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Pakistan, Uzbek cultures relations on the move: Tarar

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Pak targets January for Panda bonds

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Tim Kane meets Shehbaz

PM expresses solidarity with Australia after terror attack

Ambassador Tim Kane thanked the Prime Minister for the warm welcome and expressed Australia's keen interest in further enhancing Pakistan-Australia relations

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Tim Kane, the newly appointed High Commissioner of Australia to Pakistan, paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif at the Prime Minister's House on Friday. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Tariq Fatemi, and the Foreign Secretary were also present during the meeting. The Prime Minister warmly felicitated Ambassador Tim Kane on his appointment and expressed confidence that his tenure would further strengthen the long-standing, friendly and multifaceted relations between Pakistan and Australia. He underscored the importance Pakistan attached to its ties with Australia and reaffirmed Islamabad's commitment to expanding cooperation across various sectors. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif conveyed Pakistan's deepest condolences over the tragic loss of innocent lives in the terrorist shooting at Bondi Beach, Sydney, on December 14, 2025. He strongly condemned the cowardly act of terrorism and reiterated Pakistan's unwavering solidarity with the people and

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Australia plans gun buyback

DNA

SYDNEY: Australia will launch a national gun buyback scheme following the mass shooting in Sydney, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said on Friday, as hundreds of surfers and swimmers paddled out at Bondi Beach to honour victims. The buyback would be similar to gun reforms introduced soon after the massacre in 1996 in Tasmania's Port Arthur after a lone gunman killed 35 people, which prompted authorities to implement some of the world's toughest gun laws. "Australia's gun laws were last substantially reformed in the wake of the Port Arthur tragedy. The terrible events at Bondi show we need to get more guns off our streets," Albanese said during a media briefing.

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May 9 cases

Court acquits Qureshi; sentences Yasmin, others

Omer Sarfraz Cheema, Mian Mehmoodur Rashid and Ejaz Chaudhry got 10 years of imprisonment each



BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: An anti-terrorism court (ATC) on Friday acquitted PTI leader Shah Mahmood Qureshi, while sentencing four other leaders, including Dr Yasmin Rashid, Omer Sarfraz Cheema, Mian Mehmoodur Rashid and Ejaz Chaudhry, to 10 years of imprisonment each in a case related to the May 9 riots. These PTI leaders have already been jailed after being indicted by different courts in Punjab in cases pertaining to violence on May 9, 2023. On that

day, supporters and workers of the party, reacting to founder Imran Khan's arrest, vandalised and torched military installations and government properties. Judge Manzoor Ali Gill announced the verdict inside Kot Lakhpat Jail, concluding the trial in first information report number 852/2023, which pertains to an attack on the entrance gate of Government Officers' Residence-I Club Chowk. The Race-course police had registered the case and submitted a challan against 25 suspects,

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Four soldiers martyred North Waziristan attack

According to security sources, militants belonging to the Indian proxy group Fitna al Khwarij attempted to breach the perimeter of a security forces camp in a calculated and cowardly assault. The attackers tried to infiltrate the facility but were promptly challenged by alert troops deployed at the post

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Four personnel of the Pakistan Army were martyred while four terrorists were killed after security forces thwarted a major terrorist attack on a military camp in the Boya area of North Waziristan district on Thursday. According to security sources, militants belonging to the Indian proxy group Fitna al Khwarij attempted to breach the perimeter of a security forces camp in a calculated and cowardly assault. The attackers tried to infiltrate the facility but were promptly challenged by alert troops deployed at the post. Failing to penetrate the camp, the terrorists rammed an explosives-laden vehicle into the outer perimeter wall, causing its collapse. The powerful blast resulted in significant damage to nearby civilian infrastructure, including a mosque and several residential houses. Fifteen local civilians, including women and children, sustained serious injuries and were shifted to nearby medical facilities for treatment. Security forces responded with professionalism and courage,

engaging the attackers in a fierce exchange of fire. As a result of the timely and decisive response, all four terrorists were neutralised before they could cause further damage. However, during the intense firefight, four soldiers embraced martyrdom after fighting gallantly. The martyrs were identified as Havildar Muhammad Waqas (42), a resident of Kotli; Naik Khanwaiz (38) from Mansehra; Sepoy Sufyan Haider (25) from Vehari; and Sepoy Riffat (32) from Layyah. Their sacrifice was hailed as a testament to the unwavering resolve of Pakistan's armed forces in the fight against terrorism. Security officials stated that the attack was planned and directed by Afghanistan-based militants, a claim that stands in sharp contrast to repeated assurances by the Afghan Taliban regime regarding the non-presence of such groups on Afghan soil. Pakistan has once again urged the Interim Afghan Government to fulfil its international obligations and prevent the use of its territory by terrorist elements against Pakistan. Officials reiterated that the safety and security of the

Continued on Page 06

US pauses green card lottery program

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: US Homeland Security chief Kristi Noem ordered the suspension of the diversity visa lottery programme on Thursday after saying it was used by the suspect in a mass shooting at Brown University. "The Brown University shooter, Claudio Manuel Neves Valente, entered the United States through the diversity lottery immigrant visa programme (DV1) in 2017 and was granted a green card," Noem wrote on social media. "At president Trump's direction, I am immediately directing US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to pause the DV1 programme to ensure no more Americans are

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Pak issues demarche to Taliban regime

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office (FO) on Friday issued a demarche to the Afghan Taliban regime, conveying Pakistan's grave concern over the continued support and facilitation provided to Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) after four Pakistani soldiers embraced martyrdom during today's terrorist attack in North Waziristan. "Pakistan condemns, in the strongest possible terms, today's terrorist attack carried out by Khwarij belonging to

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Dar tells diplomats

India's manipulation of water threatens food, economic security of Pak

Indian actions could trigger a severe humanitarian crisis in Pakistan, says deputy prime minister

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has termed India's recent unilateral suspension of the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) in the aftermath of April's Pahalgalam attack a threat to the country's food and economic security which "could trigger a severe humanitarian crisis". During a briefing to foreign diplomats, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar condemned India's move to suspend the treaty in April 2025, describing it as a clear example of weaponising water resources. He warned that such actions threaten Pakistan's food security and have the potential to trigger a severe humanitarian crisis. "Indian manipulation of water at critical time of our agriculture cycle directly threatens the lives and livelihoods as well as food and economic security of our citizens," Dar said. "The Indus Water Treaty is a cornerstone for peace and stability in South Asia,"

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Pak raises water flow concerns with India

FIAZ CHAUDHRY

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has formally taken up the issue of unusual fluctuations in the Chenab River's water flow with India after official monitoring showed an extraordinary reduction earlier this month, the Ministry of Water Resources said on Friday. According to a press release, the Punjab Irrigation Department is carrying out continuous monitoring of the Chenab River flow at Marala, excluding Jamu and Manawar Tawi, and sharing the data with the Office of the Pakistan Commissioner for Indus Waters.

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Briefs

ECP notifies Agha Shahbaz, Abid Sher Ali

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Friday declared Agha Shahbaz Ali Durrani as the returned candidate for Sindh Assembly's PS-9 Shikarpur, while Abid Sher Ali was elected as senator. Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) candidate Agha Durrani has secured victory in the PS-9 Shikarpur-III by-election held on December 14, according to the official notification. Durrani, son of former Sindh Assembly Speaker Agha Siraj Khan Durrani, emerged successful in the contest. Meanwhile, Abid Sher Ali has been declared elected to the Senate seat left vacant following the passing of Irfan ul Haq Siddiqui.

Pak target Jan for panda bonds

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is targeting January to issue its first panda bond tranche, part of a planned programme of up to \$1 billion, the Ministry of Finance said on Friday, as Islamabad seeks to diversify funding sources and tap China's on-shore debt market. The inaugural issuance is expected to raise the equivalent of about \$250 million, with further tranches to follow under a phased programme once regulatory approvals are completed, the ministry said after Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb chaired a review meeting on the plan.

Holiday Notice

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

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KP CM urges centre to release funds under NFC

PESHAWAR: Addressing the 43rd meeting of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa cabinet here on Friday, the Chief Minister Muhammad Sohail Afridi urged the federal government to release the promised funds under the National Finance Commission (NFC). He said the funds were supposed to be released on a quarterly basis, but have not yet been transferred by the federal government for the financial year 2025-26. He said that due to the non-release of these funds, development projects in the merged districts are being adversely affected. Despite these financial constraints, the Chief Minister emphasized that the provincial government is making all possible efforts to ensure that the people of the merged districts do not face hardships and that development and welfare initiatives continue within available resources. On governance, the Chief Minister informed the cabinet that he has personally initiated field visits and has directed all provincial ministers and their secretaries conduct field visits to their respective districts and departments every fifteen days. He said such visits help restore public trust and ensure effective checks and balances. He also announced that a detailed briefing on the Good Governance Roadmap prepared by the provincial government will be presented by the Chief Secretary in the upcoming cabinet meeting. Briefing the media on cabi-

net decisions, Special Assistant to the Chief Minister for Information and Public Relations, Shafi Jan, stated that several important decisions related to socio-economic development, law and order, and governance were taken during the meeting. He announced that the cabinet approved the Ehsaas Rehrihaan (Street Vendors) Livelihood Protection Act, 2025, which will soon be presented in the Provincial Assembly. The law aims to protect the rights of street vendors by allocating designated spaces in every city where they can conduct their business in an improved and organized environment. He said that more than 140,000 individuals in the province are associated with street vending, and legal protection will help formalize this activity, creating sustainable livelihood opportunities. Under the new law, street vendors will also be able to benefit from various government loan schemes for their businesses. The Special Assistant further informed that the cabinet approved the establishment of a new district named "Ber Swat," with its headquarters at Matta. He added that a committee has been constituted to address smog in Peshawar, which will review the situation and present recommendations for long-term solutions. Proposed measures include the introduction of electric rickshaws, plantation drives, and other administrative interventions. Regarding security, Shafi Jan stated

that the cabinet approved measures to enhance the capacity of the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) and the Special Branch to effectively counter terrorism. A package of Rs. 17 billion was approved for the CTD, out of which Rs. 7 billion will be released immediately, while Rs. 14 billion will be approved for the Special Branch. These funds will be utilized for the procurement of weapons, armoured vehicles, new recruitments, and the establishment of formations in districts and headquarters office at Peshawar. He further said that the cabinet approved the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Promotion of Digital Payments Bill, 2025, under which 170 government services will be shifted to digital payment systems over the next two years. In the first phase, 21 services will be brought under the digital payment framework. The cabinet also approved the transfer of land to the Labour Department for the establishment of a 20-bed polyclinic hospital for employees of the Social Security Institute in Dera Ismail Khan. Additionally, a non-ADP scheme was approved for cemetery land in Mansehra. Other approvals included the establishment of the Chief Secretary's Service Delivery Unit, additional cost for the upgradation and construction of the Women and Children Hospital in Haripur, and the appointment of the Chief Executive Officer of the Pakhtunkhwa Energy Development Organization.—DNA



SHAHEED BENAZIRABAD : First Lady Bibi Aseefa Bhutto Zardari attended the 5th passing out parade and 'Day ceremony of Bakhtawar Cadet College for Girls.

Sindh CM renews crackdown on extortionists

KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Friday said the provincial government has once again launched a comprehensive crackdown on extortion and organised crime, expressing confidence that the menace will be eliminated as it was in the past. Talking to the media persons at the Sindh Assembly, the chief minister said he had presided over a detailed meeting a day earlier to review the law-and-order situation, particularly incidents of extortion in the city. He said representatives of the business community, including members of the Association of Builders and Developers (ABAD), expressed satisfaction with the actions taken by law-enforcement agencies so far. "The main concern raised was that when one criminal is eliminated, another emerges. This challenge is being addressed through sustained and intelligence-based operations," Murad Shah said. The chief minister stressed the need to act not only against criminals operating within the country but also against facilitators and handlers based abroad. He said his government had formally written to the federal government in this regard. "In response, the federal government has informed us that red warrants have been issued against several individuals involved in facilitating extortion and terrorism from overseas," Shah added. Murad Ali Shah reiterated that extortion had been successfully curbed in the past through coordinated efforts of the police, Rangers and intelligence agencies, and said the government would achieve similar results again.—APP

NGC makes strong progress in ERP, ICT modernization

LAHORE: The National Grid Company of Pakistan (NGC) has achieved over 85 percent progress in its ERP and ICT Modernization Program, marking a major step towards digital transformation and improved governance. During a 44th Steering Committee Meeting on ERP & ICT, Managing Director NGC, Engr. Altaf Hussain, stated that the modernization initiative is fully aligned with the Government of Pakistan's vision of digitization, transparency, and efficient service delivery. He emphasized that the new ERP system will help NGC streamline operations, improve financial management, ensure real-time data availability, and enhance decision-making across the organization. The upgraded ICT infrastructure will also strengthen cybersecurity, system reliability, and

internal coordination. The ERP & ICT program aims to replace outdated manual processes with standardized, automated, and transparent systems, enabling NGC to operate more efficiently as a modern national grid company. Senior management and technical teams briefed the meeting on the current progress, upcoming milestones, and system testing plans. The project is expected to be completed within the approved timeline, bringing long-term benefits for employees, stakeholders, and the power sector as a whole. The committee was informed that several critical ERP modules, including Finance, Human Capital Management, and Supply Chain Inventory, have been successfully activated, are fully operational, and are in

the rollout phase. In addition, Enterprise Asset Management (EAM) functionalities—covering operations, tripping, maintenance, and shutdown management—are now in production, establishing a unified and reliable platform for financial, asset, and operational data across the organization. Furthermore, the remaining components for Procurement, Treasury, Project Systems, Billing & Recovery, and e-Tendering are in the final stages of implementation and are scheduled for rollout in the coming months. NGC remains committed to adopting modern technology solutions to support Pakistan's growing energy needs and to ensure a reliable, transparent, and efficient transmission system for the country.—APP

Final polio vaccination campaign of 2025 underway, 38 million children immunised

Pakistan's final nationwide polio vaccination campaign of 2025 continued for a fourth day, with authorities reporting that nearly 38 million children have been immunised. Pakistan is one of only two countries in the world, along with Afghanistan, where polio has not yet been eradicated. The current campaign is being conducted simultaneously in both countries as part of coordinated regional efforts to eliminate the virus. According to the National Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), more than 37.8 million children under the age of five were administered polio drops during the first three days of the campaign, which began on 15 December and will run until 21 December. Punjab recorded the highest coverage, with about 20.8 million children immunised, followed by Sindh with more than 7.4 million. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, over 6.1 million children received the vaccine, while Balochistan recorded more than 2.1 million vaccinations. Officials in Islamabad reported that over 417,000 children had been immunised. In Gilgit-Baltistan, more than 256,000 children received the vaccine, while Azad Jammu and Kashmir recorded over 689,000 vaccinations. Health authorities said more than 400,000 polio workers are participating in the campaign, conducting door-to-door immunisations. The National EOC has urged parents and communities to cooperate with vaccination teams, noting that polio is incurable and can cause lifelong paralysis. Officials appealed to parents to ensure all children under five are vaccinated.—APP

Passing out parade held at PAF Airmen academy

KARACHI: Passing Out Parade of Trainees, Entries No 2306, 2406 and 2412 was held at PAF Airmen Academy, Korangi today. Air Marshal Kashif Qamar, Deputy President NASTP Advisory Board, Pakistan Air Force, was the Chief Guest on the occasion. On his arrival, the Chief Guest was received by Air Vice Marshal Muhammad Shahid Afzal, Air Officer Commanding, PAF Airmen Academy, Korangi Creek. A total of 1155 trainees from PAF, Pakistan Navy and allied countries successfully completed their training. While addressing the parade, the Chief Guest said that Pakistan Air Force is a highly professional organization and is internationally recognized as a combat-efficient force owing to its exemplary courage, operational preparedness and professional excellence. He highlighted that, in line with the vision of Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber

Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force, PAF Airmen Academy Korangi is imparting training aligned with the evolving dynamics of contemporary warfare to effectively meet future challenges. The Chief Guest further said that history bears witness to PAF's consistent ability to rise to the expectations of the nation during times of trial through historic valour and unmatched professionalism. With the induction of modern aircraft and sophisticated air defence systems, PAF is counted among the leading Air Forces of the world. He underscored that the success of PAF in Operation Bujyan-ul-Marsos against Indian transgression reflects the highest standards of operational preparedness and the resolute leadership of Chief of the Air Staff. He added that the effective employment of full-spectrum Multi Domain Operations—integrating space, cyber and electronic warfare alongside long-range preci-

sion assets and unmanned systems—highlights the necessity for harmonizing training and professionalism with contemporary warfare demands to produce competent and skilled airmen.

During the ceremony, trophies were awarded to high achievers. The prestigious Chief of the Air Staff Trophy for Overall Best Performance was claimed by Aircraftman Sergeant Ahmed Hussain Arif, setting the benchmark for all-round distinction. Asghar Khan Trophy for Best in Aeronautics was secured by Aircraftman Hamza Ali, while mastery in Aero Avionics Technology earned Aircraftman Sergeant Ahmed Hussain Arif the coveted Nur Khan Trophy. Demonstrating outstanding professionalism in core training, Academy Sergeant Aircraftman Shafaat Noor clinched the Air Officer Commanding Trophy for Best in General Service Training, whereas the Best Performance Trophy for the Foreign Trainee was proudly awarded to LAC THGND Herath of Sri Lanka. The Chief Guest warmly congratulated the graduating trainees and their proud parents, extended his best wishes for success in their future assignments.—APP

Finance minister reviews sectoral issues

ISLAMABAD : Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb on Friday, held a meeting with a delegation comprising telecommunication infrastructure companies (TOWERCO Pakistan) and Venture Capital Firms (VCs) to discuss and review key sectoral issues, with a particular focus on taxation, investment climate, and growth prospects. The visiting delegation represented a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including telecom infrastructure companies that build, own, and operate mobile network towers leased to mobile network operators, as well as venture capital firms actively investing in Pakistan's startup ecosystem and wider business ventures. During the meeting, the participants shared an overview of their respective business models, operational dynamics, and on-ground challenges, particularly those related to physical infrastructure deployment and regulatory compliance. Members of the delegation presented a number of proposals aimed at rationalizing and relaxing elements of the existing tax regime to help facilitate further growth, enhance investment flows, and support expansion in both the telecommunications infrastructure and venture capital sectors. The proposals were shared in the context of strengthening digital connectivity, improving service delivery, and fostering innovation-led economic activity in the country. Addressing the meeting, the Finance Minister acknowledged the critical role played by telecom infrastructure companies in enabling nationwide digital connectivity and underscored the importance of venture capital in supporting entrepreneurship, innovation, and job creation. He noted that a predictable, transparent and growth-oriented policy and tax framework is essential to attract long-term investment and to ensure sustainable development of these sectors. The finance minister emphasized that the government is committed to facilitating private sector-led growth, particularly in technology-driven and investment-intensive sectors. He stated that while fiscal considerations remain important, the objective is to strike a balanced approach that supports business expansion, encourages formalization, and strengthens Pakistan's digital and innovation ecosystem over the medium to long term. During the meeting, it was agreed that a dedicated working group would be constituted, comprising representatives from the Tax Policy Office and other relevant stakeholders, to undertake a detailed examination of the proposals and recommendations presented by the delegation. The working group will assess the proposals in detail and develop actionable recommendations.—DNA

ISSI hosts event commemorating Kenya's 'Jamhuri Day'


ISLAMABAD: The Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East and Africa (CAMEA) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Pakistan Africa Institute for Development and Research (PAIDAR), organized an event to commemorate Kenya's 'Jamhuri Day'. The proceedings, which began with the national anthems of Pakistan, Kenya and East African Community (EAC), were moderated by Dr. Amina Khan, Director CAMEA. Speakers included Ambassador Sohail Mahmood, Director General ISSI; Lt. Gen (Rtd.) Peter Mbogo Njiru, High Commissioner of Kenya to Pakistan; Mr. Ibrar Hussain Khan, High Com-

missioner of Kenya to Pakistan; and Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman BOG ISSI. The Chief Guest on the occasion was Mr. Mushahid Hussain Sayed, President PAIDAR, and the Keynote Speaker was Ambassador Hamid Asghar Khan, Additional Secretary (Africa), Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan (MOFA). Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed said Pakistan and Kenya share deep historical ties rooted in a common colonial legacy, commonwealth membership, and Pakistan's support for Kenya's independence. He highlighted strong contemporary relations, including nearly one billion dollars in bilateral trade, Pakistan's import of Kenyan tea, people-to-people links,

defence and civil service cooperation, and a vibrant diaspora. Noting their partnership in the Global South, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Maritime Silk Road, he emphasised Afro-Asian solidarity and reaffirmed the enduring friendship between the two countries. During his address, Ambassador Sohail Mahmood stated that the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad was pleased to commemorate the 62nd anniversary of Kenya's Jamhuri Day in partnership with PAIDAR and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He paid tribute to the leadership of Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed and Ambassador Hamid Asghar Khan in strengthening Pakistan-Africa ties.

He noted that Jamhuri Day marks Kenya's independence on 12 December 1963 and its transformation into a republic under Jomo Kenyatta. He emphasised that the day embodies sovereignty, unity, and self-rule, a cause that Pakistan fully supported, and recalled Kenya's freedom struggle as part of Africa's wider decolonisation. Ambassador Sohail Mahmood further observed that Kenya has consolidated its position as a leading African state with a diversified economy, strong governance, and achievements in tourism, conservation, and business innovation. He highlighted the cordial relations between Pakistan and Kenya, including






the growing trade and defence cooperation, the contribution of a vibrant Pakistani diaspora, and collaboration in multilateral forums. He emphasised Kenya's key place under Pakistan's 'Engage Africa' policy and the potential for cooperation across multiple sectors. He concluded by conveying congratulations to the Government and people of Kenya and reaffirming Pakistan's desire to further strengthen friendship and cooperation for peace, prosperity, and development. He also announced the establishment of an 'Africa Corner' at ISSI in 2026 as part of the efforts to reinforce Pakistan's 'Engage Africa' policy.—DNA



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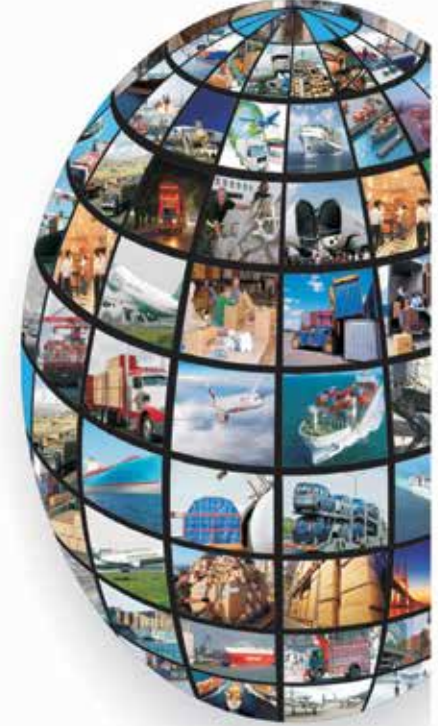
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National Days and Armed Forces Days

DECEMBER

Dec 01/Romania National Day

Dec 02/United Arab Emirates National Day

Dec 02/Laos Republic National Day

Dec 05/Thailand National Day

Dec 06/Finland Independence Day

Dec 07/India Armed Forces Flag Day

Dec 09/Tanzania National Day

Dec 11/Oman Armed Forces Day

Dec 12/Kenya Independence Day

Dec12/Turkmenistan Neutrality Day

Dec 16/Bahrain National Day

Dec 16/Kazakhstan Independence Day

Dec 18/Qatar National Day

Dec 18/Niger National Day

Dec 23/Philippines Armed Forces Day

Dec 23/Japan National Day

Emergency

Rescue (Police).....15

Bomb Disposal.....15

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Emergency Ambulance.1122 & Rescue Services.4451122

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Motorway Police.9270601-20

Women Police Stations Islamabad.....9222596

Rawalpindi.....9270601-20

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CMH.....5611111

MH.....561116

Cantt Hospital.....9270907-11

DHQ.....5556311-4

RGH.....9290301-7

Holy Family.....9290322-7

PIMS.....9261170-79

Polyclinic.....9218300-09

Shifa International 4603666

Departments

CDA.....9221334-43

CDA.....9208301-04

Met Office.....9250360-6

RDA.....5555864

TMA.....5770886

Cantonment Board 9270151-3

Islamabad Metropolitan

Corporation.....9209224

Potohar Town.....9209224

Rawal Town.....5773343

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

ICCI President reaffirms chamber’s CSR commitment

ISLAMABAD: A grand mega welfare ceremony was organized by Alkhidmat Foundation Islamabad at the auditorium of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), where wheelchairs, sewing machines, winter relief packages and interest-free loans were distributed among persons with disabilities and deserving families President ICCI, Sardar Tahir Mehmood, graced the event as Chief Guest. The ceremony was presided over by Dr. Hafeez ur Rehman, President Alkhidmat Foundation Pakistan, while Muhammad Altaf Sher, President Alkhidmat Foundation Islamabad, hosted the event. Tahir Ayub, Senior Vice President ICCI, and Kashif Chaudhry, President Pakistan Business Forum, attended as distinguished guests. Addressing the gathering, Sardar Tahir Mehmood highly appreciated Alkhidmat

Foundation’s philanthropic and humanitarian services, stating that such welfare initiatives play a pivotal role in building a compassionate and inclusive society. He said that ICCI firmly believes in corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a collective duty of the business community toward social uplift. He highlighted that ICCI has been actively undertaking and supporting welfare activities, including assistance for underprivileged communities, skill development programs, and support for persons with disabilities, healthcare initiatives, education, and emergency relief efforts. He pledged that ICCI will continue and further strengthen its welfare and CSR-driven initiatives in collaboration with reputable charitable organizations. The ICCI President reaffirmed the Chamber’s commitment to partnering with

credible welfare institutions like Alkhidmat Foundation to promote self-reliance, create sustainable livelihoods, and ensure inclusive economic growth. Dr. Hafeez ur Rehman, in his address, said that Alkhidmat Foundation Pakistan is serving humanity across the country without discrimination. He emphasized that providing wheelchairs and sewing machines is a vital step toward empowering persons with disabilities and skilled individuals, while interest-free loans help aspiring entrepreneurs start small businesses with dignity. Muhammad Altaf Sher stated that Alkhidmat Foundation Islamabad is playing a proactive role in the rehabilitation of underprivileged segments of society and will continue to expand such welfare programs. He expressed gratitude to donors, volunteers, and ICCI for their

valuable support. Senior Vice President ICCI Tahir Ayub and other speakers appreciated Alkhidmat Foundation’s services and stressed that strong collaboration between the private sector and welfare organizations is essential to effectively address social challenges. During the ceremony, honorary shields were presented to individuals who rendered outstanding services in social welfare. At the conclusion of the event, relief items were distributed among beneficiaries, while participants termed Alkhidmat Foundation’s initiative as timely, impactful, and highly commendable. Those prominent among the attendees included ICCI Executive Members, Vice Presidents Alkhidmat Foundation Islamabad Zaheer ud Din Babar, Farooq Ahmad , Secretary General Tayyab Siddiqui and other.

President Zardari to visit Iraq from Dec 20

ISLAMABAD: President, Asif Ali Zardari, will undertake an official visit to the Republic of Iraq from December 20 to 24 at the invitation of President of the Republic of Iraq, Dr Abdul Latif Jamal Rashid. The visit underscores the longstanding, brotherly relations between Pakistan and Iraq, rooted in shared bonds of faith, culture, and mutual respect, a Ministry of Foreign Affairs news release said. During the visit, the president will hold high-level meetings with the Iraqi leadership to review the full spectrum of bilateral relations and explore ways to further strengthen cooperation across key areas of mutual interest, including trade and investment, energy, reconstruction, manpower, technology, education, and people-to-people exchanges. Discussions will also cover regional and international developments, as well as cooperation at multilateral fora. The visit is expected to reinforce the traditionally warm and cordial ties between the two countries, identify new avenues of partnership, and enhance people-to-people linkages, particularly in the context of religious tourism and economic collaboration.—APP

Seafood worth \$173m, meat \$149m exported

ISLAMABAD: Fish and fish preparations exports from the country during the first five months of the current financial year grew by 7.03 per cent as compared to the exports of the corresponding period of the last year. During the period from July-November, 2025, over 75,766 metric tons of fish and fish products valued at \$173.750 million were exported as compared to the exports of 75,336 metric tons worth of \$162.334 million of the same period of the last year, according to the data of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. Meanwhile, meat and meat products exports from the country during the period under review increased by 7.12 per cent as about 47,990 metric tons of meat and meat preparations worth \$215.944million were exported as compared to the exports of 47,507 metric tons valued at \$201.586 million of the same period of the last year.—APP

CDA, IFC sign MoU to improve water, sewage services



DNA

ISLAMABAD: A signing ceremony for an agreement between the Capital Development Authority (CDA) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group was held at the CDA Headquarters. The ceremony was attended by Federal Secretary Interior Muhammad Khurram Agha, Chairman CDA and Chief Commissioner Islamabad Muhammad Ali Randhawa, Member Planning and Design Dr. Khalid Hafiz, Regional Director (IFC) and other senior officers from CDA’s Islamabad Water and IFC. Under the agreement, IFC will provide technical assistance to the Islamabad Water Agency for various projects under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP). In this regard, IFC will provide

its Transaction Advisory Services for three water and sewage-related projects in Islamabad. Prior principle approval for execution of these projects under a PPP has already been obtained from the CDA Board and the Public-Private Partnership Board. Transaction Advisory Services for completing these Islamabad Water projects under a PPP are being procured in accordance with relevant rules. The completion of these projects will help resolve issues related to the water and sewage system in the Federal Capital, Islamabad. Key components of these projects include improving the supply of clean water installing water meters and reducing non-revenue water in the Federal Capital, Islamabad. Similarly, measures to make water pumps energy-efficient and to repair and rehabilitate sewage lines, including sewage treatment plants are also part of these

projects. The completion of these projects will lead to a significant increase in CDA’s revenue, which will be spent on improving water supply in the Federal Capital, Islamabad. Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa said that completing these projects under a PPP will help improve the monitoring system and control water wastage. He said that modern technology will be utilized for monitoring all installations and water pumps of Islamabad Water which will improve water supply. Chairman CDA further said that all resources will be utilized to provide the citizens of the Federal Capital, Islamabad, with the best facilities for clean water and sewage systems. The meeting also reiterated the commitment to fully leverage the technical expertise, experience and capacity of the International Finance Corporation (IFC).

Sufism addresses inner conflicts of humans

ISLAMABAD: Mysticism is often misunderstood as an escape from worldly responsibilities, whereas in reality it is deeply connected with self awareness, conscious living and ethical engagement with society Talking to APP on Friday, Researcher and writer Jamshed Iqbal said that mysticism and Sufism should be seen as serious intellectual and psychological disciplines aimed at resolving inner conflicts of human beings rather than ritualistic or symbolic practices. He said that the fundamental human question of reality can move in either inward or outward. “When directed inward, it gives rise to mysticism or Sufism, while an outward direction leads to science and empirical inquiry”, he explained. Jamshed Iqbal underlined that Eastern societies largely inherited Sufism as tradition, memory and cultural practice, whereas the West adopted mystical thought through conscious self exploration and psychological understanding. This, he said, allowed Western thinkers to demystify many Sufi principles and translate them into practical tools such as mindfulness, meditation and emotional awareness He noted that practices like controlled breathing, meditation and living in the present moment are central to mystical teachings and have a direct impact on emotional and psychological well-being.—APP

Weekly inflation up by 0.24%

ISLAMABAD: The weekly inflation, measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), recorded increase of 0.24 percent for the combined consumption group during the week ended on December 18, 2025, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday According to the PBS data, the SPI for the week under review was recorded at 336.53 points, up from 335.73 points last week. On a year-on-year basis, the SPI increased by 3.75 percent. The weekly SPI with base year 2015-16 = 100 covers 17 urban centres and 51 essential items for all expenditure groups. The SPI for the lowest consumption group (up to Rs17,732) increased by 0.07 percent, to 327.07 points from 326.84

points. The SPI for consumption groups of Rs17,733–22,888; Rs22,889–29,517; Rs29,518–44,175; and above Rs44,175 increased by 0.14 percent, 0.18 percent, 0.24 percent and 0.28 percent, respectively. During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 17 (33.33 percent) items increased, 14 (27.45 percent) items decreased, and 20 (39.22 percent) items remained stable. Major commodities registering a week-on-week decrease included tomatoes (11.38 percent), potatoes (8.39 percent), diesel (5.00 percent), sugar (4.52 percent), onions (3.52 percent), pulse mash (1.29 percent), garlic (1.26 percent), salt powder (1.12 percent), gur (1.05 percent) and LPG (0.14 percent). Items showing

an increase in prices included chicken (11.11 percent), chilies powder (3.08 percent), eggs (2.88 percent), shirting (1.64 percent), firewood (0.86 percent), cooking oil 5 litre (0.32 percent), energy saver (0.31 percent), pulse moong (0.31 percent), mustard oil (0.25 percent) and beef (0.23 percent). On a year-on-year basis, major increases were observed in the prices of gas charges for Q1 (29.85 percent), sugar (24.10 percent), wheat flour (22.52 percent), chicken (20.78 percent), beef (13.66 percent), gur (13.43 percent), firewood (12.08 percent), powdered milk (9.50 percent), eggs (8.75 percent), lawn printed (8.29 percent), shirting (8.07 percent) and bananas (7.83 percent).—APP

Ahsan urges results-oriented reporting on constitutional principles

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Professor Ahsan Iqbal, on Friday stressed that ministries’ annual reports should go beyond formalities and focus on measurable, real results Speaking at a national workshop on the Principles of Policy, organized by the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, the minister pointed out that ministries usually submit standard reports without any system to check real outcomes. The government plans to create a transparent and effective national framework to ensure these constitutional principles are properly applied, he said. He said that annual reporting on the constitution’s principles of policy should move from being a routine task to a process that shows clear results and benefits for the public, adding turning these principles into concrete actions was urgently needed. He noted that while creating the constitution was an important milestone, putting it into practice is equally important. The constitution provides the direction for the state, but a clear plan for implementing the ‘principles of policy’ is still missing. The minister emphasized that the goals of these principles should match development priorities and governance results. He added that the true measure of reporting is the impact it has on people’s lives, not just how the report looks.—APP

Pak-Tajik cultural festival strengthens historic ties: Khichi

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for National Heritage and Culture, Aurangzeb Khan Khichi Friday said that the celebration of Pakistan–Tajikistan Cultural Week reflects the deep-rooted friendship between the two countries and serves as an effective platform to promote cultural diplomacy, people-to-people contacts, and regional harmony. Addressing the opening ceremony of the two-day Pakistan-Tajik Festival at Lok Virsa, the federal minister said Pakistan and Tajikistan share centuries-old historical, cultural, and spiritual ties that continue to grow stronger through cultural exchanges. He emphasized that such initiatives are essential in today’s world, where culture plays a central role in building bridges between nations and fostering mutual understanding. Aurangzeb Khan Khichi said the festival highlights the shared civilizational heritage, folk traditions, music, arts, and literary connections of Pakistan and Tajikistan. He noted that both nations are linked through common cultural values, linguistic harmony, and historical interactions that transcend borders. “Culture is a soft power that brings nations closer, strengthens friendship, and contributes to peace and stability in the region,” he remarked. The federal minister reiterated Pakistan’s firm commitment to promoting cultural cooperation with friendly countries, particularly Central Asian states. He said the government is actively encouraging cultural festivals, exchanges, and joint initiatives to introduce younger generations to their shared heritage and to project Pakistan’s positive and peaceful image to the world Speaking on the occasion, State Minister for National Heritage and Culture, Huzaifa Rehman highlighted the close linguistic relationship between Urdu and Persian, describing them as sister languages deeply connected with Tajik culture. He said cultural links between Pakistan and Tajikistan are rooted in shared history and civilization rather than mere geography. The state minister noted that following the initiative taken by the Tajik Ambassador, several brotherly countries have approached Pakistan to organize their own cultural weeks. He emphasized that in the contemporary global environment, nations strengthen their standing through soft image and cultural engagement instead of conventional conflict. He said the ministry is making concerted efforts to organize similar cultural weeks with other countries for public engagement and cultural enrichment. Earlier, Minister of Culture of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ms. Sattoriyon Matlubakhon Amonzoda thanked the government and people of Pakistan for the warm hospitality. She said the Culture Days of Tajikistan in Pakistan symbolize the centuries-old spiritual, linguistic, and cultural ties between the two nations. She highlighted the growing bilateral cooperation under the leadership of President Emomali Rahmon and Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.—DNA



ISLAMABAD: Advisor to Chairman Senate and ambassador for ISC Ms. Misbah Khar with UAE ambassador Salem Mohammed Al Zaabi.

Briefs

CDA union extends condolences

DNA

ISLAMABAD Former Additional Session Judge Malik Atta Rasool Joiya, father of DIG Islamabad Police Muhammad Haroon Joiya and father-in-law of CDA Member Administration Talat Mahmood Gondal has been laid to rest. Expressing deep sorrow over his demise, Patron-in-Chief of the Pakistan Workers Federation and General Secretary of the CDA Mazdoor Union Chaudhry Muhammad Yaseen, General Secretary Pakistan Workers Federation Asad Mahmood, President CDA Mazdoor Union Aurangzeb Khan, Chairman Raja Shakir Zaman Kiani, Chief Organizer Muhammad Aasim Malik, Azhar Khan Tanoli, Muhammad Sarfaraz Malik, Chaudhry Wajid Gujar, General Secretary PCP Workers Union Chaudhry Bilal, President All Pakistan Sports Board Union Mohsin Zia, General Secretary Schlumberger Workers Union Malik Abdul Hameed, President State Bank Union Shafqatullah Waraich and others issued a joint condolence statement. They stated that the late Malik Atta Rasool Joiya spent his entire life upholding high principles and values and that his life remains a shining example for all. They added that his selfless services will always be remembered in golden words. The leaders prayed to Almighty Allah to grant the departed soul a high place in Jannatul-Firdous and to bless the bereaved family with patience and strength during this difficult time.—APP

Sherry calls UN Report ‘diplomatic victory for Pakistan’

ISLAMABAD :Senator Sherry Rehman endorsed a UN report, describing it as a diplomatic success for Pakistan and stated that India has failed to respond, warning that Indian-sponsored terrorism could trigger a major conflict in the region. While speaking exclusively to local media, Senator Sherry Rehman hailed the UN report as a significant recognition of Pakistan's efforts on the international stage. Senator Sherry Rehman said the UN report clearly states that India violated rules through cross-border incursions into Pakistani territory. She emphasized that the report highlighted India's involvement in international terrorism, adding, the UN had given India time to respond, but it failed to do so. Responding to a query, Sherry Rehman also pointed out that Indian nationals were linked to the Sydney shooting incident. She further stated that the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) should investigate India's role in terrorism, adding, the UN report also warns of the risk of major conflicts, noting India's involvement in terrorism and violations of the Indus Waters Treaty.—APP

Pak, Indonesia need to strengthen coop in edible oil sector

KARACHI: Indonesian Consul General in Karachi, Madzaker M.A., has emphasized that enhancing bilateral cooperation between Pakistan and Indonesia, particularly in the edible oil sector has become an urgent necessity, as strong partnerships are essential for sustainable development and shared prosperity. He expressed these views during a meeting with Sheikh Umer Rehan, Chairman of the Pakistan Vanaspati Manufacturers Association (PVMA), at the Indonesian Consulate in Karachi. Rashid Jan Muhammad and Ahmed Ghulam Hussain were also present at the meeting. The Consul General stated that Indonesia possesses extensive experience in palm oil cultivation and processing and can offer Pakistan technical assistance, training programs, and technology transfer in this field. He noted that enhanced agricultural cooperation and the exchange of expertise would further strengthen economic ties between the two countries.—APP

PIDE hosts IMF's dialogue on Pak eco path after EFF review

The session concluded with an interactive question-and-answer segment, reflecting strong academic and policy interest in Pakistan's ongoing engagement with the IMF

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) convened a policy session on the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Extended Fund Facility (EFF), focusing on the successful completion of the second review, at its Islamabad office. The session was delivered by Mr. Mahir Binici, Resident Representative of the IMF in Pakistan, marking his first official visit to PIDE. The event brought together faculty members, researchers, students, and policy professionals for an in-depth exchange on Pakistan's macroeconomic trajectory and reform priorities. The session was formally inaugurated by Dr. Karim Khan, Dean of Academics at PIDE, who emphasized the importance of informed, evidence-based policy dialogue in addressing Pakistan's economic challenges. Highlighting PIDE's role as a platform for rigorous research and policy engagement, Dr. Khan outlined the core objectives of the IMF-supported program, including fiscal sustainability through achieving a primary balance, maintaining a

sustainable debt-to-GDP ratio, strengthening macroeconomic prudence, enhancing climate resilience in light of Pakistan's vulnerability to climate shocks, and reinforcing social protection mechanisms. In his presentation, Mr. Mahir Binici provided a comprehensive overview of the completion of the second review under Pakistan's IMF Extended Fund Facility, approved on December 8, 2025. He noted that the 2024 EFF has been designed by incorporating lessons from previous arrangements, with a stronger emphasis on building economic resilience and supporting sustainable growth. The presentation covered key elements of the program, including macroeconomic stabilization, fiscal consolidation and revenue mobilization, inflation dynamics, monetary policy stance, and developments in the external sector and foreign exchange market. While acknowledging recent improvements in economic indicators, Mr. Binici cautioned that macroeconomic vulnerabilities persist, underscoring the need for continued and credible reform efforts. Highlighting progress under the program, Mr. Binici pointed to reductions in external imbalances, improved functioning of

the foreign exchange market, and a gradual easing of pressure on foreign exchange reserves. He stressed that these stabilization gains must be preserved through policy continuity, discipline, and consistency to ensure long-term durability. On fiscal policy, he underscored the importance of consolidation to ensure debt sustainability, identifying tax base broadening, stronger tax administration, and rationalization of untargeted subsidies as key reform priorities necessary to create space for development spending and social protection. Addressing inflation and monetary policy, Mr. Binici acknowledged the adverse impact of high inflation on households and emphasized the role of a tight and credible monetary policy framework in restoring price stability. He highlighted the importance of central bank independence and anchoring inflation expectations as foundations for sustainable economic growth. On the external sector, he reiterated the value of a market-determined exchange rate in absorbing external shocks, enhancing export competitiveness, and supporting foreign exchange reserve accumulation.

Mr. Binici also emphasized that structural

reforms remain central to the IMF-supported program, particularly in the energy sector, state-owned enterprises, and governance and transparency frameworks. He noted that these reforms are critical not only for macroeconomic stabilization but also for strengthening long-term economic resilience. Recognizing the social costs associated with adjustment measures, he stressed the importance of targeted social safety nets to protect vulnerable segments of society from the impact of inflation and reforms. Concluding his remarks, Mr. Binici underscored the importance of strong domestic ownership and consistent implementation of reforms for the success of the program, noting that nationally driven and well-communicated reforms help build investor confidence and support durable growth. He also appreciated PIDE's role in facilitating constructive engagement between academia and policymakers, emphasizing that research-driven analysis and informed debate are essential for effective economic policymaking. The session concluded with an interactive question-and-answer segment, reflecting strong academic and policy interest in Pakistan's ongoing engagement with the IMF.



ISLAMABAD: A stunning view of the sculptures of horses in the premises of Convention Center in Federal Capital.

Rs 28b set aside for Gwadar water supply

ISLAMABAD: Balochistan government has approved Rs 28 billion for a major water supply project aimed at addressing potable water shortages in Gwadar. Chief Minister of Balochistan has earmarked the funds for the project, which is expected to ease the city's long-standing water scarcity and related public hardships. Under the plan, a 160-kilometre pipeline will be constructed to transport water from Mirani Dam in Turbat to Gwadar city and its surrounding sub-districts. According to a Gwadar Pro's report, the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) has been assigned to implement the project. The pipeline network is scheduled for completion within one year. Once completed, the project is expected to provide a permanent solution to Gwadar's water woes. Mirani Dam, the second-largest dam in Balochistan, has a storage capacity of 302,000 acre-feet. Meanwhile, the Secretary for Water has also approved an annual budget of Rs 150 million for the operation and maintenance of the China-aided 1.2 MGD desalination plant. The plant is currently operating at optimal capacity and is supplying a significant amount of water to the city. Gwadar is facing an acute water crisis as the region enters its second consecutive year without meaningful rainfall. Local reservoirs, including the Ankara and Sawad dams, have nearly dried up. The Shadi Kaur Dam pipeline, which was reactivated in September, has yet to reach full capacity and is currently supplying only limited water to the city.

PM Shehbaz hails FBR's anti-smuggling drive

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister, Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Friday chaired a weekly performance review meeting of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), lauding recent anti-smuggling operations and directing authorities to further intensify action against tax evasion and illicit trade. During the meeting, the prime minister was briefed on progress made by the FBR in curbing smuggling and related enforcement measures. He said that smuggling annually causes losses of billions of rupees to the national exchequer, stressing that decisive action was essential to safeguard the country's economic interests, a Prime Minister's Office news release said. The prime minister commended the role of Pakistan Customs and said successful enforcement operations had led to a significant reduction in smuggling, calling the results encouraging and commendable. He noted that due to effective measures, several commodities that were previously smuggled were now being imported through legal channels and had become part of the formal economy. The prime minister directed that efforts against tax evasion be further accelerated, reiterating that no leniency would be shown in cases involving smuggling or tax

fraud. He also instructed provincial governments to extend full cooperation to the FBR in taking legal action against illegal petrol pumps. The officials informed the meeting that an integrated customs enforcement system was now operational across the country to prevent smuggling. It was further briefed that petrol pumps nationwide had been registered through the Rahguzar App, while legal action against illegal outlets was ongoing. District administrations have been empowered under the new Petroleum Act to seize illegal machinery, and a GPS-based tracking system has been enforced for the transportation of petroleum products. According to the briefing, measures taken between July and November 2025 to curb petroleum smuggling resulted in an 82 percent increase in revenue compared to the same period last year. Significant revenue gains were also recorded over the past five months following actions against the illegal smuggling of cigarettes, tyres, garments, electronics, and other goods. The meeting was attended by Federal Ministers Muhammad Aurangzeb and Ahsan Khan Cheema, Minister of State for Finance Bilal Azhar Kayani, the Chairman FBR, and senior officials from relevant departments.—APP

FOSPAH facilitates landmark settlement

LISLAMABAD: In one of the year's most significant dispute resolution outcomes, FOSPAH successfully mediated a long standing inheritance conflict involving a commercial property in G 8, Islamabad. The complainant approached FOSPAH after being denied her rightful share in the property. While most legal heirs were willing to distribute the asset according to Sharia principles, one heir opposed the process and initially refused to participate in the proceedings. His non appearance led to ex parte action, and the property was placed for auction with a reserve price of PKR 1.6750 billion. When the opposing heir later rejoined the proceedings and challenged the valua-

tion. FOSPAH asked him to substantiate his claim by producing potential buyers, ensuring transparency and fairness for all heirs. Over the following weeks, FOSPAH's local commission worked diligently to guide the parties and verify claims. In this process, revenue authorities supported FOSPAH by verifying the status and ownership of property. Through patient facilitation and consistent follow up, the forum helped the family move from disagreement to consensus, ultimately settling at the revised valuation of PKR 1.7 billion, ensuring that every legal heir, including the widow and daughters, received their rightful share. This case not only underscores FOSPAH's commit-

ment to accessible justice, it demonstrates the importance of gender sensitive mediation and persistent engagement to resolve even the most complex family disputes. FOSPAH has helped women obtain access to property worth over PKR 10 billion rupees in the past 3 years. Proceedings have often resulted in settlement between heirs, once they realise that the law is clear and the State stands behind women's right to property. In Pakistan, where women's inheritance rights are clearly recognized under statutory law and Islamic principles, brothers have a legal and moral duty to ensure that sisters receive their lawful shares without delay, coercion, or obstruction. When

hindrances are created, through pressure, misinformation, fraudulent transfers, or social coercion, it not only violates the law but also undermines justice and family harmony. Denial of women's property rights perpetuates economic dependency, weakens women's bargaining power, and deepens gender based discrimination. Conversely, when families facilitate and respect women's rightful shares, they strengthen the rule of law, promote economic empowerment, and uphold ethical values rooted in fairness and accountability. Ensuring unhindered access to property for women is therefore not merely a private matter but a legal obligation with far reaching social consequences.—APP

Rawlapindi wraps up year's polio vaccination

RAWALPINDI: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif is personally monitoring the province's polio campaigns, with strict instructions for mandatory polio drops at border entry points to prevent virus importation from neighboring regions. This was told by Uzma Kardar, Focal Person to the Chief Minister on polio, during a press conference on Friday. She emphasizing Punjab's strong performance in polio immunization campaign and said that the province was polio-free two to three years ago but saw cases emerge due to population movement from Attock and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Describing polio as a 'cruel virus' spread through feces and sewage, she stressed the full mobilization of Punjab's health department. She said that Punjab has reported only one polio case in 2025 so far. At the national level, cases dropped from 74 in 2024 to 30 as of mid-December 2025, she said. Uzma informed the media reps that enhanced security was being provided to polio teams, while efforts continued to counter fake news and misinformation spread on social media by certain elements regarding vaccine and the vaccination drive. Uzma Kardar expressed optimism that Punjab could be declared polio-free by 2026. She highlighted that in Rawalpindi, the final major drive of the year achieved strong results despite recent positive environmental samples indicating virus circulation. The district targeted over 989,924 children aged under 5 years, with a house-to-house focus on 722,056. Uzma informed media reps that more than 4,731 mobile teams, along with fixed and transit teams, covered 200 union councils. According to official data, the latest NID vaccinated 719,623 children in house-to-house efforts, 97 percent coverage against a target of 744,940, with additional vaccinations at 30,163 out-of-house sites, 94,426 schools, 21,208 fixed sites, and 35,788 transit points. Throughout the year, Rawalpindi conducted five drives deploying 225 UC Supervisors, 765 Area Supervisors, thousands of teams, 262 fixed sites, and 194 transit teams. All campaigns passed post-campaign assessments, maintaining an overall 98% market survey coverage. "Punjab health departments remain vigilant amid ongoing risks, committed to high immunization rates, effective supervision, and community engagement to secure a polio-free future", she added. Deputy Commissioner Rawlapindi, Dr. Hassan Waqar Cheema on the occasion informed that 46000 children vaccinated during the recent campaign were guests population. "A huge number of guest kids vaccinated during the campaign reflects the total commitment of the health authority for achieving the maximum target", he said.—DNA

Excellence award ceremony at IMCG held

DNA

ISLAMABAD :An Excellence Award Ceremony 2024-25 was hosted by IMCG Postgraduate F-7/2 Islamabad. The dignified ceremony aimed to recognize and reward meritorious students for their hard work and exceptional results in the BS degree examinations as well as the HSSC Part I & II Annual Examinations conducted by the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education. The Chief Guest was Syed Junaid Ikhtlaq, Director General, Federal Directorate of Education Guest of honor was Prof Sadia Ibrar while Principal Prof Fouzia Sheikh presided the ceremony. Model college F7/2 grab 11 positions scoring 1000+ marks out of 1100 in HSSC II (2024). The college stood 2nd overall among FIDE colleges on the basis of FBISE annual HSSC II result 2024 and in the FBISE HSSC II (2025) annual result, the college achieved a GPA of 4.18 with a massive number of 1063 students who appeared in the examination. Moreover in Quaid-i-Azam University exams total 37 students of IMCG F7.2 secured an excellent CGPA of 4.0 and 109 students secured a GPA of 4.0 in the academic session 2024-25 respectively.—APP

Pakistan's PCIW endorses UN Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Commissioner for Indus Waters (PCIW) Syed Muhammad Mehar Ali Shah expressed confidence on Friday in the report by the United Nations independent special experts, which revealed violations of international law, offering solid evidence for Pakistan to continue its diplomatic and political efforts to hold India accountable on the international stage. In an exclusive conversation with a local media channel, Syed Muhammad Mehar Ali Shah emphasized that the UN report was based on the findings of independent experts. He pointed out that the report sheds light on India's consistent non-cooperation regarding the Indus Waters Treaty and its violations of international laws, which were clearly exposed by the UN's findings. Shah reiterated that such actions further validate Pakistan's stance and strengthen the case for holding India accountable on the global stage. According to Shah, Pakistan will continue to work through diplomatic channels to expose India's actions on the global stage, ensuring that the violation of international law is recognized and addressed at the highest levels.—APP

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AI pioneers have a responsibility to humankind

MOHAMED CHEBARO

TWO telling tales about the impact of the emerging artificial intelligence realm on human life emerged from a pair of end-of-year announcements over the last week. One was the word “slop” being named word of the year for 2025 by the editors of the Merriam-Webster dictionary. Merriam-Webster defines slop as “digital content of low quality that is produced usually in quantity by means of artificial intelligence.” This sums up the fact that AI has been churning out content that some people find annoying or even bordering on the ridiculous. The second tale relates to the announcement of the Time person of the year: the architects of AI. One wonders if we ought to celebrate or simply admit the fact that we have stepped into the unknown – that the super-powerful machine and its operating algorithm have come to dominate human life. It is not yet known how far this trend will impact the role of the individual as a free-willed creature in the future. At the same time, the Financial Times named Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang as its person of the year due to his role in providing the tech industry with its single most important component: chips. With certainty eroding and new frontiers being celebrated, the age of AI tools and the thinking machine is upon us For a long time, chips were overlooked in favor of the devices and screens they powered. But accompanying the surge of computing power and the race for artificial general intelligence, Nvidia, headed by Huang, is seen as the component producer behind the mania sweeping through the tech, financial and business worlds. And for that, Huang has been credited as being at the center of the biggest investment program ever seen in the private sector. Many agree that 2025 has been dominated by AI and US President Donald Trump, as both dotted the information landscape with facts, hype and an incessant stream of information. With certainty eroding and new frontiers being celebrated, the age of AI tools and the thinking machine is upon us. So, it is not strange that Time would name the architects of AI its 2025 person of the year. As the magazine stated, “this was the year when artificial intelligence’s full potential roared into view, and when it became clear that there will be no turning back or opting out.” Since 1927, Time has named a person of the year who, “for better or for worse ... has done the most to influence the events of the year.” It recognized Adolf Hitler in 1938 and Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979, alongside life-changing concepts such as the endangered Earth in 1988 and the personal computer in 1982.

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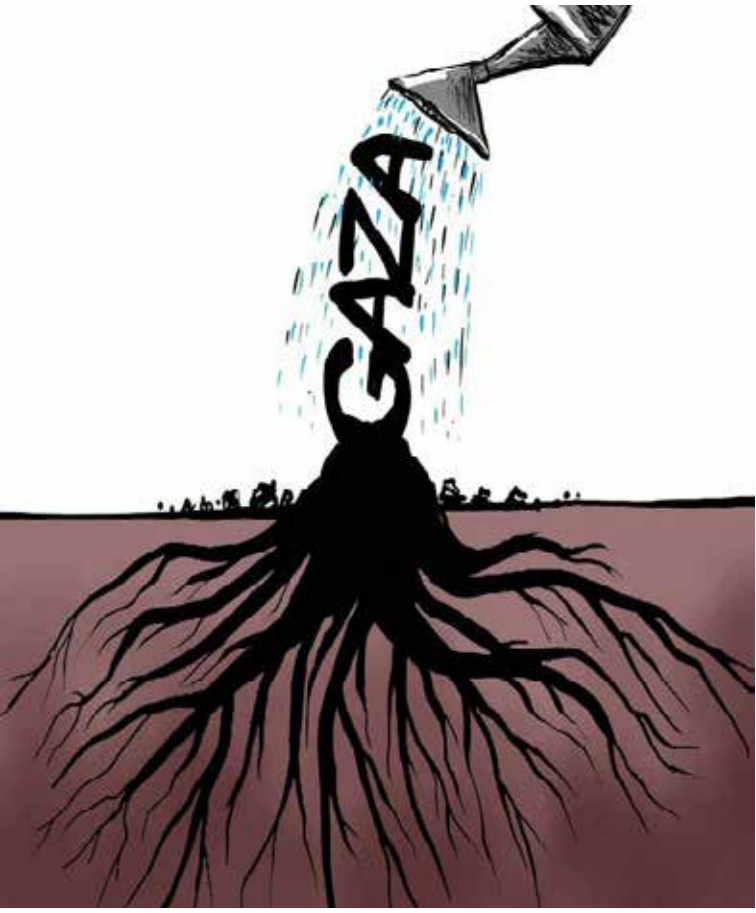
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Yet, the naming of the individuals who imagined, built and are driving the AI project as person of the year should be of concern to everyone. Through this, we are recognizing and celebrating the technological breakthrough despite its uncertain limits and impacts and the potential adversities it may bring. We are recognizing and celebrating the technological breakthrough despite its uncertain limits and impacts We should all celebrate the breakthroughs new machines and software offer to human advancement and their solutions to many current and future challenges. But AI and artificial general intelligence, its offspring, being pursued at breakneck speed – costing the planet and its environment undetermined sums without any accountability or transparency – has sent shivers down the spines of those who worry that a neo-empire is dawning on us that will likely to change all the anchors of human history and experience so far. With every technological breakthrough, there are some adversities factored in and others simply emerge as we go along. In celebrating the architects of AI and those pumping money, science and computing power into developing tools that we all agree are aimed at providing human and business benefits, one would imagine that protections from the dangerous use of AI are built in. So far, those guardrails are not guaranteed. The users of AI are grappling with its errors and its damage to society as a result of its recycling of toxic, fake and fabricated content, which can be used to spread disinformation and misinformation. There are often discriminatory or hurtful outcomes, but the creators and their distributors are not being held accountable. AI-powered tools of war is another dangerous field that needs a separate discussion. Among the pack of frontier companies racing to optimize AI – alongside OpenAI, Google DeepMind, xAI, Meta and the Chinese rivals led by DeepSeek – Anthropic has been the most vocal in warning about the decisions these developers are due to make regarding the level of autonomy they will allow their machines to have. There are also the repercussions that an AI explosion could have, possibly leading to humans losing control of the machine. Anthropic’s chief scientist and co-owner Jared Kaplan warned recently that if recursive self-improvement was allowed in an uncontrolled way, humanity could face two risks. He said: “One is, do you lose control over it? Do you even know what the AIs are doing? The main question there is: are the AIs good for humanity? ... Are they going to allow people to continue to have agency over their lives and over the world?” The second risk is related to security, where self-taught AI could in the next few years exceed human capabilities in scientific research and technological development. If it were to fall into the wrong hands, it could lead to misuse and even help a political power-grab. The architects, designers and makers of AI should rightly be celebrated. However, as securing the future is also in their hands at this stage, one hopes that their creation’s excellence will not overtake their ability to control it. One would hope that, surely, the good of humanity and society is a paramount consideration in the work of these pioneers, because if the machine stops serving the human interest, it could render their endeavors meaningless.

Trump’s Naval Gamble on Venezuela

Qamar Bashir



Geopolitically, the naval embargo also accelerates Venezuela’s alignment with U.S. rivals. Russia and China have already condemned the move, framing it as a violation of sovereignty and maritime norms. While neither is likely to engage militarily, diplomatic, financial, and logistical support to Caracas could deepen, transforming Venezuela into another node in a growing network of states resisting U.S. pressure. Even traditional U.S. partners are uneasy. Canada and several Latin American countries, themselves affected by trade disputes and tariffs, see the normalization of gunboat diplomacy as a dangerous precedent

GUNBOATS, Oil, and the Illusion of Control: Why Trump’s Naval Embargo on Venezuela Risks Repeating History President Donald Trump’s decision to impose a naval embargo on sanctioned Venezuelan oil tankers marks one of the most dramatic escalations in U.S.–Latin America relations in decades. Framed as a national-security response to drug trafficking—after the administration classified fentanyl and its precursors as “weapons of mass destruction” through an executive order—the move signals a fundamental shift: from counter-narcotics cooperation to maritime coercion. While officially described as a limited action targeting sanctioned vessels, the practical effect resembles a partial blockade, carrying economic, geopolitical, and humanitarian consequences far beyond its stated purpose. Had the United States extended this naval action to all Venezuelan shipping, it would have amounted to a de facto declaration of war. Even in its current form, the message is unmistakable: Washington is prepared to use sea power to choke Venezuela’s primary economic lifeline—oil exports—under the banner of law enforcement. Caracas, unsurprisingly, responded by ordering its navy to escort oil tankers through territorial and international waters, asserting sovereignty through symbolism rather than strength. The imbalance is stark. Venezuela’s modest naval capabilities—largely coastal patrol vessels and a handful of aging combatants—cannot be meaningfully compared to the global reach of the U.S. Navy, with its aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines, destroyers, and unmatched logistical infrastructure. The escort order is not about deterrence; it is about dignity and survival. The real battlefield, however, is not the Caribbean Sea but the global energy market. In late 2025, Venezuela was exporting roughly 900,000 barrels of oil per day—its highest level in years after partial sanctions relief and creative logistics. Around 70 to 80 percent of this oil moved through a shadow fleet: aging tankers, opaque ownership structures, ship-to-ship transfers, and insurance arrangements designed to bypass sanctions. U.S. enforcement has now focused precisely on this network. More than 30 tankers operating around Venezuelan waters are already sanctioned, and the fear of seizure has caused many loaded vessels to remain anchored, unable—or unwilling—to sail. This paralysis matters. If even two-thirds of Venezuela’s exports are disrupted, roughly 600,000 barrels per day could be removed from the global market. On paper, that represents less than one percent of global supply. In reality, oil prices are driven not by averages but by expectations and risk premiums. Markets respond sharply to uncertainty, especially when shipping routes become contested. Even modest disruptions can trigger disproportionate price movements, particularly for vulnerable import-dependent economies. A sustained squeeze could force Venezuela to shut in production due to storage constraints, turning

a logistical problem into a structural collapse. The consequences would not stop at oil prices. Venezuela’s economy remains overwhelmingly dependent on crude exports. Further strangulation of this sector would reduce state revenues, weaken the currency, worsen inflation, and deepen shortages of food and medicine. The burden would fall not on political elites but on ordinary citizens already exhausted by years of crisis. And history offers a grim forecast: economic collapse fuels migration. Venezuela has already produced one of the largest displacement crises in modern history, with nearly eight million people leaving the country over the past decade. Another severe shock could push hundreds of thousands more onto regional migration routes—first into neighboring states, then northward toward the United States. Ironically, the very policy justified as a defense of American security may intensify pressures on U.S. borders. Colombia, already hosting millions of Venezuelan migrants, lacks the capacity to absorb another wave without destabilization. Other regional economies, strained by inflation and debt, would struggle as well. Migration does not occur in isolation; it cascades. When one country collapses, the shock ripples across continents. Geopolitically, the naval embargo also accelerates Venezuela’s alignment with U.S. rivals. Russia and China have already condemned the move, framing it as a violation of sovereignty and maritime norms. While neither is likely to engage militarily, diplomatic, financial, and logistical support to Caracas could deepen, transforming Venezuela into another node in a growing network of states resisting U.S. pressure. Even traditional U.S. partners are uneasy. Canada and several Latin American countries, themselves affected by trade disputes and tariffs, see the normalization of gunboat diplomacy as a dangerous precedent. Rather than strengthening alliances, Washington risks reinforcing the perception that it creates more enemies than partners. This raises a fundamental question: does maritime coercion actually reduce drug trafficking into the United States? Evidence suggests otherwise. The narcotics trade is demand-driven. As long as millions of Americans consume cocaine, fentanyl, and other drugs, suppliers will find routes—by sea, land, air, or digital networks. Interdiction may raise prices temporarily, but it rarely eliminates supply. Instead, it increases profitability, incentivizing smugglers to innovate and diversify. Destroy one corridor, and another emerges. The United States has alternatives—more effective, less destructive, and more humane. The first is demand reduction. Large-scale investment in prevention, education, and treatment can shrink the market that fuels trafficking. Decades of research show that rehabilitation and public-health approaches are more cost-effective in reducing drug use than inter-

dition alone. Recent declines in overdose deaths, though fragile, demonstrate that progress is possible without militarization. The second option is dismantling domestic trafficking infrastructure. Drugs do not distribute themselves. They rely on financial networks, logistics hubs, corrupt intermediaries, and money-laundering systems operating within U.S. borders. Aggressive enforcement against these networks—combined with financial transparency and asset seizures—would strike at the heart of the trade without destabilizing foreign societies. The third is smarter border security integrated with humanitarian policy. Borders can be controlled without turning neighboring countries into failed states. Technology, intelligence sharing, and legal migration pathways reduce chaos far more effectively than economic strangulation abroad. By contrast, collapsing Venezuela’s economy would likely increase, not decrease, drug flows over time. Unemployment and desperation are fertile ground for illicit activity. When formal economies implode, informal and criminal ones expand. Smuggling becomes not just profitable but necessary for survival. The result is a vicious cycle: sanctions breed collapse, collapse breeds crime, crime justifies further sanctions. At its core, the naval embargo reflects an old reflex dressed in new language. The rhetoric has changed—from communism to drugs, from ideology to security—but the method remains coercion. History warns where this path leads. Iraq was once sanctioned into ruin in the name of global safety; the outcome was regional instability, humanitarian catastrophe, and long-term insecurity. Sovereignty is not a privilege reserved for powerful states. Small and weak nations possess it as well, along with the right to economic survival. Using drug smuggling as a pretext to weaponize hunger, unemployment, and migration risks undermining the very international order the United States claims to defend. If Washington’s objective is fewer drugs, fewer refugees, and a safer hemisphere, it must look inward as much as outward. Gunboats can seize tankers, but they cannot cure addiction. Blockades can choke economies, but they cannot build stability. Real security lies not in dominating seas, but in addressing the human systems—demand, inequality, governance—that drive crisis in the first place. The choice before the United States is not between strength and weakness, but between wisdom and repetition. History is watching.

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Migration issues undergo transformation

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh

The second issue that was a major driver of migration in 2025 was climate change. Across South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Latin America, climate-linked floods, rising temperatures and unpredictable rainfall patterns uprooted communities that were already vulnerable to insecurity and poverty. What has made this year distinct from preceding years is not only the magnitude of climate-related displacement but the frequency of repeated internal movements

THE year 2025 has witnessed a significant shift in the way migration is viewed and politicized across the world. The convergence of several factors, such as large-scale armed conflicts, accelerating climate impacts and economic pressures, has made migration one of the key issues on the global agenda. In the past, migration was mostly analyzed from a humanitarian perspective. But in 2025, migration debates heavily entered geopolitics, the racial and religious demographic and even the US’ national security strategy. So, migration is no longer just an episodic crisis that needs to be managed for a short time; instead, it will impact global governance and shape the political and economic landscape well into 2026 and beyond. Armed conflict played a significant role in migration in 2025. The wars in Gaza, Sudan, Yemen and Ukraine collectively displaced tens of millions of people, destabilized regional markets and amplified the strategic calculations of neighboring states. Prolonged bombardment, infrastructure collapse and restrictions on humanitarian access created some of the most severe internal displacement crises of the decade, forcing families to move repeatedly in search of safety, temporary shelter or caloric survival. Sudan is experiencing the fastest-growing displacement crisis in the world, with mass violence and famine conditions forcing populations out of their homes. Yemen’s protracted conflict has eroded essential services. Meanwhile, Ukraine continues to sit at the center of Europe’s largest displacement crisis since the Second World War, with millions of refugees dispersed across the continent and millions more displaced internally. These conflicts have together reshaped the humanitarian, economic and political systems on a global scale. It will impact global governance and shape the political and economic landscape well into 2026 and beyond. The second issue that was a major driver of migration in 2025 was climate change. Across South Asia, sub-Sa-

haran Africa and parts of Latin America, climate-linked floods, rising temperatures and unpredictable rainfall patterns uprooted communities that were already vulnerable to insecurity and poverty. What has made this year distinct from preceding years is not only the magnitude of climate-related displacement but the frequency of repeated internal movements. In many cases, people were not simply fleeing from one point to another, they were moving repeatedly within short time frames. This cyclical movement introduced a new challenge to humanitarian systems, which were designed to deal with discrete emergencies rather than recurring climate shocks. It also created a new challenge to legal systems, which are not adequately equipped to protect people who have been displaced by environmental issues rather than conflicts. This is partially why the international community this year confronted severe funding shortfalls that limited their capacity to respond effectively. As humanitarian budgets shrank, essential services such as food assistance, shelter provision, medical care and sanitation support have had to be reduced. This increases the likelihood of secondary displacement and deepens the protracted nature of crises. Instead of being proactive, humanitarian organizations are now mostly in a reactive position, unable to keep pace with global displacement. This year has also witnessed sweeping policy transformations in Europe that have redefined the meaning of migration governance. A series of national and regional measures have reshaped border regimes, asylum procedures and return policies. Several European states have tightened asylum rules, expanded the list of designated “safe countries of origin,” accelerated border procedures and adopted new frameworks intended to increase deportations and discourage irregular arrivals. Nevertheless, at the same time, many of these same countries introduced reforms to attract skilled labor and regularize long-term residents in order to address domestic labor shortages in aging economies. This dual strategy seems to prioritize economic and security is-

suces rather than humanitarian obligations. Humanitarian organizations are now mostly in a reactive position, unable to keep pace with global displacement. The shifting policy environment in Europe also appears to frame migration not as a social or humanitarian issue but as a security concern intertwined with border protection, counterterrorism and regional stability. In addition, migration control has become a bargaining tool in domestic politics and international relations. From an economic perspective, migration in 2025 produced complex effects. In many host countries, refugees and labor migrants contributed to key sectors experiencing workforce shortages, such as healthcare, eldercare, agriculture and logistics. Yet, at the same time, rapid and large-scale arrivals strained some public services, fueled political tensions and strengthened far-right narratives around identity and security. Demographically, this year has also reaffirmed the significance of migration for countries facing aging populations, declining fertility and shrinking workforces. Looking to the future, the transformation and structural forces that defined 2025 when it comes to global migration are unlikely to change. The issue of migration will continue to influence diplomatic relationships, national security strategies, labor market planning and demographic futures. This is why countries that develop coherent, effective and forward-looking policies that respect rights will be better positioned to navigate the next year and even the coming decade. This year should be considered a major one when it comes to global migration, as it has revealed that this issue is not peripheral but that it shapes economic systems, political identities and international relations. As we enter 2026, policymakers, scholars and global institutions must recognize that the era of viewing migration as a temporary emergency has passed. Migration is now a major and structural driver of global change amid a rapidly shifting international landscape.

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Briefs

PM expresses solidarity with Australia after terror...

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government of Australia in their hour of grief. Emphasizing that terrorism has no religion, the Prime Minister stressed that it must be condemned in all its forms and manifestations, adding that collective international action was essential to eradicate this global menace. Welcoming the positive trajectory of Pakistan-Australia relations, the Prime Minister highlighted the need to further expand bilateral trade and investment. He identified agriculture and livestock as promising sectors for enhanced cooperation and noted Australia's interest in Pakistan's mining and minerals sector. Referring to the Reko Diq project, he described it as a shining example of the immense potential Pakistan offered to international investors. The Prime Minister also lauded the valuable contribution of the vibrant Pakistani diaspora in Australia, terming it a vital bridge that strengthened people-to-people ties and mutual understanding between the two countries. He noted that Pakistan and Australia enjoyed strong cultural linkages, further reinforced by their shared passion for cricket, which continued to bring the two nations closer.

Australia plans gun buyback

FROM PAGE 01
Fifteen people were killed and dozens wounded on Sunday in Bondi after two gunmen opened fire at people celebrating Hanukkah, the Jewish festival of lights. A 50-year-old gunman, who was killed at the scene, held a firearm license and had six guns registered, drawing criticisms that Australia's gun laws needed an overhaul. An estimated four million firearms are currently in the country, Albanese said. The government would target surplus, newly banned and illegal firearms, with the costs to be shared between the federal and state governments, he said. Following the Port Arthur massacre, Australia announced a gun buy-back scheme and secured the surrender of about 640,000 prohibited firearms nationwide. The total cost of compensation to owners was about A\$304 million (\$201 million).

Court acquits Qureshi; sentences...

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including PTI leaders and workers. This marks the fifth case in which PTI leaders Dr Yasmin, Cheema, Mian Mahmoodur, and Chaudhry were convicted, while former foreign minister Qureshi was acquitted. Earlier verdicts were delivered in cases related to an attack on the Shadman police station, violence at Sherpao Bridge, the burning of police vehicles near Rahat Bakery, and the torching of a Supreme Court judge's squad vehicle near Jinnah House during the May 9 protests.

India's manipulation of water...

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he added, noting that India has halted the exchange of hydrological data and disrupted the joint monitoring mechanism agreed upon under the treaty, further escalating tensions. The statement came only a day after Pakistan demanded an answer from India over its continued and abrupt variations of the flow of River Chenab, asking the international community to take notice of India's continued disregard of a bilateral treaty as New Delhi once again resorted to "weaponisation of water". Spokesperson Tahir Andrabi, during the weekly media briefing on Thursday, pointed out that Pakistan had observed abrupt variations in the flow of the River Chenab during the past week, particularly 7 December onwards.

Crunch time for EU leaders on tapping Russian assets for Ukraine

The unprecedented scheme on the table would see an initial 90 billion euros from the Russian assets loaned to the EU, which would then loan them on to Ukraine

BRUSSELS: EU leaders were locked in late-night talks Thursday over whether to use frozen Russian central bank assets to fund Ukraine, after President Volodymyr Zelensky insisted they had the "moral" and legal right to make the move. The 27-nation bloc was scrambling to bolster its ally Kyiv as US President Donald Trump pushes for a deal with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to end the fighting. Officials have insisted the summit in Brussels would last as long as it takes to hammer out an agreement, saying both Ukraine's survival – nearly four years into the war – and Europe's credibility are at stake. Belgium, where international deposit organisation Euroclear holds the bulk of the assets, has so far been resisting the move over fears it could face crippling legal and financial reprisals from Russia. But after a day of last-ditch negotiations on the

sidelines of the summit, a new draft plan that appeared to cover most of Belgium's worries was put to the leaders. Among the key concessions it made to Belgian leader Bart De Wever was to float other EU countries giving "uncapped" guarantees they would share any liabilities if Moscow sues. Diplomats said that would be an unacceptable pill for many to swallow – and reaching a final deal was far from assured. "The devil is in the details, and it remains to be seen whether the other member states are willing to grant open guarantees," one EU diplomat told AFP on condition of anonymity. The EU estimates Ukraine needs an extra 135 billion euros (\$159 billion) to stay afloat over the next two years, with the cash crunch set to start in April. The unprecedented scheme on the table would see an initial 90 billion euros from the Russian assets loaned to the EU, which would then loan them on

to Ukraine. Kyiv would then only pay back the "repairs loan" once the Kremlin compensates it for the damage. Zelensky told the leaders that Kyiv needed a decision on its financing by the end of the year, and that the move could give it more leverage in talks to end the war. "Russian assets must be used to defend against Russian aggression and rebuild what was destroyed by Russian attacks. It's moral. It's fair. It's legal," Zelensky said. He warned that one effect of Ukraine not getting the funding would be that it might have to cut its vital drone production. A raft of EU leaders argued strongly in favour of tapping the assets, saying propping up Ukraine was key to protecting the rest of Europe. "We have a simple choice: either money today, or blood tomorrow. I'm not talking about Ukraine only, I'm talking about Europe," Polish Prime

Minister Donald Tusk said. The EU has also floated a back-up plan for the bloc to raise the money itself for the loan – but that was put on the back-burner as officials focused on getting the assets scheme over the line. Bubbling close to the surface of the EU's discussion are the US efforts to forge a deal to end the war. Zelensky announced Ukrainian and US delegations would hold new talks on Friday and Saturday in the United States. He said he wanted Washington to give more details on the guarantees it could offer to protect Ukraine from another invasion. "What will the United States of America do if Russia comes again with aggression?" he asked. "What will these security guarantees do? How will they work?" Trump nonetheless kept the pressure on Kyiv, saying again he hopes Ukraine "moves quickly" to agree a deal. – **Agencies**

Napoli beat Milan in Italian Super Cup semi-final

Napoli Defeat AC Milan in Riyadh Semi-Final as Neres and Hojlund Goals Seal Italian Super Cup Final Spot, Highlighting Saudi Arabia's Growing Role as Host of Elite European Football Events

RIYADH: On one of the coldest evenings of the year in Riyadh, the atmosphere inside Al-Awwal Park was anything but subdued. Thousands of fans braved the conditions to witness another major chapter in Saudi Arabia's growing international calendar, as Napoli and AC Milan went head-to-head in the first semi-final of the 2025/26 Italian Super Cup.

It wasn't to be for I Rossoneri, as goals from David Neres and Rasmus Hojlund proved decisive for Napoli, sending them into the Super Cup final for the second time in the new four-team format after missing out on last year's edition. Backed by raucous Forza Milan chants, Milan nearly opened the scoring in the fifth min-

ute when Ruben Loftus-Cheek tested Vanja Milinkovic-Savic, who reacted sharply to make a vital save. Napoli responded with a spell of pressure of their own, but were repeatedly denied by a well-organised Milan defence. Milan came close again in the 34th minute, as Adrien Rabiot was found inside the six-yard box from a dipping cross, only for his effort to fly over Milinkovic-Savic.

They would keep that momentum going as just a few minutes later, a swift counter-attack led by Alexis Saelemaekers found Christopher Nkunku on the edge of the box, though his strike also flew over goal. Napoli punished Milan's missed chances in the 39th minute. A low pass from Rasmus Hojlund across the box was parried by Mike Maignan straight into the path of David Neres, who made no mistake slotting the ball into the open net. Napoli pushed for a second before the interval, with Hojlund testing Maignan again, who turned the striker's effort behind for a corner. The Milan goalkeeper was called into action once again in the second half, producing a strong save to deny Amir Rrahmani. – **Agencies**



IHC Dismisses Athletics Federation Petition in Butt Ban Case

OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) has dismissed the petition filed by the Pakistan Athletics Federation (PAF) challenging the decision of the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) Adjudicator to lift the lifetime ban imposed on Olympic champion Arshad Nadeem's coach, Salman Iqbal Butt. Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir dismissed the athletics federation's plea seeking to set aside the PSB adjudicator's order dated November 13, 2025, which had lifted the lifetime ban on Salman Iqbal Butt and directed the Pakistan Athletics Federation to withdraw all letters written to international bodies against the coach. The court further instructed the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) Board to hear the Athletics Federation's appeal against the adjudicator's decision and decide the matter in accordance with the law. In its order, the court directed the PSB Board to hear the appeal within the current month and announce a final decision thereafter. Earlier, the Pakistan Athletics Federation had imposed a lifetime ban on coach Salman Iqbal Butt. However, the PSB Adjudicator, headed by Senator Pervaiz Rashid, later lifted the ban, declaring it unconstitutional. Aggrieved by the decision, the Pakistan Athletics Federation approached the Islamabad High Court seeking restoration of the ban. The court, however, dismissed the petition and referred the matter back to the PSB Board for final adjudication. – **Agencies**

US President Donald Trump renames Kennedy arts center after himself

"Congratulations to President Donald J. Trump, and likewise, congratulations to President Kennedy, because this will be a truly great team long into the future!" she added

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump sealed his takeover of Washington's famed Kennedy Center on Thursday after the White House said the institution's board voted to rename it the "Trump-Kennedy Center." Trump hand-picked new board members of the US national cultural center and installed himself as chairman earlier this year, as part of a crackdown on institutions he branded too woke. But family members of slain US president John F. Kennedy, after whom the arts venue is named, slammed the decision as "beyond wild" and said it could not be renamed without the approval of Congress. Adding his own name to the storied venue is the latest in a series of grandiose Trump schemes including the demolition of the White House East Wing to build a \$400-million ballroom, and planning a large triumphal arch. "I was surprised by it, I was honored by it," Trump told reporters after the announcement of the board decision – despite having repeatedly talked about a name change for the center in the past. White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said the "highly respected" board of the

Kennedy center had "voted unanimously" to take the extraordinary step of renaming it after a living president. Leavitt said it was "because of the unbelievable work President Trump has done over the last year in saving the building." "Congratulations to President Donald J. Trump, and likewise, congratulations to President Kennedy, because this will be a truly great team long into the future!" she added. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963. The imposing white-marble arts center, which sits on the banks of the Potomac River, opened in 1971. The website of the Kennedy Center later had a new "Trump-Kennedy Center" logo. But the move met fierce condemnation from the Kennedy family, America's most storied political clan. "Can we not see what is happening here? C'mon, my fellow Americans! Wake up!" JFK's niece Maria Shriver said on X. She added that it was "beyond wild" of Trump to think it was acceptable to add his name before her uncle's. Former congressman Joe Kennedy III said the center was a "living memorial" to his great-uncle and "can no sooner be renamed than can someone rename the Lincoln Memorial, no matter what anyone says." The full name of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is set out in federal statute. Congress created the center in 1958 and later renamed it by law to honor Kennedy after his assassination. – **Agencies**

Four soldiers martyred North...

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Pakistani people remain paramount, adding that Pakistan reserves the right to pursue and eliminate terrorists, along with their facilitators and affiliates, wherever they may be found. A sanitisation operation in the area was carried out following the incident to eliminate any remaining threats, while security across the region has been further strengthened.

US pauses green card lottery program

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harmed by this disastrous programme," she said. According to the Associated Press, the diversity visa programme makes up to 50,000 green cards available each year by lottery to people from countries that are little represented in the US, many of them in Africa. The lottery was created by Congress, and the move is almost certain to invite legal challenges, AP reported. Officials said earlier that the suspect was dead as investigators said he also killed a Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor two days after the rampage at Brown. He had been a PhD student in physics who was familiar with the building where the shooting took place, officials said.

Pak issues demarche to Taliban...

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Kharji Gul Bahadur Group on a Pakistan Military camp in North Waziristan District," the FO spokesperson said in a statement. The FO said it summoned the Afghan deputy head of mission to convey Pakistan's strong demarche over the continued support by the Taliban regime to TTP, enabling them to carry out terrorist attacks against the Pakistan military and the civilian population along the Pak-Afghan border and in adjoining areas. "It was emphasised that the permissive environment enjoyed by the TTP in Afghanistan belies Afghanistan's international commitments as well as to Pakistan, that it would not allow its soil to be used against any other country, including Pakistan," it added.

Pak raises water flow...

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The data indicates that after a period of volatility, the river's discharge has now stabilised. The press release came a day after Pakistan demanded an answer from India over its continued and abrupt variations of the flow of River Chenab, asking the international community to take notice of India's continued disregard of a bilateral treaty as New Delhi once again resorted to "weaponisation of water". Spokesperson Tahir Andrabi, during the weekly media briefing on Thursday, pointed out that Pakistan had observed abrupt variations in the flow of the River Chenab during the past week, particularly 7 December onwards.

Morocco beat Jordan 3-2 after extra time to clinch Arab Cup

Morocco Win Arab Cup After Extra-Time Thriller Against Jordan as Hamed Allah Brace, Tannane Wonder Goal Seal 3-2 Victory Amid Continued Rise of Atlas Lions on regional and global stage

DOHA: After a day of intense rain in Doha, Morocco were crowned champions of the 2025 Arab Cup with a dramatic 3-2 victory against Jordan in a final marked by constant momentum swings at Lusail Stadium. The match kicked off in electrifying fashion, with Morocco needing less than five minutes to open the scoring. Oussama Tannane, spotting an open goal from behind the halfway line, launched a bold attempt that sent Moroccan fans into a frenzy as the ball crossed the line. Jordan, stunned by the opener – goalkeeper Yazeed Abulaila crashing into the post in his attempt to prevent the goal – showed no immediate signs of backing down. Morocco soon began to take greater control of the game, coming inches away from doubling their lead, only to be denied by a brave clearance from Issam Smeiri. The second half saw a complete shift in momentum. It took Jordan less than three minutes to equalise, as tournament top scorer Ali Olwan met Mohannad Abu Taha's cross with a composed header past El Mehdi Benabid in the 48th minute. Jordan continued to apply pressure, with the referee called to the VAR monitor in the 65th minute after Achraf El-Mahdioui handled the ball inside the penalty area. The decision to award a penalty sent Jordan



fans into celebration, and Olwan made no mistake from the spot to score his second of the night and sixth of the tournament. A sustained spell of Moroccan offense followed, with the Atlas Lions pushing relentlessly in a bid to break down the compact Nashama. Morocco's persistence finally paid off through Abdelrazak Hamedallah. In a frantic penalty-area

scramble, he ultimately forced the ball over the line, only for celebrations to be halted as an offside flag was raised. A tense VAR review followed, holding Lu-sail in suspense. When the goal was eventually confirmed, Moroccan fans and players erupted in relief as they found themselves back in the game in the 87th minute. Ali Olwan, in search of his hat-trick, saw

two late chances in regular time fail to restore Jordan's lead as extra time beckoned. Jordan emerged for extra time with no intention of sitting back. Just 15 seconds into the first half, a stunning strike from Mohannad Abu Taha found the net to make it 3-2, only for the goal to be ruled out for an apparent handball. Morocco capitalised on their momentum, pushing forward with intent as another set piece led to their third of the night. Hamedallah added to his tally after an acrobatic bicycle kick by Marwan Saadane created an opening in the 100th minute. The momentum swung once again, with Jordan immediately finding themselves on the attack, only for Hussam Abu Dahab's shot to marginally skim past the outside of the post. Fatigue began to show in the closing phases of extra time, allowing Morocco to manage the final moments and secure their first Arab Cup title since 2012. Jordan's players dropped to the turf at full time, their historic run ending in heartbreak. It is worth noting that the third-place play-off took place earlier in the day, with the match between Saudi Arabia and the UAE abandoned due to adverse weather conditions, with FIFA set to confirm the outcome at a later stage. – **Agencies**

Briefs

China threatens 'forceful steps' over US arms sales package to Taiwan

BEIJING: China's military will step up training and "take forceful measures" to safeguard the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, the defense ministry said on Friday in response to a planned \$11.1 billion US arms sales package to Taiwan. The package, the largest ever by the United States to the island Beijing views as its own territory, comes as China has been stepping up its military and political pressure on Taiwan. The ministry said it had lodged "stern representations" with the United States, and urged the country to immediately cease arms sales to Taiwan and abide by its commitment not to support "Taiwan independence forces."

"The 'Taiwan independence' separatist forces, at the cost of the safety and well-being of Taiwan compatriots, use the hard-earned money of ordinary people to fatten US arms dealers in an attempt to 'seek independence by relying on military force'," the ministry statement said. The United States, by repeatedly going back on its word, indulging and supporting Taiwan independence, is "bound to get burned itself," the ministry added.

"The Chinese People's Liberation Army will continue to strengthen training and combat readiness, take strong measures to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and resolutely frustrate attempts at 'Taiwan independence' separatism and external interference." It did not give details on what exact steps it might take. —APP

PSX declines 556 points to close at 171,404 points

ISLAMABAD: The benchmark KSE-100 Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) on Friday closed bearish, losing 556.16 points, a negative change of 0.32 percent, to settle at 171,404.49 points compared to 171,960.65 points on the previous trading day, according to PSX data. During the session, the ready market witnessed a trading volume of 797,528 million shares with a traded value of Rs 42,219 billion, against 950,146 million shares valuing Rs 54,075 billion in the previous session. Market capitalization declined to Rs 19,457 trillion from Rs 19,498 trillion a day earlier. Out of 485 active companies in the ready market, 179 advanced, 260 declined, while 46 remained unchanged. K-Electric Limited topped the volume chart with 116,033 million shares, followed by Bank Makramah with 24,747 million shares and Crescent Star Insurance with 23,054 million shares. —APP

Gold prices fall by Rs 900 per tola

ISLAMABAD: The price of 24 karat gold decreased by Rs 900 per tola and was traded at Rs 454,862 on Friday, All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association reported. The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also went down by Rs 772 to Rs 389,970, whereas the price of 10 grams of 22 karat gold decreased by Rs 434 to Rs 357,485. The price of per tola silver decreased by Rs 52 to Rs 6,848, while the price of 10 grams of 24 karat silver fell by Rs 44 to Rs 5,871. In the international market, the price of gold decreased by \$9 to \$4,325 per ounce, whereas the price of silver went down by \$0.52 to \$65.76 per ounce. —APP

Rupee gains 01 paisa against US Dollar

ISLAMABAD, Dec 19 (AP-P): The Rupee on Friday appreciated by 01 paisa against the US Dollar in interbank trading and closed at Rs 280.25 compared to the previous day's closing at Rs 280.26. 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 283.1, respectively. —APP



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting regarding FBR matters .

Egypt vows to prevent escalation between Lebanon, Israel

BEIRUT: Egypt is doing all it can to prevent further escalation between Lebanon and Israel amid tension between the two neighbors over the disarmament process of the militant Hezbollah group, the country's prime minister said Friday during a visit to the Lebanese capital Egypt, which signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1979, has been working for months to deescalate the regional tensions and Prime Minister Mustafa Madbouly's visit to Beirut comes after similar trips to the small Arab nation by Egypt's foreign minister and intelligence chief. "Egypt will spare no effort in continuing its tireless endeavors to keep Lebanon away from any escalation," Madbouly told reporters during a joint briefing with his Lebanese counterpart Nawaf Salam. Madbouly's visit also focused on strengthening bilateral ties and addressing pressing regional developments. Madbouly's meetings in Beirut came as the committee monitoring the enforcement of a US-brokered ceasefire that halted the latest war between Israel and Hezbollah a year ago held another meeting Friday. Friday's gathering along the Lebanon-Israel border was the second meeting of the mechanism after Israel and Lebanon appointed civilian members to a previously military-only committee. The group also includes the United States, France and the UN peace-keeping force deployed along the border. A statement issued by the US Embassy in Beirut said that military participants offered operational updates and remained focused on deepening the cooperation by finding ways to increase coordination through the mechanism. It added that all participants agreed that a strengthened Lebanese army, the guarantors of security in the border area known as the south Litani Sector, "is critical to success." The embassy added that civilian participants

meanwhile focused on setting conditions for residents to return safely to their homes, advancing reconstruction, and addressing economic priorities. It added that they underscored that durable political and economic progress is essential to reinforcing security gains and sustaining lasting peace. The embassy said meeting participants reaffirmed that progress on security and political tracks remain mutually reinforcing and essential "to ensuring long-term stability and prosperity for both parties." The Lebanese government has said that the army should have the whole border area south of the Litani River cleared from Hezbollah's armed presence by the end of the year. The latest Israel-Hezbollah war began on Oct. 8, 2023, a day after Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel, after Hezbollah fired rockets into Israel in solidarity with Hamas. Israel launched a widespread

bombardment of Lebanon in September 2024 that severely weakened Hezbollah, followed by a ground invasion. Israel has carried out almost daily airstrikes since then, mainly targeting Hezbollah members, but also killing 127 civilians, according to the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Also Friday, the Israeli military said that a Hezbollah operative who was captured from Lebanon last year played a major role in the group's secretive maritime force. The military added that Imad Amhaz was trained in Iran and Lebanon to carry out maritime operations. A Hezbollah official said the group will not comment on the video released by the Israeli military of Amhaz, describing him as "a Lebanese citizen who was kidnapped." The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media. —Agencies

Over 1,000 patients have died awaiting evacuation from Gaza since July 2024

GENEVA: More than 1,000 patients have died while waiting for urgent medical evacuation from war-ravaged Gaza in the last year and a half, the World Health Organization said Friday. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on X that the UN agency and its partners had "evacuated over 10,600 patients from Gaza with severe health conditions, including over 5,600 children" since the start of the war more than two years ago. But he warned that "many more patients remain in Gaza awaiting evacuation to receive appropriate health care." Citing numbers from the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza, Tedros said that 1,092 patients were known to have died while awaiting medical evacuation just between July 2024 and November 28, 2025. "This figure is likely underreported," he warned, calling on "more countries to open doors to patients from Gaza, and for medical evacuation to the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, to be restored." "Lives depend on it." The WHO has previously estimated that more than 16,500 patients still need treatment outside of Gaza, while a top official with the charity Doctors Without Borders told AFP earlier this month the actual number was likely "three to four times that number." —APP

Border casinos caught in Thailand-Cambodia crossfire

BANGKOK: Thailand has struck multiple casinos linked to cyberscamming in neighbouring Cambodia during an almost two-week-long border conflict, with the prime minister saying he would "take care" of fronts for fraud operations. Across Southeast Asia, criminal gangs have used casinos, hotels and fortified compounds to carry out sophisticated cyberscams, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, often relying on trafficked people. Cambodia hosts dozens of the scam centres with an estimated 100,000 people — many victims of human trafficking — perpetrating online scams in a multibillion-dollar industry. At least four casinos on Cambodia's border with Thailand — two which monitors have identified as scam hubs — have been struck this month in a military conflict between the neighbours that has killed dozens and displaced more than half a million. UN human rights chief Volker Turk said Thursday that trafficked foreign nationals forced to carry out scams in Cambodia were "now exposed to further risk by the fighting", and called for their evacuation. But efforts to make peace with Cambodia rested on Phnom Penh's commitment to "destroy scamming attempts", Thailand's Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul told reporters at an international anti-scam conference in Bangkok on Wednesday. If casinos in Cambodia were hiding fraud operations behind their doors, "then we will regard it as a scamming centre that we need to take care of", he said. Rights abuses in Cambodia's scam centres are happening on a "mass scale", and the government's poor response suggested its complicity, said a June report by Amnesty International.

But Ros Phirun, secretary general of Cambodia's Commercial Gambling Management Commission, told AFP that authorities were taking "serious action" to crack down on scams, and called Thailand's action on the border casinos "totally illegal". —APP

Multilateral coop at Global Security Governance stressed

CHONGQING: Executive Director, Pakistan Research Center for a Community with Shared Future (PRCCSF) Khalid Taimur Akram on Friday emphasized the importance of collaborative frameworks, multilateral cooperation, and knowledge sharing to strengthen regional stability in a multipolar global order. Khalid Akram expressed these views as he participated as distinguished speaker at the 4th Academic Symposium on "Global Security Governance," jointly organized by the Baize Institute of Strategic Studies at Southwest University of Political Science and Law, Chongqing, China, and the Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand held at Chongqing, China. Around 80 scholars and experts from 27 countries participated in the event. In his keynote speech on "Rethinking Regional Security Governance in a Multipolar World" in the forum themed "Regional Practices in Global Security Governance", Akram analyzed emerging regional security architectures and highlighted the evolving roles of both state and non-state actors in addressing contemporary security challenges. Drawing on practical case studies and policy insights, Khalid Akram proposed innovative approaches for integrating regional practices with global governance mechanisms. His presentation was highly appreciated for combining scholarly analysis with actionable strategies for promoting peace, security, and cooperative governance. This year's symposium was themed "The Contemporary Connotation and Global Significance of the Global Governance Initiative." The keynote addresses were delivered by Prof. Ma Fang, Chairman and President at the Baize Institute for Strategic Studies, Southwest University of Political Science and Law, and Professor Hu Ergui, Vice President of Southwest University of Political Science and Law, Chongqing, China. Both speakers highlighted the importance of strengthening international cooperation, advancing rule-based global governance, and addressing the challenges posed by an increasingly multipolar world. The symposium was structured into three thematic Forums, each focusing on a critical dimension of global governance and security. —

Ukraine evacuates horses amid menacing Russia strikes

NOVOMYKOLAIVKA: With a generous handful of hay and some firm nudges, stud farm workers in Ukraine's southern Zaporizhzhia region coax a bay horse onto a lorry that will evacuate the animal to safety. The danger for the stud farm has been creeping closer for months, with Russia pounding the region with air strikes that kill civilians and pose a mortal threat for the animals. The state-owned stud farm currently houses 130 horses, some of which had already been evacuated from elsewhere in Zaporizhzhia or from the neighboring Dnipropetrovsk region in Ukraine's central east. "We are currently transferring the horses at this stud farm to other stud farms in Ukraine," director of the state-owned enterprise "Horse Breeding of Ukraine" Vitaliy Brovko told AFP. At the beginning of the Russian invasion in 2022, the farm's stables were hit with a missile, leaving one horse wounded and others traumatized. "They didn't go into the stables for two weeks, and day and night, they ran to the stables, turned around and ran back," Mykhailo Sych, a branch director at the "Horse Breeding of Ukraine" told AFP. The threat has been looming ever since "There have been cases where horses had miscarriages from stress," the horse farm worker Oleksandr Konyakhin told AFP. "Now there are no strikes, only explosions can be heard, and the horses have gradually gotten used to it," Konyakhin added. —APP

Iraq negotiates new coalition under US pressure

BAGHDAD: More than a month after Iraq's parliamentary elections, the country's top leaders remain locked in talks to form a government while facing pressure from Washington to exclude Tehran-backed armed groups. Amid seismic changes in the Middle East, where new alliances are forming and old powers waning, Iraqi leaders face a daunting task: navigating relations with US-blacklisted pro-Iranian factions. The US has held significant sway over Iraqi politics since leading the 2003 invasion that ousted long-time ruler Saddam Hussein. But another spectre also haunts Iraq's halls of power: Washington's arch-foe, Iran. Iraq has long been caught between the two, with successive governments negotiating a delicate balance. Now, after November's election, Washington has demanded the eventual government must exclude Iran-backed armed groups and instead move to dismantle them, Iraqi officials and diplomats told AFP. A State Department spokesperson, speaking on condition of anonymity, said: "Iraqi leaders well know what is and is not compatible with a strong US-Iraq partnership." Washington, the spokesperson said, "will continue to speak plainly to the urgency of dismantling Iran-backed militias." But some of these groups have increased their presence in the new chamber and have joined the Coordination Framework, an alliance of Shiite parties with varying ties to Iran and which holds the majority. For weeks, the Coordination Framework has been embroiled in talks to nominate the next prime minister. "The US has put conditions that armed factions should not be part of the new government," a senior Iraqi official said. The factions must disarm and "sever ties with Iran's Revolutionary Guard," he added. In recent tweets, the US special envoy to Iraq, Mark Savaya said that Iraqi leaders are at a "crossroads." Their decision will send a clear and unmistakable signal to the United States... that Iraq is ready to claim its rightful place as a stable and respected nation in the new Middle East. "The alternative is equally clear: economic deterioration, political confusion, and international isolation," Savaya said. - Which armed groups? - The US has blacklisted as "terrorist organizations" several armed groups from within the Hashed Al-Shaabi, a former paramilitary alliance now integrated into the armed forces. They are also part of the Iran-backed so-called "axis of resistance" and have called for the withdrawal of US troops — deployed in Iraq as part of an anti-jihadist coalition — and launched attacks against them. Most of these groups hold seats in parliament and have seen their political and financial clout increase. The Asaib Ahl Al-Haq faction, led by Qais Al-Khazali, who is a key figure in the Coordination Framework, won 27 seats in the latest election, making it harder to exclude it from the government. A potential compromise is to deny it a key

portfolio, as in the current government. "The US has turned a blind eye before, so they might after all engage with the government as a whole but not with ministries held by armed groups," a former Iraqi official said. Iraq has its economic growth to worry about. After decades of turmoil, it has only begun to regain a sense of normalcy in recent years. Washington has already imposed sanctions on several Iraqi entities and banks, accusing them of helping Tehran evade sanctions. But Iraqi leaders hope for greater foreign investments and support partnerships with US companies. The most striking endorsement came from Khazali, an opponent of the US military presence who now argues that it would be in Baghdad's interest for major US companies to invest. Since the Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza began in October 2023, Iraq has remained relatively unscathed by the turmoil engulfing the Middle East. Iraqi armed groups did launch attacks on US troops and largely unsuccessful ones on Israel. Washington responded with heavy strikes, and the attacks have long since halted. Iraq remained the only close regional ally of Iran to stay out of Israel's crosshairs. So far, the US has acted as a buffer, helping to prevent an Israeli attack, but Iraqis have been warned of strikes against the armed groups, multiple sources said. But as the presence of American forces dwindles, fears are growing. —APP

Dubai warns residents to stay indoors because of rain

DUBAI: Dubai police on Thursday urged residents to stay indoors unless going out was "absolutely necessary" as heavy rainfall was expected across the country, which saw record downpours last year. The warning came hours after rainfall in the city caused flooding in streets. "For your safety, please remain cautious as unstable weather conditions are expected in the coming hours, and avoid going out unless it is absolutely necessary until midday on Friday," said a police alert sent to residents' phones. The National Center of Meteorology (NCM) in the UAE warned of rainfall across the country from Thursday to Friday, including in Dubai and the capital Abu Dhabi. Other Gulf states also experienced heavy rain on Thursday, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar where the downpour caused an Arab Cup third-place match between the Green Falcons and the UAE to be canceled. Last year in April, record rains lashed the UAE, flooding homes and transforming streets into rivers. The UAE's heaviest since records began 76 years ago, the stormy weather killed at least four people, including three Filipino workers and one Emirati. —APP

Syria welcomes lifting of US sanctions

DAMASCUS: Syria's foreign ministry on Friday welcomed the permanent ending by the United States of the so-called Caesar sanctions, paving the way for the return of investment to the war-ravaged nation. The US Congress on Wednesday permanently ended the sanctions imposed on Syria under Bashar Assad, who was ousted in December last year. The Caesar Act, named after an anonymous photographer who documented atrocities in Assad's prisons, severely restricted investment and cut off Syria from the international banking system.

A foreign ministry statement in Damascus "welcomed" the step, calling it "an entrance to the phase of reconstruction and development." It urged "all Syrians in the country and abroad to contribute in national recovery efforts." US President Donald Trump had already twice suspended the implementation of sanctions against Syria in response to pleas from Saudi Arabia and Turkiye, allies of the new government headed by former jihadist Ahmed Al-Sharaa. —APP

Briefs

Violence erupts in Bangladesh after wounded youth leader dies

Thousands of protesters take to streets of Dhaka to demand arrest of Sharif Osman Hadi's killers

NEWS DESK

DHAKA: Violence broke out in Bangladesh's capital early Friday after a youth leader of the country's 2024 pro-democracy uprising who was injured in an assassination attempt died in a hospital in Singapore. Thousands of protesters took to the streets of Dhaka after the death of Sharif Osman Hadi, 32, was announced, to demand that his killers be arrested. Several buildings in the capital, including those housing the country's two leading newspapers, were set on fire, according to authorities, with staff trapped inside.

Hadi was a key figure in last year's uprising that ended the autocratic rule of prime minister Sheikh Hasina and sent her fleeing to India. He was running for a parliament seat in the February 2026 national election. On December 12, Hadi was shot by masked assailants as he was leaving a mosque in Dhaka. He was airlifted to a hospital in Singapore for treatment, where he succumbed to his injuries on Thursday.

A group of people set fire to The Daily Star newspaper office building, following the death of Sharif Osman Hadi, a student leader who had been receiving treatment in Singapore after being shot in the head, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, December 19, 2025. — Reuters

A group of people set fire to The Daily Star newspaper office building, following the death of Sharif Osman Hadi, a student leader who had been receiving treatment in Singapore after being shot in the head, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, December 19, 2025. — Reuters

At least three cases of arson were reported in Dhaka after the news of his death spread early Friday, a spokesperson for the Fire Brigade and Civil Defence force told AFP, including a fire at the Daily Star building and another at a building housing the Prothom Alo newspaper.

EU agrees 90-bn-euro loan for Ukraine

BRUSSELS: EU leaders struck a deal Friday to provide Ukraine a loan of 90 billion euros to plug its looming budget shortfalls — but failed to agree on using frozen Russian assets to come up with the funds.

The middle-of-the-night agreement reached at summit talks in Brussels offers Kyiv a desperately needed lifeline as US President Donald Trump pushes for a quick deal to end Russia's nearly four-year war. "Today's decision will provide Ukraine with the necessary means to defend itself and to support the Ukrainian people," European Council head Antonio Costa, who chaired the summit, said. — APP

Uzbek photojournalists to be invited to Pak: Tarar

Photo exhibition marks new chapter in Pak-Uzbek cultural relations

Culture minister praises photographers work; Uzbek ambassador says exhibition shows deep bilateral culture bonds



ANSAR MAHMOOD BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar has announced the launch of a journalists and photojournalists exchange programme between Pakistan and Uzbekistan, aimed at promoting mutual understanding and familiarising media professionals with Pakistan's culture, history and heritage.

He made the announcement while speaking at the opening of a photo exhibition at the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA), featuring works by Pakistani photojournalists who recently visited Uzbekistan on an official invitation. The exhibition showcased the rich cultural heritage, landscapes and everyday life of Uzbekistan as captured through the lenses of Pakistani photographers.

The photojournalists include Ramzan Mughal, Shahid Qureshi (Raju), Suleman. Azhar Hafeez and Gulrez Ghauri. Federal Minister for Culture and National Heritage Aurangzeb Khan Khichi was also present on the occasion, along with dip-

lomats, artists, journalists and a large number of students and culture enthusiasts.

Addressing the gathering, Attaullah Tarar said the exchange programme would provide journalists and photojournalists from both countries an opportunity to learn from each other, share professional experiences and gain first-hand exposure to the cultural and historical richness of Pakistan and Uzbekistan.

He noted that Uzbekistan had recently hosted a delegation of Pakistani journalists, and now Pakistan was keen to reciprocate the gesture by inviting Uzbek media professionals.

The information minister said Pakistan attached great importance to its relations with Uzbekistan, describing the bilateral ties as rooted in shared history, culture and values. He added that the leadership of both countries — Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev — was fully determined to further strengthen cooperation and take their nations forward on the path of development and prosperity.

Recalling his recent visit to Uzbekistan, Attaullah



Tarar praised the warm hospitality extended to the Pakistani delegation. He said the visit helped deepen understanding between the two sides and opened new avenues for cooperation, particularly in the fields of culture, media and people-to-people contacts. He further stated that, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, a comprehensive plan would be devised to promote and showcase Pakistan's culture, history and heritage to the outside world. Such initiatives, he said, were essential to project Pakistan's soft image and highlight its rich civilisational legacy at the international level.

Federal Minister for Culture and National Heritage Aurangzeb Khan Khichi, speaking on the occasion, lauded the outstanding work of the Pakistani photojournalists whose photographs were on display. He said the exhibition not only reflected professional excellence but also served as a bridge between the two friendly nations.

Khichi assured that his ministry would continue to extend full support to cultural and artistic activities in the coming days. He emphasised that cultural exchanges, exhibitions and people-to-peo-

ple contacts played a vital role in strengthening bilateral relations and fostering mutual respect and understanding among nations.

Uzbekistan's Ambassador to Pakistan, Alisher Tukhtaev, also addressed the ceremony and said that Pakistan and Uzbekistan enjoyed excellent and ever-growing relations. He noted that Uzbekistan was progressing by leaps and bounds under the dynamic leadership of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, with significant reforms and development initiatives transforming the country.

The ambassador praised the efforts of Pakistani photojournalists, saying their work beautifully captured the essence of Uzbekistan's culture, heritage and daily life. He expressed hope that such exchanges would continue in the future and further enhance cooperation between the two countries in the fields of media, culture and tourism.

The exhibition was widely appreciated by the audience, who described it as a powerful visual narrative highlighting the close cultural bonds between Pakistan and Uzbekistan and the important role of media in bringing nations closer.

'UN report exposes India's unlawful actions, marks a crucial turning point'

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Finance and Railways, Bilal Azhar Kayani on Friday welcomed the UN special report, stating it validates Pakistan's long-standing position on India's violations, including the unlawful suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty and termed it a major development for Pakistan, adding that India violated UN resolutions and should apologize to Pakistan for its actions.

In an exclusive interview with a local media channel, Bilal Azhar Kayani spoke vehemently about the recent UN report on the Indus Waters Treaty violations. He emphasized that the report, particularly on page 11, acts as a clear charge sheet against India, detailing its unlawful actions.

Kayani pointed out that the report does not just highlight India's suspension of the treaty but categorically states that India has made unfounded

accusations against Pakistan, including claims of war and violations, without providing any credible evidence to support these allegations.

Kayani went on to stress that the UN report serves as an irrefutable document holding India accountable for its actions. He called for global recognition of these violations and urged international bodies to press India to offer a formal apology to Pakistan. According to Kayani, India's attempts to shift blame without evidence must not be allowed to go unchallenged and Pakistan deserves immediate justice for these ongoing violations.

Minister described the recent UN report as "damning evidence" of India's blatant disregard for the Indus Waters Treaty, adding, the report not only exposes India's violation of international law but also serves as irref-

utable proof of its ongoing attempts to undermine Pakistan's water rights, calling for global recognition and accountability for India's actions.

To another query, Minister Bilal Azhar stated that Pakistan will continue its discussions on Kashmir, with the UN report serving as a powerful reinforcement of Pakistan's stance on the issue. Kayani highlighted that this report not only strengthens Pakistan's position on the Indus Waters Treaty but also bolsters its broader narrative on Kashmir and other grievances against India. He emphasized that the findings validate Pakistan's long-standing concerns about India's disregard for international agreements and its aggressive actions in the region, providing further evidence to support Pakistan's diplomatic efforts. — Agencies

Justice Jahangiri planned to 'resign' next month after securing pensionary benefits

Judge's 5-year service of high court was to complete on Dec 31, making him eligible for pension from Jan 1

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri, whose appointment was on Thursday struck down by the Islamabad High Court (IHC), had intended to retire early next month after becoming eligible for post-retirement pensionary benefits. According to the sources, members of the bar were keen that Justice Jahangiri would retire upon completion of the minimum five-year service required to qualify for pensionary benefits. His five-year service as a judge of the

high court was to complete on December 31, making him eligible for pension from January 1, 2026.

The sources said Federal Law Minister Azam Nazir Tarar was also approached by the bar members in this regard and was given assurances that Justice Jahangiri would retire on January 1, immediately after completing the minimum qualifying service. Under the rules, a judge who leaves office before completing five years of service is not entitled to any pensionary benefits. There were also reports that Justice Jahangiri had handed over a post-dated resignation to the law minister to take effect after Dec 31. However, when contacted by the publication, neither did the law minister nor Justice Jahangiri respond to query seeking confirmation. Earlier in the day, the IHC ruled that Justice Jahangiri was not qualified to be appointed as a judge and directed Ministry of Law and Justice to de-notify him from office.

Govt to reinvest most of bidding proceeds in PIA

Major obstacles that undermined previous privatisation attempt have been removed, says PM's adviser

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The government is set to auction 75% stake in the Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) with a commitment to reinvest most of the proceeds back into the national airline marred by financial woes, The News reported on Friday, citing officials' briefing to a Senate panel.

Prime Minister's Adviser on Privatisation Muhammad Ali said 92.5% of the bidding proceeds would be reinvested in PIA to support its turnaround, adding that the airline would still require an additional Rs80 billion in financing after privatisation to stabilise operations and fund growth. He said the government plans to place some electricity distribution companies (Discos) under long-term concession agreements rather than selling them outright.

Ali briefed the Senate Standing Committee on Privatisation, chaired by Senator Afnan Ullah Khan, that PIA currently operates 18 aircraft and needs fresh investment to induct new planes. He said the reference price for the bidding has not yet been finalised. Only the airline's core aviation business is being privatised, he added, while assets such as the Roosevelt Hotel in New York will remain under government ownership and would be developed through a joint venture instead of privatisation.

Privatisation Commission Secretary Usman Bajwa told the committee that the government could sell up to 100% of PIA shares, depending on investor interest and final approvals. He said major obstacles that undermined a previous privatisation attempt have been removed, including Rs33 billion in liabilities that investors were earlier required to assume. Tax-related issues, including those linked to sales tax, have also been resolved, he said. Bajwa said the reopening of routes to Britain and Europe has strengthened PIA's commercial outlook, while negotiations with investors over final commercial terms have entered the final stage and are expected to conclude imminently.

ADB reaffirms support for ML-1 upgrade

ISLAMABAD: A delegation of the ADB, led by Director General Leah Gutierrez, called on Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi on Friday to review progress on the upgradation of Main Line-I (ML-I), Pakistan Railways' most critical infrastructure project. During the meeting, detailed discussions were held on the scope, financing and implementation strategy of the ML-I upgradation, said a news release. The officials briefed the meeting that ML-I serves as the backbone of Pakistan Railways, facilitating nearly 80 percent of passenger traffic and about 90 percent of freight movement across the country.

Given current condition of railway infrastructure, participants emphasized the urgent need for upgrading ML-I to ensure safe, efficient and reliable rail operations. Project is expected to significantly enhance connectivity, reduce travel time and strengthen Pakistan's logistics and trade capacity. Hanif Abbasi said ML-I as a key project for the national economy, stating that its modernization would play a vital role in promoting economic growth, regional connectivity and sustainable transport. — APP

Pakistan calls for counter-terrorism action

UNITED NATIONS: With recent political upheavals in Benin and Guinea-Bissau exposing ongoing vulnerability in a region already plagued by violent extremism, Pakistan has urged increased collaboration with and between regional organizations to address these challenges facing West Africa and Sahel regions. "Strengthening mutual trust among Member States of the region remains critical for coordinated counter-terrorism action," Pakistani delegate Asif Khan told the Security Council on Thursday. Participating in a discussion on the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Khan, who is a minister at the Pakistan Mission to the UN, voiced extreme concern over the intensified terrorist activity by groups such as Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM), Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP), Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Boko Haram. "Terrorist entities continue to exploit porous borders, illicit trafficking routes, online radicalization tools and criminal networks," the Pakistani delegate said, adding that the deteriorating security situation demands a collective response. Frameworks such as ECOWAS, the Accra Initiative, and the Multinational Joint Task Force must be strengthened and adequately resourced and reinforced, Asif Khan said. In this regard, he said Pakistan supports UNOWAS efforts to facilitate constructive engagement and help maintain channels of dialogue.

"We stand in full solidarity with the governments and

peoples of West Africa and the Sahel as they continue to confront the scourge of terrorism and violent extremism," the Pakistani delegate said, as he spoke of Pakistan's deep-rooted partnership with Africa.

Pakistani peacekeepers, he added, have served with distinction across the continent. "We stand ready to share our counter-terrorism experience, including expertise in intelligence coordination, border management, and de-radicalization efforts." Also, the Pakistani delegate advocated a multidimensional approach to addresses not only kinetic threats but also the political, economic, climatic, and social drivers of instability. He urged the international community to step in to address the urgent humanitarian needs of more than 6.9 million people across the central Sahel. Opening the debate, Barrie Freeman, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, highlighted key developments that "illustrate both the region's fragility and its resilience".

On 7 December, Benin's national security forces, with support from ECOWAS and partners, thwarted an attempted coup d'état by military officers citing grievances over deteriorating security, management of the Armed Forces and restrictions on political activity. On 26 November, in Guinea-Bissau, the military took control of the country, disrupting presidential election results. — Agencies

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