once as high as 24%, have eased substantially, enabling capital to flow from banks into productive and industrial sectors, which is critical for sustainable economic growth. Concluding his remarks, Mr. Usman Shaukat expressed optimism about Pakistan's economic trajectory, stating that 2025 has emerged as a turning point, with stability translating into growth, opportunity, and renewed confidence for businesses and investors alike.

Iran authorities say govt building attacked in south

TEHRAN: Several people attacked and damaged a provincial governor's office in southern Iran on Wednesday, according to authorities quoted by the justice ministry's Mizan agency, after days of protests over the economy. "A portion of the provincial governors' office door and its glass were destroyed in an attack by a number of people," said Hamed Ostovar, the head of Fasa city's judiciary, as quoted by Mizan, without specifying how the attack was carried out. Fasa is located 780 kilometers south of the capital Tehran, where a spontaneous movement against the high cost of living broke out on Sunday among shopkeepers before spreading to some universities.—APP

EU warns Israel suspending Gaza NGOs would block 'life-saving aid'

BRUSSELS: The EU warned Wednesday that Israel's threat to suspend several aid groups in Gaza from January would block "life-saving" assistance from reaching the population.

"The EU has been clear: the NGO registration law cannot be implemented in its current form," EU humanitarian chief Hadja Lahbib posted on X, after Israel said several groups would be barred for failing to provide details of their Palestinian employees. "IHL (international humanitarian law) leaves no room for doubt: aid must reach those in need," Lahbib wrote. NGOs had until December 31 to register under the new framework, which Israel says aims to prevent "hostile actors or supporters of terrorism" operating in the Palestinian territories, rather than impede aid.

Israeli authorities announced Tuesday that organisations which "refused to submit a list of their Palestinian employees in order to rule out any links to terrorism" had received notice that their licences would be revoked as of January 1, with an obligation to cease all activities by March 1.

Israel has not disclosed the number of groups facing a ban, but it has specifically called out Doctors Without Borders (MSF) for failing to meet the rules. It accused the medical charity of employing two individuals with links to Palestinian armed groups.—APP

Gulf nations offer support for Yemen's govt and Saudi security

LONDON: Gulf and Arab countries on Tuesday offered their support for the internationally recognized government in Yemen, after the UAE withdrew its forces from the country. It came after the military coalition supporting Yemen's government carried out airstrikes targeting a shipment of weapons and vehicles destined for southern separatist forces. The shipment arrived in the port of Al-Mukalla on two vessels that traveled from Fujairah in the UAE. Early on Tuesday, shortly after the airstrikes, Rashad Al-Alimi, the head of Yemen's presidential council, told Emirati authorities to withdraw their troops from Yemen within 24 hours. Saudi authorities said the separatists, who operate under the Southern Transitional Council and are supported by the UAE, pose a direct threat to the Kingdom's national security, and regional stability, after recently seizing territory in the governorates of Hadramaut and Al-Mahra. Authorities in Qatar said they were following the developments "with keen interest." The country's foreign ministry said Doha fully supported the legitimate government in Yemen, and stressed the importance of preserving the country's unity and safeguarding the interests of the Yemeni people. It added that the security of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Cooperation Council member states "constitute an inseparable part of the security of the State of Qatar, reflecting the deep-rooted fraternal ties and shared destiny that unite the GCC states."—APP

Seoul to host New Year countdown event

SEOUL: The Seoul city government is set to host a spectacular New Year's Eve countdown event Wednesday as part of the ongoing 2025 Seoul Light Gwanghwamun media art festival — a free, large-scale public art installation that has drawn unprecedented crowds this winter. Now running through Jan. 4, the festival has transformed Gwanghwamun Square and the surrounding streets into a luminous canvas of media art, sound and performance, attracting nearly 2 million visitors in just two weeks, far surpassing last year's total attendance. Seoul will usher in the new year with a citywide countdown spectacle, blending cutting-edge media art with cultural performances in the Seoul Light Gwanghwamun New Year Countdown event scheduled from 10:50 p.m. Wednesday to 12:30 a.m. Thursday, the city government said. During the event at Gwanghwamun Square and adjacent digital signage across the district, nine major digital screens and outdoor displays, including LUUX media tower and Sejong Pavilion, will simultaneously broadcast countdown visuals, it said. The integrated media presentation will feature dynamic countdown visuals, New Year messages and artworks inspired by Korean cultural motifs, creating a unified, immersive experience across the cityscape. The countdown event will also feature a traditional-inspired fashion show and live musical performances by well-known Korean artists. "This event offers a meaningful way to close out 2025 and welcome 2026 with hope and positivity, bringing Seoul residents and international visitors together in a memorable celebration," said Choe In-gyu, director of design policy at the Seoul city government.—APP

India's space industry gears up

NEW DELHI: After sending its first astronaut to the International Space Station, autonomously docking two satellites, and launching the heaviest payload this year, India's space industry is preparing for the first uncrewed test of its human spaceflight program in 2026. In 2025, India's space program spearheaded by the Indian Space Research Organisation marked several milestones, starting in January, when it became the fourth country to perform space docking — connecting two spacecraft in orbit, which is a capability crucial for future space stations and deep-space missions. In June, Shubhanshu Shukla, an Indian Air Force pilot, flew to the ISS as part of the Axiom 4 mission. He became the second Indian national in space, after Rakesh Sharma in 1984. A month later, ISRO, in collaboration with NASA, launched a joint observation satellite to provide high-resolution radar imagery of the Earth, and in December capped the year by deploying the BlueBird Block 2, the heaviest payload ever launched from Indian soil. It "marked a decisive year for India's space sector as policy reforms translated into tangible execution across launch, satellite manufacturing, Earth observation, space data, and satellite communications," said Lt. Gen. AK Bhatt (retd.), director general of the Indian Space Association. The year also saw new contracts, production lines, launch vehicles moving closer to operational readiness, and growth in India's \$9 billion space economy driven largely by the private industry and public-private partnerships, which Bhatt expected to expand in the coming year.—APP

Briefs

CCoP
endorses
Rs135bn
PIA bid

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Cabinet Committee on Privatisation (CCoP) has approved a Rs135 billion bid submitted by an AHC-led consortium for the acquisition of a 75% stake in Pakistan International Airlines Corporation Limited (PIACL), and recommended that the proposal be placed before the federal cabinet as part of the privatisation process of the national carrier.

The decision was taken at a meeting chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, where the secretary of the Ministry of Privatisation presented a detailed briefing on the future course of action for PIA's privatisation. Notably, on Dec 23, an Arif Habib Corporation-led consortium, comprising Fatima Fertiliser, AKD Group, City Schools and Lake City Holdings, won the bid with the highest offer.

Dar urged all ministries concerned and departments to act swiftly to ensure early finalisation of the process, expressing the hope that privatisation would help PIA regain its "glory days".

The meeting was attended by the minister for power, advisers to the prime minister on privatisation and on industries and production, Special Assistants to the Prime Minister Tariq Bajwa and Bilal Kiyani, and federal secretaries from the Cabinet Division, Privatisation, defence, law, power and industries, along with senior officials from the Privatisation Commission and other relevant departments.

Xi, Putin
exchange
New Year
greetings

DNA

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping on Wednesday exchanged New Year greetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin. In his message, Xi extended his sincere congratulations and best wishes to Putin and the Russian people on behalf of the Chinese government and the Chinese people.

Noting that 2025 marks the 80th anniversary of the United Nations, Xi said China and Russia have solemnly commemorated the 80th anniversary of the victory in the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, the Soviet Union's Great Patriotic War and the World Anti-Fascist War, sending a powerful message that peace will prevail, justice will prevail, and the people will prevail.

Xi said the year 2025 also marks a concrete step in the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era, recalling that they met in Beijing and Moscow respectively this year, where they exchanged in-depth views on major issues of mutual concern.

Pak witnesses
significant
drop in polio
cases in 2025

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has recorded significant progress in its fight against polio, with the number of cases falling sharply in 2025, according to the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC). Official data show that only 30 polio cases have been reported so far in 2025, compared with 74 cases recorded in 2024.

The NEOC said no new polio case has been reported anywhere in the country since September this year. It further noted that no polio case has been reported in Balochistan and Punjab for more than a year, reflecting improved surveillance and sustained vaccination efforts in the two provinces. As per the NEOC, six nationwide anti-polio campaigns were successfully conducted during 2025. In the most recent campaign, more than 98% of targeted children were vaccinated.

'Ex-spymaster Faiz not turning approver against Imran Khan'

"I know such things for fact," says ex-ISI chief's lawyer when asked if matter has been discussed with his client

MONITORING DESK

ISLAMABAD: Faiz Hamid, former chief of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), is not becoming an approver in any case against Imran Khan, claimed former spymaster's lawyer. Barrister Mian Ali Ashfaq, counsel for Faiz, rejected reports suggesting that his client may turn an approver against jailed Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran, terming such claims as "speculative and baseless."

Responding to the publication's queries, Barrister Ashfaq said there was "no truth whatsoever" in reports circulating in certain media and political circles that Faiz was considering becoming an approver in cases against Imran.

"All such reports are completely unfounded and based on speculation," he said. The clarification comes amid repeated statements by some federal ministers and Senator Faisal Vawda – considered close to the military establishment – who have said that the former spy chief would testify against the former prime minister.

There is also speculation about an alleged nexus between



Imran and Faiz, particularly in connection with the May 9, 2023 violence. When asked whether he had directly discussed the matter with his client, Barrister Ashfaq did not respond in the affirmative, but said, "I know such things

for a fact", indicating that there was no question of Faiz becoming an approver against the PTI founder.

Speculation regarding a Faiz-Imran nexus is a government-backed narrative, which is repeated time and again ever since the May 9 incidents, during which military installations were attacked following Imran's arrest.

The speculation furthered following the recent sentencing of Faiz for 14 years by a military court.

Senior cabinet members, including Defence Minister Khawaja Asif and Information Minister Attaullah Tarar, have repeatedly claimed that the violence was the result of a coordinated plan involving Imran and the former ISI chief. However, despite these assertions, the military's media wing, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), has not yet stated in any of its public briefings that such a nexus existed. Notably, when the government's chief spokesman, the information minister, was recently asked by The News whether claims of an Imran-Faiz connection were based on findings of a civil or military investigation or merely based on circumstantial evidence, he avoided a direct reply and referred the matter to the ISPR.

Bangladesh mourns ex-PM
Khaleda Zia with state funeral

"Through her uncompromising leadership, the nation was repeatedly freed from undemocratic conditions and inspired to regain liberty," he said in a statement



DHAKA: Bangladesh bids farewell on Wednesday to former prime minister Khaleda Zia with a state funeral expected to draw vast crowds, mourning a towering leader whose career defined politics for decades. Zia, the first woman to serve as prime minister in the South Asian nation of 170 million people, died on Tuesday aged 80. "Khaleda Zia has been an inspiration," homemaker Sharmina Siraj told AFP, adding that "it is difficult to imagine women in leadership positions anytime soon".

The 40-year-old mother of two said stipends introduced by Zia to support girls' education "had a huge impact on the lives of our girls. To me, this is her biggest contribution".

Despite years of ill health and imprisonment, Zia had vowed to campaign in elections set for February 12 – the first vote since a mass uprising toppled her arch-rival Sheikh Hasina

last year. Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is widely seen as a frontrunner, and her son Tarique Rahman, 60, who returned only last week after 17 years in exile, is seen as a potential prime minister if they win a majority.

The interim government, led by Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, declared three days of national mourning, with an elaborate state funeral beginning with prayers outside parliament around 2:00 pm (0800 GMT).

Flags will be flown at half-mast, and a large deployment of security forces is expected across the capital, Dhaka.

Yunus said Bangladesh had "lost a great guardian".

"Through her uncompromising leadership, the nation was repeatedly freed from undemocratic conditions and inspired to regain liberty," he said in a statement.

Humanitarian
workers continue to
rush aid to Gazans

UNITED NATIONS: Severe weather conditions have led to further casualties and heightened health risks in war-shattered Gaza over the past 24 hours, according to the UN aid coordination office (OCHA). Heavy seasonal downpours are compounding an already dire humanitarian situation, as rainstorms cause war-damaged buildings to collapse, flood tents and soak people's belongings, OCHA said.

To respond swiftly to flood alerts, a coordinated system bringing together UN agencies and non-governmental organizations is distributing tents, tarpaulins, warm clothes, blankets and dignity kits across Gaza. The UN and its partners are also mobilizing heavy equipment to pump overflowing sewage – which poses serious health risks – away from residential areas. OCHA warned that the conditions have increased the

risk of hypothermia, particularly among babies, as well as illnesses linked to sewage flooding.

Separately, humanitarian teams are assisting hundreds of people newly displaced from the At Tufah neighbourhood in Gaza City, where ongoing military operations have forced many residents to flee.

People who remain in, or have returned to, the As Sanafour area of At Tufah – often due to a lack of space elsewhere – report significant challenges in accessing water, food and basic services.

Other relief operations under the UN-coordinated humanitarian plan for the ceasefire are continuing.

Partners working on water, sanitation and hygiene dispatched tens of thousands of dignity kits, hygiene kits and bottles of shampoo across Gaza, reaching some 150,000 people in need, according to OCHA.

As of Monday, partners addressing food insecurity had reached more than one million people – about half of Gaza's population – through 60 distribution points with December's monthly general food assistance. In parallel, humanitarian partners distributed veterinary kits and animal feed to more than 2,000 families with livestock between 9 and 26 December, helping support local production and reduce aid dependency, OCHA said. – DNA

UN seeks \$1.7 bln as humanitarian
needs soar in Afghanistan

The response will prioritize water, sanitation and hygiene needs in areas most affected by drought, cholera outbreaks, disasters and large-scale returns

UNITED NATIONS: Afghanistan is expected to remain one of the world's largest humanitarian crises in 2026, UN agencies and humanitarian partners warned Tuesday, launching a \$1.7 billion appeal to assist nearly 18 million people in urgent need. Years of conflict, compounded by worsening food insecurity, recurrent natural disasters, climate change impacts and large-scale returns of displaced people, have left an estimated 45 per cent of the population – some 21.9 million people – in need of humanitarian assistance next year, according to the UN.

Of those, 17.5 million people – more than three-quarters of them women and children – have been prioritised for support under the coordinated response. Food security and sanitation remain among the most urgent needs, it was pointed out. The Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan projects that during the 2025-2026 lean season, more than one-third of Afghanistan's population will face crisis-level or worse food insecurity, as defined by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC). This means many households will meet minimum food needs only by depleting essential livelihood assets – a sharp deterioration compared with the previous year, it said. The ongoing drought has also led to the failure of nearly 80 per cent of rainfed wheat crops in several regions, leaving

many families without food stocks for the winter. Sanitation conditions are equally dire: an estimated 25 per cent of households relied on unimproved water sources this year, while 37 per cent lacked soap for basic hygiene. The response will prioritize water, sanitation and hygiene needs in areas most affected by drought, cholera outbreaks, disasters and large-scale returns. Afghanistan is facing one of the world's largest and fastest-growing returnee-related displacement crises, with around five million people returning to the country this year.

More than 2.6 million Afghans returned from Iran and Pakistan, driven largely by tightened migration policies and deteriorating protection conditions. Many have returned to districts already grappling with poverty, food insecurity, drought and limited access to basic services, further straining local capacities.

In 2026, humanitarian partners aim to reach more people with fewer resources. The \$1.7 billion required represents a 29 per cent reduction compared to the resources needed in 2025. Yet it aims to reach about 4 per cent more than the target last year. These changes have been "driven by sharper prioritization, notable efficiency gains, and a strategic shift away from high-cost, less sustainable interventions," the response plan noted. – Agencies

Thailand
releases 18
Cambodian
soldiers

PHNOM PENH: Thailand on Wednesday released 18 Cambodian soldiers captured in July, both governments said, after a fresh ceasefire between the neighbours held for more than three days following weeks of deadly border clashes. "I can confirm," Cambodia's information minister Neth Pheaktra told AFP when asked if the soldiers had been released and re-entered Cambodian territory.

Thailand's foreign ministry also confirmed the repatriation of the 18 soldiers to Cambodia, saying it was done "as a demonstration of goodwill and confidence-building", according to a statement.

The Southeast Asian neighbours agreed a truce on Saturday, ending renewed fighting at their border that killed dozens of people and displaced more than a million this month. The conflict stems from a territorial dispute over the colonial-era demarcation of the 800-kilometre (500-mile) Thai-Cambodian border, where both sides claim centuries-old temple ruins. – Agencies

Double
decker buses
introduced
in Karachi

BUREAU REPORT

KARACHI: Double-decker buses were introduced in Karachi on Wednesday, with Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon saying that they would be available to the public from January 1 (Thursday).

"Today marks the beginning of double-decker bus [services] in the city. They will be available to the public from tomorrow, and today, they will be tested [on the city's road]," Memon, who also has the transport portfolio, said while speaking to the media at the inauguration of the bus service in Karachi. Memon inaugurated the bus service along with Sindh Local Government Minister Syed Nasir Hussain Shah.

The development comes more than a year after the Sindh government announced the initiative in October 2024 for the city of over 23 million that has faced mobility issues for long. Memon recalled that the Sindh government had promised to introduce double-decker buses in Karachi by December 2025, pointing out that today was December 31.

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