



Islamabad POST

Monday, December 22, 2025

Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

Price Rs. 30

Romania keen to enhance cultural relations with Pak

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Water scheme with Australian support starts

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Iran welcomes Asif Zardari message: envoy

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PNS Khaibar commissioned in Türkiye

Pakistan, Türkiye defence relations historic: Erdogan

Admiral Naveed Ashraf acknowledged the dedication and professionalism of M/s ASFAT, Istanbul Naval Shipyard, and the Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) involved in the planning, design, and construction of the Pakistan Navy MILGEM ships

DNA

RAWALPINDI: The commissioning ceremony of the second Pakistan Navy MILGEM-class ship, PNS Khaibar, was held at the Istanbul Naval Shipyard, Türkiye, marking a significant milestone in Pakistan-Türkiye defence cooperation. The President of the Republic of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest, while Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS) Admiral Naveed Ashraf, NI, NI (M), also attended the ceremony. Addressing the gathering, President Erdoğan described the brotherly relations between Pakistan and Türkiye as exemplary and rooted in shared history, values, and mutual trust. He emphasized the importance of further strengthening bilateral collaboration, particularly in the field of defence production, to meet emerging security challenges and enhance strategic self-reliance of both countries. Speaking on the occasion, Admiral Naveed Ashraf acknowledged the dedication and professionalism of M/s ASFAT, Istanbul Naval Shipyard, and the Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) involved in the planning, design, and construction of the Pakistan Navy MILGEM ships. He lauded the deepening defence partnership between Pakistan and Türkiye, noting that sustained bilateral engagements between the

Pakistan Navy and the Turkish Naval Forces continue to significantly strengthen defence collaboration and reflect an enduring strategic partnership.

Following the commissioning ceremony, President Erdoğan visited PNS Khaibar, where he was presented a Guard of Honour and interacted with officers and sailors of the ship. During the visit, the Turkish President and the Chief of the Naval Staff exchanged views on regional maritime security and discussed avenues for future Pakistan Navy-Turkish Naval Forces joint initiatives, including training, interoperability, and collaborative maritime operations.

The PN MILGEM ships represent the most technologically advanced surface combat platforms in the Pakistan Navy's fleet. These vessels are equipped with state-of-the-art command and control systems, modern weapons, and advanced sensors, significantly enhancing Pakistan Navy's operational capability across the full spectrum of maritime operations.

The contract for the construction of four MILGEM-class ships for Pakistan was signed in 2018 between the Ministry of Defence Production, Pakistan, and M/s ASFAT, Türkiye. Under the agreement, two ships were to be constructed in Türkiye and the remaining two in Pakistan. The commissioning of PNS Khaibar marks the completion of construction of both ships in Türkiye, underscoring a successful chapter in bilateral defence industrial cooperation.



ANKARA: The commissioning ceremony of the second Pakistan Navy MILGEM-class ship, PNS Khaibar, was held at the Istanbul Naval Shipyard. The President of the Republic of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, graced the occasion as the chief guest. – DNA

Iran appreciates President Zardari's goodwill message

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Pakistan, Reza Amiri Moghadam, on Sunday expressed deep appreciation for the goodwill message conveyed by President of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari as his aircraft transited through Iranian airspace. In a statement, Ambassador Moghadam said it was an immense honor for Iran to warmly welcome the flight of the President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and to receive his gracious message of goodwill. He termed the gesture a clear reflection of the deep-rooted bonds of mutual respect, solidarity, and enduring friendship and fraternity between Iran and Pakistan.

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9 terrorists killed in KP areas

BUREAU REPORT

PESHAWAR: Security forces gunned down nine terrorists belonging to Indian proxy Fitna al-Khawarij during two separate intelligence-based operations (IBOs) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said on Sunday. The operations were conducted in Dera Ismail Khan and Bannu districts on December 19, read a press release issued by the military's media wing. Forces conducted an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in the Dera Ismail Khan district on the reported presence of terrorists. "During the conduct of operation, own troops effectively engaged the khawarij location and after an intense fire exchange, four khawarij were sent to hell," the ISPR said.

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Fostering friendship

Dar, Iranian FM review relations, regional situation

Reaffirming their commitment to strengthening bilateral ties, Senator Ishaq Dar and Foreign Minister Araghchi agreed to work closely to deepen cooperation in trade, connectivity, and people-to-people contacts

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar on Saturday held a telephonic conversation with Foreign Minister of Iran, Seyyed Abbas Araghchi, during which the two leaders reviewed the state of bilateral relations and exchanged views on regional developments. During the discussion, both sides expressed satisfaction over the positive trajectory of Pakistan-Iran relations and reviewed cooperation across a range of sectors, including trade, economic engagement, energy, connectivity, and border cooperation. They underlined the importance of further expanding mutually beneficial collaboration to enhance regional integration and shared prosperity. The two foreign ministers also exchanged perspectives on the evolving regional situation and emphasized

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President Zardari conveys goodwill Mmessage to Iran

DNA

ISLAMABAD: While en route from Islamabad to Baghdad, President of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari conveyed a message of goodwill and solidarity to the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran as his aircraft entered Iranian airspace. In his message, the President reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to strong, friendly, and respectful relations with Iran, underscoring the deep-rooted historical, cultural, and civilizational bonds shared by the two neighboring countries.

Continued on Page 06

After Moonis Elahi

Interpol drops Zulfi Bukhari extradition case

Interpol's General Secretariat says PTI leader no longer "subject to an Interpol notice or diffusion"

DNA

LONDON/LYON: A month after giving a clean chit to senior Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Moonis Elahi in the corruption allegations case seeking his arrest and extradition to Pakistan, Interpol has dropped the terrorism case extradition request for Zulfi Bukhari by the Government of Pakistan – in a big setback to the interior ministry's efforts to repatriate exiled and wanted PTI leaders. The General Secretariat of the International Criminal Police Organisation (Interpol) has confirmed that it has dropped its investigation into Bukhari and that he is no longer



"subject to an Interpol notice or diffusion". Around two years ago, the interior ministry approached Interpol seeking red notices against Moonis and Bukhari. The case against Moonis was based on an alleged

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Briefs

President meets Iraqi counterpart

NEWS DESK

BAGHDAD: President Asif Ali Zardari met Iraqi President Dr Abdul Latif Jamal Rashid at Baghdad Palace on Sunday, a statement from the Presidency said. The president, who is expected to meet senior Iraqi leadership during the trip, arrived in Iraq on Saturday night, where he was received by Iraq's Culture Minister, Ahmed Fakkak Al-Badrani, upon his arrival in Baghdad. According to the statement, President Zardari received a guard of honour upon his arrival at the palace, where he was scheduled to have lunch and a one-on-meeting with his Iraqi opposite number. The pair expressed satisfaction over growing diplomatic momentum from high-level exchanges. "The president noted that current levels of bilateral trade do not reflect the true potential of Pakistan-Iraq economic, cultural and security relations," the statement read.

Pakistan seal U19 Asia Cup crown

SPORTS DESK

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan were crowned the champions of the Men's U19 Asia Cup after a dominant 191-run victory over arch-rivals India in the final at the ICC Academy, Dubai, on Sunday. Set to chase a daunting 348-run target, India's batting unit could yield 156 runs before getting bowled out in 26.2 overs, courtesy of Pakistan's stellar bowling attack. The Men in Blue got off to a contrasting start to the pursuit as their batting sensation, Vaibhav Suryavanshi, knitted a quickfire 32-run opening partnership with captain Ayush Mhatre, who could score two before falling victim to Ali Raza in the fourth over.

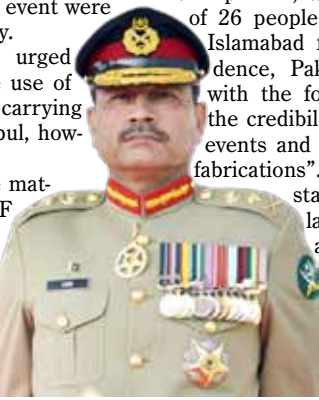
Field Marshal addresses Ulema

Only state can issue Jihad fatwa: CDS

Says it is honour for Pakistan armed forces to guard holy mosques; TTP formations infiltrating into Pakistan mostly comprise Afghans: CDF Field Marshal Asim Munir

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) and Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir has said that formations of the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban (TTP) infiltrating into Pakistan mostly comprised Afghans. "In the TTP formations coming [into Pakistan], 70 per cent are Afghans," he said. The defence forces' chief made this statement at the National Ulema Conference held in Islamabad on December 10. However, details of the Field Marshal's address at the conference were scant thus far and clips of his speech from the event were broadcast on television today. Islamabad has repeatedly urged Kabul to put an end to the use of Afghan soil by terrorists for carrying out attacks in Pakistan. Kabul, however, denies the allegation. Turning his attention to the matter at the conference, CDF Munir questioned: "Is Afghanistan not spilling the blood of our Pakistani children?" He recalled that the Afghan Taliban had been told to choose between Pakistan and the TTP.



Continued on Page 06

Speaking about the four-day May conflict with India, he said in Pakistan's retaliatory operation during the confrontation, Bunyanum Marsoos, the armed forces received "divine help". "We felt it," he commented. India launched a series of strikes in the early hours of May 7 across Pakistan, an act which led to the worst between the old foes in decades. Both sides used fighter jets, missiles, artillery and drones during the four-day conflict, killing dozens of people, before agreeing to a ceasefire. The confrontation followed an attack on tourists in occupied Kashmir's Pahalgam on April 22, which resulted in the death of 26 people. While New Delhi blamed Islamabad for the attack without evidence, Pakistan denied involvement, with the foreign ministry questioning the credibility of India's account of the events and saying it was "replete with fabrications". The Field Marshal also stated that there were 57 Islamic countries in the world, and among them, "God gave us the honour of being the protectors of Haramain Sharifain (a reference to Makkah and Madina)".

Domestic challenges make Gaza mission politically toxic

ANSAR M BHATTI

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has publicly acknowledged Pakistan's willingness to "consider being part" of the proposed International Stabilisation Force (ISF) for Gaza. The idea, though not officially confirmed by Pakistani side, has stirred debate in Islamabad. When asked about these reports, Pakistan's Foreign Office responded cautiously, stating that "no decision has been made on this issue so far." The choice of words is telling: the spokesperson did not outright refute the reports, leaving room for speculation that discussions may indeed be underway. For Pakistan, however, the matter is far from straightforward. The country faces multiple internal challenges: political instability, economic fragility, and rising public discontent all of which make it extremely difficult for the government to sell such an idea to its people. The clergy, in particular, would be reluctant to endorse any move that involves Pakistani forces being deployed in Gaza, regardless of whether the mission is

framed as humanitarian or military. Religious parties, which wield significant influence over public opinion, would think twice before putting their weight behind such a proposal. Public opinion in Pakistan is deeply sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. Any suggestion that Pakistani troops might be deployed in a mission that could be perceived as undermining Hamas or other Palestinian factions would be met with strong resistance. The clergy, already skeptical of Western-led initiatives in the Muslim world, would likely oppose the move outright. For them, the optics of Pakistani soldiers operating under a U.S.-backed mission in Gaza would be unacceptable. Even if the mission were purely peace-keeping, the perception among ordinary Pakistanis would be difficult to mold in favor of participation. Another major obstacle is financial. Reports suggest that countries contributing forces to such a mission would have to bear the expenses themselves. For Pakistan, already grappling with a severe economic crisis, this is simply not feasible. The government is struggling to meet its own budgetary needs, and the idea of funding a foreign deployment in Gaza would be politically toxic. The

public would question why scarce resources are being diverted abroad when Pakistan itself faces pressing challenges at home from inflation to unemployment to security threats. Beyond finances and public opinion, there are serious security risks. If Pakistani forces were deployed in Gaza and came under attack from Hamas or other militant groups, it would create an untoward situation. Any such situation would inflame domestic anger and destabilize the government further. Conversely, if Pakistani or other Muslim countries' forces were used to disarm Hamas, the backlash would be even greater. Such a move would be seen as Muslims fighting against fellow Muslims, a scenario that would be politically and morally unacceptable in Pakistan. Pakistan has already made it clear that it will not become part of any initiative that involves disarming Palestinian groups or siding against them. The government has consistently maintained that Pakistan supports the Palestinian cause and calls for a just resolution based on international law and UN resolutions. Any deviation from this stance would be seen as a betrayal of Pakistan's long-standing

position and would invite fierce criticism both domestically and internationally. Despite these challenges, reports suggest that the U.S. President is likely to raise the issue with Pakistan's civil and military leadership in the coming days. Washington may argue that Pakistan's participation would lend credibility to the mission and demonstrate solidarity with international efforts to stabilize Gaza. The idea of Pakistan sending forces to Gaza is fraught with complications. Financial constraints, public opinion, clerical resistance, and the risk of escalation all make it a non-starter. While the Foreign Office has left the door slightly ajar by not refuting the reports outright, the reality is that Pakistan cannot afford politically, economically, or morally to take part in such a mission. The government will likely continue to tread cautiously, reaffirming its support for the Palestinian cause while resisting external pressure to commit troops. The coming days may bring more pressure from Washington, but Islamabad's political leadership knows that agreeing to such a mission would be a perilous gamble one that Pakistan simply cannot afford.

Pak needs Charter of Politics: Azam

LAHORE: Federal Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar on Sunday stressed that Pakistan urgently needs a "charter of politics" to ensure political maturity, stability and national progress.

He was addressing a seminar held at Aiwan-e-Iqbal on the 53rd martyrdom anniversary of Khawaja Muhammad Rafique Shaheed.

The law minister said the proposed charter was not for any individual or political party, but solely for the beloved homeland. He remarked that those who had played with the fate of the country were no longer hidden from the public.

The minister emphasized the need to

adopt a positive attitude towards criticism, promote tolerance, and listen to political opponents.

He said such events highlight the personality and sacrifices of great leaders, adding that Pakistani politics has produced many illustrious names, with Khawaja Muhammad Rafique Shaheed shining as a bright star among them. Paying tribute, he said Khawaja Rafique Shaheed always raised his voice for truth and followed a path rooted in love for the homeland, politics, and the common citizen. "He left this world like a brave man," he added, noting that politics is a continuous process that

demands wisdom and patience.

The minister observed that Pakistan had witnessed extremism in politics and said it was the responsibility of politicians to address issues with prudence. He warned that extremism and violence should not be allowed to chart their own course in political affairs. Stressing the present challenges, Azam Nazeer Tarar said Pakistan today needs dialogue, political stability and economic stability. "Without these, progress is not possible," he said, adding that Khawaja Rafique Shaheed sacrificed his blood in the struggle to eliminate fascism from the country.—APP

KP govt begins furniture supply in schools

PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Shohab Ali Shah on Sunday said that the provincial government had formally launched the provision of furniture in schools lacking adequate facilities under the Good Governance Roadmap, with the aim of ensuring a better and dignified learning environment for students.

He stated that citizens who were aware of any school were facing a shortage of furniture should tag his X account, @CSKOfficial, so that the matter could be taken up without delay. The Chief Secretary assured that he would personally ensure prompt action in such cases Emphasizing the government's commitment to the education sector, Shohab Ali Shah said that the provision of basic facilities in schools was a key step toward improving learning outcomes.

He added that quality education remained the top priority of the provincial government and all available resources were being utilized to strengthen the public education system across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.—DNA

Govt taking measures to revive basketball

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has said that the government is committed to promoting basketball and other sports facilities across the province. In her message on World Basketball Day, she said that sports play a vital role in inculcating teamwork, healthy competition, discipline, and endurance among the youth, adding that the Punjab government is taking comprehensive measures to revive and strengthen the sports culture. The chief minister said that world-class sports complexes are being constructed in Punjab, while players will be provided financial and institutional support through an enhanced Sports Endowment Fund. She announced that sports festivals and competitions are being restored, and the Punjab League will be launched at the union council level to ensure grassroots participation. Highlighting key initiatives, she said the "Khelta Punjab" programme has been launched to promote sports activities and identify emerging talent throughout the province. CM Maryam Nawaz added that the government is determined to build 300 new grounds and sports complexes for the youth, for which a dedicated Construction and Renovation Department is being established. — APP

Policymakers urged to adopt climate-resilient strategy

LAHORE: Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) Coordinator Saif Ur Rehman has urged policymakers to adopt a long-term climate-resilient strategy in the face of climate change bringing extreme weather events more frequent. Talking to a traders delegation here Sunday, he added that Pakistan, being a water-stressed country, cannot afford to let billions of gallons of rainwater go to waste every year while facing recurring floods, energy shortages and infrastructure damage. The Coordinator suggested that yearly monsoon heavy downpours

can be used for power generation and sustainable development rather than merely a source of destruction and humans loss. "Turning monsoon challenges into economic opportunities would protect lives, boost development and ensure sustainable growth for future generations," he opined. Saif Ur Rehman emphasized that with proper planning, investment and coordination among federal and provincial institutions, monsoon rains water can be effectively used through small and medium dams, urban water reservoirs and rainwater harvesting

systems. He said that channelizing floodwaters towards hydropower projects could help generate affordable and clean electricity, reduce dependence on imported fuels and strengthen energy security. He further said that modern drainage systems, flood channels and water storage facilities can minimize urban flooding, while supporting agriculture and groundwater recharge. The Coordinator called for incentivizing private sector participation and offering tax relief for projects related to renewable energy and water management.—APP

Grilled fish warm hearts as torrential rain lashes parts of KP

PESHAWAR: As torrential rains lashed parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Sunday, plunging temperatures down across the province, the sizzling aroma of grilled fish and chappli kabab once again became a source of comfort for residents and visitors of the province. With the weather turning bitterly cold and damp due to rains since Saturday night, food lovers flocked to the city's iconic eateries at historic Qissa Khwani Bazaar and Namak Mandi, seeking warmth in steaming plates of freshly grilled fish, spicy chappli kabab, sekh kabab and cups of traditional qehwa (green tea). Many residents were seen packing parcels for family members back home, turning food into a shared shield against the winter chill. Known as the City of hospitality, Peshawar has long been a magnet for tourists and culinary enthusiasts eager to savor its famed delicacies. From mouthwatering chappli kabab and aromatic Peshawari pulao to winter-special trout fish brought from Malakand, Hazara, Punjab and Karachi, the city's food culture comes alive every winter.especially when rain and cold grip the historic valley. — APP



SHAHEED BENAZIRABAD: First Lady Bibi Aseefa Bhutto Zardari MNA, inaugurated the rehabilitation, improvement and expansion project of the road from Mehran Highway (Bandhi) to 60-Mile 3-Chak Road (Karnal Mori).

Call for steps to curb food adulteration

LAHORE: Food adulteration not only endangers lives of millions but also undermines public confidence, damages the credibility of the food industry and tarnishes image in international markets. Lenient laws and weak enforcement have emboldened criminals, allowing the practice to flourish unchecked. Convener of Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FPC-CI) Regional Committee on Food, Shahid Imran, expressed these views while talking to reporters here Sunday. He stressed the need for awarding strict punishment to unscrupulous elements indulged in food adulteration, terming the menace a grave threat to public health at large. The Convener urged the government to further strengthen provincial food authorities by enhancing their legal powers, technical capacity and human resources to ensure effective monitoring and strict implementation of food safety standards.—APP

Eradication of drug addiction can help form sustainable society

FAISALABAD: Experts emphasized that the eradication of drug addiction is essential for building a safe and sustainable society through collective efforts. They were speaking at a seminar on a Drug-Free Pakistan, organized by the Department of Rural Sociology, University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF), in collaboration with the Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) Prominent psychiatrist Dr. Imtiaz Dogar stressed that the menace of narcotics must be eliminated through joint efforts. — APP

Immigration process at Lahore Airport reviewed

LAHORE: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, accompanied by Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry, visited Allama Iqbal International Airport Lahore on Sunday and conducted a detailed review of the immigration process for outbound passengers. During the visit, the ministers inspected immigration counters, observed the performance of the staff and interacted directly with passengers to obtain firsthand feedback regarding the immigration procedures. Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi appreciated the efficient performance of a Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) official posted at

the immigration counter and commended him for professional conduct. During the inspection, a passenger complained that his boarding had been closed due to delays during the checking process. Taking immediate notice, the interior minister directed the authorities concerned to ensure the boarding of the passenger traveling to Kuwait. Passengers present at the airport informed the ministers that the immigration process was being completed within minutes, terming it a welcome development. On the occasion, Mohsin Naqvi said that safeguarding Pakistan's dignity and facilitating passengers were top priorities of

the government, adding that no traveler would be stopped from traveling abroad without valid reasons. He emphasized that professional beggars and individuals possessing incomplete travel documents could not be allowed to travel overseas, asserting that those who bring disrepute to Pakistan deserved strict action. The interior minister also issued directives to further improve the immigration system, making it more effective, transparent and passenger-friendly. FIA Lahore Regional Director Ali Zia and Deputy Director Airport Awais were also present during the visit.—APP

KP Police to purchase modern weapons

PESHAWAR: In order to effectively address the rising threat of terrorism, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Police have decided to further strengthen their force by procuring modern weapons and advanced equipment According to provincial police officials on Sunday, the decision aims at enhancing operational capacity and ensure the safety of police personnel. Under the plan, 50 Beretta sniper rifles and 100 additional sniper rifles will be purchased, while a total of 1,250 modern automatic weapons will be added to the "TWS" force. In addition, rails will be provided to modernize 3,000 small weapons and 3,250 large

weapons. To improve counter-terrorism capabilities, the KP Police will acquire 430 thermal binoculars and 330 thermal TI cameras. For strengthening surveillance, 73 surveillance drones will be inducted into the force. To counter drone-related threats, 14 anti-drone guns and four search drones will also be provided. Police officials further stated that 20 modern bomb disposal suits will be purchased for counter-terrorism operations, while 1,000 smart Sparta cameras will be acquired for search operations. To protect police personnel, the procurement of 6,000 bulletproof jackets and 6,000 bulletproof helmets

has also been approved. To enhance vehicle security, front windshields of 39 police vehicles and complete bulletproofing of five double-cabin vehicles will be carried out. Additionally, 210 B7-level armored vehicles and 1,200 operational armored vehicles will be acquired. Side armoring and body fabrication of police vehicles are also included in the plan. All these measures are aimed at equipping the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police with modern weapons and technology to make counter-terrorism operations more effective and secure and to ensure the protection of lives and property of the public.—APP

Snow blanketed Naran-Kaghan valleys captivates tourists

MANSEHRA: The long, winding journey to Kaghan Valley often marked by fatigue and monotony melts away the moment travelers catch their first glimpse of snow-draped mountains and frozen lakes on Sunday.As clouds part to reveal fleeting sunshine, only to be followed again by gentle rain or fresh snowfall, nature appears to be playing a delicate game of hide-and-seek, captivating visitors at every turn amid snowfall. Over the weekend, heavy snowfall transformed Saiful Malook Lake, Ansoo Lake, Babusar Top and the broader Naran-Kaghan region into a winter wonderland. Adventure seekers, families and snowfall lovers thronged the valley, eager to experience the serene charm of icy landscapes, snowball fights and the simple joy of sipping hot tea after a day in the cold. Saiful Malook lake, which is famed for its oval shape, crystal greenish-blue waters and centuries-old folklore, stood almost frozen under a thick white blanket.

The lake, long associated with fairytales and romance, appeared even more magical as snow settled gently on its shores and surrounding peaks. "Saiful Malook is my ideal tourist destination because of its peace, serenity and intense snowfall," said Ejaz Khan, a property dealer from Wapda Town Nowshera, who visited the lake with his family. Watching his children play with snowballs nearby, he described the scene as "beyond imagination," saying how the lake's beauty instantly erases the stress of daily life. Standing by the snow-covered shoreline in a Chitralli woolen cap and heavy overcoat, Umar Khan—another visitor shared similar sentimentsand said "It feels like stepping into a fairytale world,".

"The silence, the snow and the frozen water together create a sense of calm that is rare to find elsewhere." Located at an altitude of about 3,224 meters above sea level and spread over more than one square mile, Saiful Malook lake is named after the Persian Prince Saiful Malook. Renowned poet Mian Muhammad Bakhsh immortalized the lake in his classic tale Saiful Malook, narrating the legendary love story between Prince Saiful Malook and the fairy princess Badri-ul-Jamala, a story that continues to draw visitors seeking both natural beauty and cultural depth. For Asmat Khan, a visitor from Tank district, the attraction lies in both the folklore and accessibility. "This is my second winter visit," he said. "The heavy snowfall leaves a lasting impression, and families can easily reach here compared to many other high-altitude lakes." — APP

عظمت کی اونچی اڑان
پی آئی اے کا عالمی وقار بحال کرنے کیلئے
وزیر اعظم محمد شہباز شریف کا تاریخی اقدام
پاکستان انٹرنیشنل ائیر لائنز PIA کی نجکاری
Great People to Fly With
لائیو ٹیلی کاسٹ
شفاف اور قابل اعتماد نجکاری کے عمل کی لائیو ٹیلی کاسٹ اور سٹریمنگ
23 دسمبر 2025 کو 3:30 بجے
Privatisation Commission: Facebook | X | YOUTUBE | INSTA
GOP: Facebook | X | YOUTUBE
TV Channels
نجکاری۔ راہ خوشحالی
PID (U) 5146-D/25
GovtofPakistan
حکومت پاکستان
URAAAN PAKISTAN
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ministryofprivatisation
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privatisationcommission261

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



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MH.....561116
Cantt Hospital...9270907-11
DHQ.....5556311-4
RGH.....9290301-7
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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



ISLAMABAD: Australian High Commissioner Timothy Kane inaugurates water scheme for Farash Town. Australia is proud to support practical water solutions through WWF-Pakistan, ACIAR and CSIRO. DNA

G-14/1 stalemate continues as allottees await Justice

Many of the affected allottees are retired government employees who invested their life savings with the hope of securing a home in the federal capital. As delays dragged on, several allottees approached the Islamabad High Court (IHC) and even the Supreme Court, seeking justice, transparency, and a clear timeline for the resolution of their cases

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: More than two decades after its launch, Islamabad's Sector G-14 continues to be mired in disputes, with Sub-Sector G-14/1 emerging as a symbol of administrative paralysis, illegal encroachments, and prolonged injustice faced by genuine allottees Sector G-14 was launched in 2004 by the Federal Government Employees Housing Authority (FGEHA) in collaboration with the Capital Development Authority (CDA) to provide affordable and planned housing to federal government employees. Spread over four sub-sectors—G-14/1, G-14/2, G-14/3, and G-14/4—the project offered a total of 5,486 residential plots of various sizes, ranging from 25×40 feet to 50×90 feet. While the vision promised a modern residential community, the reality for many allottees has been years of frustration and uncertainty. Among all sub-sectors, G-14/1 remains the most problematic. Despite the passage of over 15 years, a vast majority of genuine allottees have yet to receive possession of their plots. Illegal encroachments, disputed built-up properties, and unresolved claims have brought development to a near standstill. According to official sources, only around one percent of the area in G-14/1 has been cleared so far, leaving the rest under occupation or dispute. Many of the affected allottees are retired government employees who invested their life savings with the hope of securing a home in the federal capital. As delays dragged on, several allottees approached the Islamabad High Court (IHC) and even the Supreme Court, seeking justice, transparency, and a clear timeline for the resolution of their cases. Courts have repeatedly emphasized the need for lawful action, but tangible progress on the ground remains elusive. The IHC, in one of its directives, instructed authorities to first complete the measurement of built-up properties (BUP) in G-14/2. While this step was aimed at addressing legal complexities, it inadvertently left G-14/1 in a state of limbo. No comprehensive eviction or clearance operation has yet been initiated in the sub-sector, further compounding the grievances of allottees. Sources within the administration reveal that powerful local groups are allegedly backing illegal occupants, making enforcement a daunting task for CDA and FGEHA. Political interference, coupled with weak implementation of court orders, has further stalled the process. Despite repeated assurances by concerned authorities, the ground situation remains largely unchanged. The prolonged delay has taken a heavy toll on allottees. Many have suffered financial losses due to rising construction costs and prolonged uncertainty, while others have endured emotional distress after years of waiting. Tragically, several original allottees have passed away without ever seeing their dream of owning a home fulfilled. Their families continue to pursue the cases, hoping that justice delayed will not become justice denied. The contrast between G-14/1 and neighboring sub-sectors is striking. G-14/2, G-14/3, and G-14/4 have witnessed gradual development, with infrastructure slowly taking shape and residents beginning to settle. In comparison, G-14/1 appears frozen in time, reflecting a failure of governance and accountability. Urban planning experts warn that continued inaction could further erode public trust in housing authorities and government-backed schemes. They stress the need for transparent identification of genuine claims, strict action against illegal encroachments, and coordinated implementation of court directives. Unless CDA and FGEHA act decisively to clear encroachments, resolve disputes fairly, and restore confidence among allottees, the promise of Sector G-14 risks turning into a broken dream. For now, G-14/1 stands as a stark reminder of how bureaucratic inertia, political pressure, and unlawful occupation can derail a project meant to serve hardworking citizens of Pakistan.

PIAF calls for urgent structural reforms

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Industrial & Traders Association Front (PIAF) has called on the government to adopt decisive structural reforms as the country's economy continues to struggle with slow growth, rising domestic debt, and a widening trade deficit. PIAF leaders warned that without bold action, economic vulnerabilities will deepen, investor confidence will remain weak, and sustainable development will remain out of reach. PIAF Chairman Faheemur Rehman Saigol, along with Senior Vice Chairman Nasrullah Mughal and Vice Chairman Tahir Manzoor Chaudhary, said in a joint statement that Pakistan's growth has remained modest despite some recent policy efforts. Real GDP growth is projected to stay around 2.6 to 3 percent for the fiscal year 2025-26, reflecting persistent structural weaknesses and the impact of climate shocks, including recent floods that affected agricultural output. The leaders highlighted that low economic growth, combined with high domestic borrowing, has limited the government's ability to expand public services and promote productive investment. Weak tax revenue collection has forced Pakistan to rely heavily on domestic and external financing to meet expenditures, further increasing debt pressures. They emphasized that unless the government broadens the tax base and moves toward more direct taxation, the fiscal deficit will continue to constrain long term economic prospects. The association also pointed to the continuing trade imbalance, noting that imports have outpaced exports, causing the trade deficit to widen sharply in recent months. PIAF urged the government to address structural bottlenecks in the power sector, citing the decades old circular debt that has grown into multi trillion rupee liabilities. Reforming inefficient state-owned enterprises, reducing energy losses, and improving policy predictability are essential to reduce costs for businesses and enhance export competitiveness. Water scarcity was identified as another major challenge. Pakistan remains one of the most water-stressed countries in the world, and ongoing management and infrastructure issues are reducing water availability for agriculture and industry, both critical drivers of growth.

ANF seizes over 1,467 kg of drugs

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) has intensified its crackdown against drug traffickers, conducting seven operations across the country, including areas around educational institutions and major cities. During the operations, ANF arrested four drug suppliers and recovered 1,467.455 kilograms of narcotics worth more than Rs 403 million. According to ANF spokesperson on Saturday, special attention is given to drug interdiction near educational institutions. During an operation near a university in Jamshoro, the ANF recovered four kilograms of hashish from the possession of drug pusher. During interrogation, the supplier confessed to supplying drugs to students of educational institutions. In international drug interdiction efforts, the ANF foiled attempts to smuggle narcotics abroad. At the cargo shed of Allama Iqbal International Airport, 35 grams of heroin were recovered from parcels concealed in the bags of three women bound for the United Kingdom. In another operation at the General Post Office (GPO) Lahore, the ANF seized 1.3 kilograms of ice hidden in clothes from a parcel destined for Australia. Under domestic drug interdiction operations, the ANF recovered 120 grams of cocaine from a car parked in the basement of a shopping mall in Lahore and arrested two accused. In a separate operation near Khalil Abad in District Kech, the ANF seized 99 kilograms of ice, 73 kilograms of hashish, and 50 kilograms of opium from a vehicle, and apprehended the accused. In yet another operation near Qila Abdullah, Peer Alizai, the ANF recovered 1,000 kilograms of hashish. Similarly, in Hazarganj area of District Quetta, 240 kilograms of heroin were seized during an operation. The ANF spokesperson said that cases were registered against the arrested suspects under the Control of Narcotic Substances Act (CNSA), 1997, and further investigations were underway.—DNA

The quite mental strain on students

KOMAL WAQAR

In Pakistani universities, it is common to see students sitting quietly in classrooms while their minds are somewhere else. They attend lectures, take notes, and complete assignments, yet many of them feel deeply tired by the end of the day. This tiredness does not come from physical labour or long hours of manual work. Instead, it comes from constant thinking, worrying, and pressure. Many students feel exhausted even on days when they have not done anything physically demanding. This silent exhaustion has become a normal part of student life in Pakistan. Mental tiredness is difficult to see, but it is easy to feel. It is the kind of tiredness that does not go away with sleep alone. It means overthinking small matters, replaying conversations in the mind, and constantly worrying about what comes next. Many students feel restless even during rest. Their minds remain busy with thoughts about exams, grades, deadlines, and expectations. Even while trying to relax, their thoughts continue to race, leaving them feeling drained without doing much physical work. Academic pressure is one of the biggest reasons behind this mental exhaustion. Pakistani students face a continuous cycle of quizzes, assignments, presentations, midterms, and final exams. There is little time to pause or recover between assessments. The syllabus often feels heavy, and students are expected to perform well in every subject. For many, studying never feels complete. There is always another topic to revise or another test to prepare for. This constant pressure keeps the mind active at all times, leaving little space for mental rest. Fear of failure adds another layer to this pressure. Many students are afraid of disappointing their families, teachers, or even themselves. Grades are often treated as a measure of intelligence and worth. A single low result can affect confidence and self-esteem. This fear forces students to remain alert and anxious even outside academic hours. As a result, the mind rarely feels free or relaxed, which slowly leads to mental fatigue. Family expectations also play a strong role in students' mental tiredness. In many Pakistani households, education is seen as the only path to success and financial stability. Parents often remind students of the sacrifices made for their education. While this support comes from good intentions, it can create a heavy sense of responsibility. Students begin to feel that failure is not an option. Comparisons with cousins, neighbours, or family friends are common and often unintentional. Simple comments about someone else's achievements can increase self-doubt and stress. Instead of feeling relaxed at home, many students continue to feel pressure there as well. Home, which should be a place of comfort, becomes another space where expectations exist. Students feel the need to constantly prove that they are working hard and moving forward. This ongoing pressure makes it difficult for the mind to truly rest, adding to mental exhaustion. Social media has further increased this mental burden. Platforms like Instagram, LinkedIn, and TikTok are filled with stories of success, productivity, and achievement. Students constantly see others showcasing skills, internships, businesses, and academic milestones. These posts often show only the highlights, not the struggles behind them. However, when students compare their own journeys with these online images, they begin to feel late or left behind. This comparison creates a sense of urgency. Students feel that they should be doing more, achieving more, and moving faster. Even rest starts to feel unproductive. Many students feel guilty for taking breaks, believing that they are wasting time. As a result, mental pressure increases, and relaxation becomes difficult. The mind remains active, even during moments meant for rest. Another major factor behind mental tiredness is uncertainty about the future. Many Pakistani students worry about job opportunities, financial stability, and whether their degrees will truly help them succeed. Rising inflation, limited employment options, and frequent changes in economic conditions increase anxiety. Students often question whether their hard work will pay off. This uncertainty stays in the background of their minds, creating constant tension and worry. Mental tiredness should not be confused with laziness or lack of motivation. Most students genuinely want to succeed and are willing to work hard. However, when pressure comes from academics, family, society, and social media all at once, the mind becomes overloaded. Without proper mental rest, this exhaustion affects focus, creativity, and confidence. Over time, students may feel disconnected, demotivated, or emotionally drained. It is important for society to recognize that mental tiredness is real and serious. Educational institutions should encourage balance instead of constant pressure. Families should offer understanding rather than comparisons. Students need reassurance that rest is not a weakness but a necessity. Mental health support, open conversations, and realistic expectations can help reduce this silent burden. In the end, a healthy mind is just as important as academic success. If we want students to learn better, perform better, and contribute positively to society, we must first understand the invisible mental load they carry every day. A generation that is mentally supported will be stronger, more confident, and better prepared for the future.

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ITP announces 15-day facilitation van schedule across Islamabad

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) has issued a 15-day schedule for its facilitation vans, from December 22, 2025 to January 4, 2026, to provide licensing and other traffic-related services at designated police checkpoints during the day and in major markets during evening hours across the federal capital. An ITP spokesperson told APP on Sunday that the facilitation vans will operate daily from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm at various police checkpoints, while from 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm, the vans will remain available in different markets to ensure easy access to services for citizens. He said the initiative aims to bring essential traffic services closer to the public, enabling citizens to obtain licences and related facilities near their homes and workplaces while avoiding long queues at traffic offices. In addition, the Traffic Office Faizabad will provide licence-related services from 1:00 pm to 7:00 pm, specifically for senior citizens and women, the spokesperson added.—APP

ICT Police conduct grand search operation

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police conducted a grand search and combing operation in various localities of the Karachi Company area to curb crime and ensure public safety. An official told APP on Sunday that the operation was carried out under the supervision of SP City Zone Suleman Zafar, with the participation of police teams including women police officials. Prior to the operation, senior officers briefed the deployed personnel regarding operational duties and standard procedures. During the search operation, police teams checked 67 individuals and 25 houses, while 35 motorcycles and seven vehicles were also inspected. As part of the checking process, 10 suspicious persons were shifted to the police station for verification and legal proceedings.—APP

Briefs

AIOU holds convocation

ISLAMABAD: The convocation of Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chapter took place at Peshawar Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, was the chief guest of the ceremony. Vice Chancellor AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, presided over the ceremony, said a press released issued here Sunday. Kundi stated that AIOU's educational services set an example for universities across the country. Providing free education to prisoners, children of martyrs and transgender individuals is a significant contribution to the nation, he added. Addressing the student Governor said receiving a degree is not the end but the beginning of a new journey true success will come when your knowledge benefits others. He encouraged the students to make education a means of positive change and to bring pride to the country and the nation.

Highlighting the University's academic programs, he said, "Offering technical and professional training, digital education, and artificial intelligence courses at AIOU is a commendable initiative." Speaking at the event, Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Nasir Mahmood said that five million students had graduated from this national University and were serving in various institutions across Pakistan to date. He added that this year, the number of students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had reached nearly 180,000, including 50 percent of female students. "These numbers are not just statistics but a bright reflection of our commitment to promoting women's education and empowerment," he said.—APP

Kashmiri women face grave rights violations under militarisation

ISLAMABAD: Speakers at a webinar on Sunday highlighted the grave human rights violations faced by women in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJ&K) under prolonged militarisation, saying Kashmiri women continue to endure violence, discrimination and psychological trauma amid an atmosphere of impunity and repression.

The webinar, organised by Kashmir Media Service and United Kashmir Journalists Association, was titled "Suppression and Silent Suffering: Women's Perspectives on Militarization in Kashmir" was moderated by senior journalist Dr. Muhammad Ashraf and human rights activist Rais Ahmed.

Addressing the webinar, former AJK minister and CEO Dastak, Parzana Yaqoob, said Kashmiri women had suffered severe human rights abuses for decades, referring to incidents such as Kunan Poshpura. She regretted that these violations had not been effectively highlighted at international forums despite global sensitivity towards women's rights, and stressed the need to expose crimes committed against Kashmiri women and girls, including minors.—APP

CCP sounds alarm on adulterated pesticides

ISLAMABAD: The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has released its "Competition Assessment Study of the Pesticide Sector in Pakistan," noting that counterfeit and adulterated pesticides are widespread in Punjab and Sindh, damaging crops, causing major financial losses to farmers, and distorting competition in the market. The report reviews the structure, regulatory framework, and overall performance of the pesticide sector, highlighting the significant gaps that undermine fair competition and quality assurance. The report notes that despite a large and expanding agricultural market, Pakistan has no local pesticide manufacturing and relies entirely on imports. Weak enforcement, regulatory gaps, and complex approval procedures continue to create hurdles for genuine businesses and expose farmers to low-quality products. Presenting its findings, the study says, fake and adulterated pesticides continue to be widespread in Punjab and Sindh, causing serious damage to crops and financial losses for farmers, while Pakistan remains fully dependent on imported pesticides due to the absence of local manufacturing.—APP



ISLAMABAD: A gardener displayed colorful and unique flower pots at his nursery along the Park road to attract customers in Federal Capital.

Rawalpindi's mobility revolution, era of seamless commutes

RAWALPINDI :Rawalpindi, long crippled by chronic traffic congestion, is undergoing a massive transformation through ambitious infrastructure projects initiated by the Punjab government. A comprehensive Rs.33.0 billion initiative aims to convert the city into a signal-free corridor, featuring flyovers and underpasses at key bottlenecks. Credit goes to CM Maryam Nawaz for her keen interest in development projects and her special oversight. Commissioner Rawalpindi Engineer Aamir Khattak recently confirmed that the mega projects are progressing smoothly and on track for timely completion. During a high-level review meeting, he was briefed on the developments designed to resolve longstanding traffic issues. The projects include flyovers and underpasses at Kachehri Chowk, Jinnah Park, Iftikhar Janjua Road, Annexe Road, remodeling of Ammar Chowk, and three underpasses on Peshawar Road at Race Course Ground, Army Graveyard Road, and Chairing Cross. Addressing concerns over escalating traffic and illegal parking, a Rs.1.6 billion parking plaza is under construction in Jinnah Park's unused land. Cost breakdowns reveal Rs.3.9 billion for Annexe Chowk, Rs.5.9 billion for Kacheri Chowk, Rs.2.6 billion for Iftikhar Janjua Chowk, plus the parking facility. Five additional parking sites in Saddar and

Cantonment areas have been identified, with proposals submitted, the commissioner informed. Core elements like Kachehri Chowk remodeling target completion by May 31 next year. Initial work on Peshawar Road underpasses has begun, with camp offices established and technical investigations underway. Peshawar Road, a vital artery, is set for a traffic revolution. Three multi billion rupees underpasses at Army Graveyard Chowk, Charing Cross, and Race Course Chowk form part of the 2025-26 Annual Development Program. These will create a signal-free route from Ammar Chowk to Motorway entrance at Chungi No.26, benefiting nearly 2 million residents and 250,000 daily commuters. The Race Course Ground underpass, the location known as Qasim Market costing Rs.3.091 billion, handles 250,736 vehicles daily. It features a single-barrel, two-lane structure 1,886 feet long, 31.50 feet wide, and 18 feet high, plus 2.90 km of road rehabilitation. The Army Graveyard Chowk underpass, at Rs.2.679 billion, manages 181,799 vehicles daily with similar dimensions: 1,706 feet long, and includes 1.93 km road improvements. Charing Cross underpass, costing Rs.2.9 billion, mirrors the design with 1,706 feet length and 2.99 km road works. Each includes a U-turn for GT Road access, de-

tails as per official briefs with APP. Rana Qamar Ali, Executive Engineer (EXEN), Punjab Highways, said that all three underpasses will be completed by June next year. "These projects collectively aim to transform the Peshawar Road corridor into a seamless, signal-free route and increase connectivity," he confirmed to APP. Earlier, timely completed GPO Underpass and TM Chowk remodeling have started contributing their role but will enhance their effect once Peshawar Road troika projects will join them. Camp offices and machinery are deployed on site nearing Race Course Ground. , Nawaz Sharif Flyover on Adyala Road has turned travel into an uninterrupted journey, linking the city to the upcoming Ring Road. In a boost to the flagship Rawalpindi King Road, Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif has already directed expeditious work on the project and expansion of its scope. Delayed, but the 38 km project will solve long-standing traffic problems, boost economic activities, and ease travel for millions. Details include five interchanges at Banth, Chak Beli Khan, Adyala Road, Chakri Road, and Thallian; two river bridges, seven stormwater bridges, one railway bridge, 11 overpasses, 10 underpasses, and 53 culverts. The project will spur development in real es-

tate, educational institutions, and small industries. Appreciating Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif for gifting these historic mega projects to Rawalpindi, residents and traders, however, are demanding further improvement plans specifically for Murree Road, the city's main socio-economic hub. They particularly seek urgent measures to address severe congestion at Liaquat Bagh Chowk, which connects Marir Chowk and Tipu Road, often resulting in stationary traffic from afternoon till late evening. Traders have expressed deep concerns over this bottleneck trio of areas Marir Chowk, Tipu Road, and Liaquat Bagh, that requires the government's special attention. While the government is planning to add more lanes on the main Murree Road from Liaquat Bagh towards Waris Khan, citizens emphasize that this does not directly tackle the critical congestion points at the Liaquat Bagh-Marir-Tipu intersection, calling for targeted interventions there. Punjab government's interconnected projects signal a pivotal shift, promising reduced congestion, enhanced connectivity, and economic growth for Rawalpindi's commuters. Last but not least, the timing of project launch and completion time reflect the government's commitment for public driven facilities.—APP

BMP for export-led strategy

D NA

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry's Businessmen Panel (BMP), has welcomed the federal government's initiative to formulate a credible post-IMF exit strategy but cautioned that without urgent, practical and export-focused reforms, Pakistan risks falling back into yet another International Monetary Fund programme. FPCCI former president and BMP Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar said that the discussion initiated at the highest level must now translate into concrete, time-bound actions driven by strong coordination be-

tween the public and private sectors.

Mian Anjum Nisar stated that Pakistan's economic history clearly shows that stabilisation without structural transformation only provides temporary relief. Unless exports are expanded aggressively, value chains are strengthened and foreign exchange buffers are built, the country will continue to face recurring balance-of-payments crises. He stressed that the warning issued by the Planning Commission regarding the possibility of slipping into another IMF programme should be taken as a serious national alarm. The BMP Chairman strongly endorsed the Planning Commission's assessment

that Pakistan must raise its exports to at least \$63 billion by 2029 if it wants to make the current IMF programme its last. He said this target is ambitious but achievable if industrial policy, taxation, energy pricing and trade facilitation are aligned around a single objective: making Pakistani exports competitive in global markets. Mian Anjum Nisar pointed out that Pakistan's exports have grown only marginally over the past two decades, while regional competitors such as Vietnam have multiplied their exports many times over. This gap, he said, reflects not a lack of potential but weak policy execution, inconsistent reforms and the absence of

a long-term export vision. He emphasised that industry-specific strategies, particularly for textiles, engineering goods, pharmaceuticals, IT services and agro-based products, must be developed and implemented with measurable outcomes. Referring to projections that Pakistan may face an external financing requirement exceeding \$12 billion during the 2028-31 period, Mian Anjum Nisar said the country cannot rely indefinitely on emergency financing. He supported the view that export growth, increased remittances, foreign direct investment and agriculture-based import substitution must collectively fill this gap.

DG RDA promises swift resolution of issues

RAWALPINDI: The Director General (DG) of the Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA), Kinza Murtaza, chaired a meeting with the affected residents of the University Town Housing Scheme to address their long-standing issues and concerns. While addressing the meeting, the DG RDA stated that, in light of the directions of Secretary Housing Noor-ul-Amin Mengal, all matters about the affectees, including plot allotments, plot positions, possession of areas, development works, and other related issues will be resolved on a priority basis and within the shortest possible time. The DG RDA directed officers from Metropolitan Planning and Traffic Engineering (MP&TE), Estate Management, and other concerned RDA departments to perform their duties fearlessly in resolving public issues and to continue taking strict and indiscriminate action against illegal elements. She further informed the participants that a formal letter has been dispatched to the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) regarding the University Town Housing Scheme matter.—APP

IESCO notifies power suspension programme

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) on Saturday issued a power suspension programme for Sunday for various areas of its region due to necessary maintenance and routine development work.

According to IESCO Spokesperson, the power supply of different feeders and grid stations would remain suspended for the period from 09:00 AM to 02:00 PM, Rawalpindi City Circle, Jail Park-1, Car Chowk, Zeta-1, Mehboob Shaheed, Ex-Lawyer, Park View, Pindi Board, Sowam Indus, RCCI Express, Humak, Imaratr, Model Town, Sarwar Shaheed, PEPSI, Mohra Nagyal, IST, Fuji Foundation, Ziraj-1, Ziraj-2, AWHs, Dk. Awan, Morgah and Walyat Complex Feeders, Rawalpindi Cantt Circle, Rawalpindi-III, Car Chowk, Hummak, VIP, Park View, Hamyoun Road and RCCI to RCCIV Feeders, Attock Circle, from 08:00 am to 04:00 pm, Jhang and Shamsabad Feeders, GSO Circle, from 09:00 am to 04:00 pm, 132 kV GSS New Islamabad International Airport (T-2) (20/26 MVA) Consumer Grid Station, from 09:00 am to 02:00 pm, INUP, CNS Lab, N-LAB-1, O-Lab, CNS-1, PINSTECH-2, PINSTECH-3, Tumair, New Lab-3, KIRPA, Simly Dam, Nilop, PINSTECH Colony, Jhang Syedan, Farash Town, Park-2 and Tumair Feeders and surrounding areas will remain closed. IESCO management apologizes to its esteemed customers for the power outage. If the work is completed ahead of time, the power supply can be restored even before the scheduled time.—APP

Sherry greets Pak U-19 team on winning Asia Cup

ISLAMABAD: Vice President Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Senator Sherry Rehman has congratulated the Pakistan Under-19 cricket team on winning the Asia Cup, calling the victory a moment of immense pride for the entire nation. In a statement issued here on Sunday, she said the national team lifted the spirits of the country by defeating arch-rivals India convincingly in the final, describing it as a performance that raised Pakistan's head high on the international stage. Sherry Rehman lauded Samir Minhas for his outstanding knock of 172 runs against India, terming it the cornerstone of Pakistan's emphatic victory in the final. She said that the comprehensive win over the traditional rivals by a large margin made the historic success even more memorable. Sherry Rehman also said that the Under-19 team avenged their earlier defeat in the group stage in a remarkable and determined manner, demonstrating resilience and character. She said that confidence, discipline and excellent teamwork displayed by the young players were key factors in Pakistan's emergence as Asia's champions. Expressing hope for the future, Sherry Rehman said she expected the young cricketers to continue playing with the same passion and commitment.—APP

Pakistan to launch Panda bond in China

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is preparing to launch its first-ever Panda bond, a yuan-denominated sovereign bond to be issued in China's domestic market, in January, marking a significant step toward deepening financial cooperation with China and diversifying the country's external funding sources. According to the Ministry of Finance, the planned issuance forms part of Pakistan's broader strategy to strengthen debt sustainability, reduce reliance on dollar-denominated borrowing and tap into China's deep and liquid onshore capital markets amid challenging global financial conditions. Gwadar Pro in a report stated that Panda bonds are renminbi-denominated instruments issued by foreign governments or entities and sold to Chinese investors. For Pakistan, entry into China's domestic bond market represents a strategic move to mitigate foreign-exchange risks while broadening its investor base through alternative, market-based financing channels. "The Panda Bond program is being pursued as a structured and programmatic financing strategy, aligned with prudent debt management objectives," the finance ministry said in a statement after Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb chaired a high-level review meeting on the proposed issuance. Officials said Pakistan envisages a Panda bond program of around US \$1 billion, with an inaugural tranche equivalent to approximately US \$250 million, subject to final regulatory approvals from Chinese authorities, which are expected by early January. Preparatory work for subsequent issuances under a second phase of the program has already commenced. The ministry said Pakistan has secured the necessary approvals from its multilateral partners, while engagement with Chinese institutional investors has so far been constructive, reflecting growing confidence in Pakistan's macroeconomic stabilization efforts and reform trajectory. Pricing will be finalized closer to market engagement once regulatory requirements are completed.—APP

DECEMBER 2025

Pakistan's Premier News & Diplomatic Affairs Magazine

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South Sudan's ruling elites rely on instability for survival

HAFED AL-GHWELL

SOUTH Sudan's slide toward yet another civil war will not be the result of state weakness alone. It will be the inevitable byproduct of a political order that survives by keeping the country unsettled. Since independence in 2011, the promise of elections, a permanent constitution, and a unified state has been endlessly deferred. These delays are often framed as technical problems or security concerns. In reality, they form a governing method. Instability is not a failure of elite rule in South Sudan; it is the operating system. Fourteen years on, South Sudan has yet to hold a single general election. The transitional period has been extended four times. Elections are now penciled in for 2026, though few insiders expect them to happen. A permanent constitution remains unfinished. Key provisions of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan sit half-implemented. Security forces remain divided. Transitional justice exists mostly on paper. To even the most untrained eye, it looks like South Sudan's drift is better understood as design. After all, the ruling elite's interest in governing through instability starts with how power actually works. Yes, formal institutions exist, but they are not where authority is exercised. Real control sits in informal networks that connect the presidency, security services, oil revenues, and ethnic patronage. These networks thrive in ambiguity. Clear rules would limit discretion. Elections would introduce risk. A settled constitution would fix power relations that are currently fluid and negotiable. The state's informal core is most visible in the security sector. South Sudan officially has a national army, but in practice it is a coalition of forces loyal to individuals rather than institutions. The failure to unify forces under the peace agreement is not a logistical error. Rival commanders retain separate chains of command because fragmentation protects elite survival. A unified army would require promotions, budgets, and authority to be regulated. Fragmentation allows rewards to be dispensed selectively, defections to be managed, and violence to be calibrated rather than eliminated. It is a pattern that repeats across governance. Oil revenues account for roughly 90 percent of government income and 95 percent of exports. Yet these funds flow through opaque channels. Damage to the oil pipeline through Sudan in 2024 cut production from about 350,000 barrels per day at independence to as low as 45,000 barrels per day. The result was fiscal collapse for the population, but not for elites. Revenue shocks increase dependence on informal extraction, illicit taxation, and aid diversion. In short, even instability becomes a resource rather than a liability. Moreover, economic fragility reinforces this system. Four

IslamabadPOST

Pakistan's First And Only Diplomatic Daily

Editor-in-Chief: Ansar Mahmood Bhatti
Deputy Editor: Abid Raza

Member APNS / ABC Certified

Vol: 06 Issue: 184

Email: dailyisbpost@gmail.com

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out of five South Sudanese live below the poverty line. Inflation surged again in late 2024, with basic goods rising nearly 15 percent in a single month. Youth unemployment hovers around 50 percent. Yet only a tiny share of households relies primarily on aid. Most survive through subsistence farming, casual labor, or informal trade. It is a curious dynamic that creates a population that is poor but not fully dependent on the state, limiting collective pressure for reform while remaining vulnerable to local coercion. The ruling elite also governs through instability by managing civil society rather than empowering it. On paper, South Sudan has an active civic space. In practice, civil society is fragmented, co-opted, and selectively repressed. Instability is not a failure of elite rule in South Sudan; it is the operating system. Organizations that align with elite narratives are tolerated or funded. Those that mobilize independently face harassment, deregistration, or worse. This produces a civil society that appears busy but rarely threatens power. Elections are another arena where South Sudan's quixotic sociopolitical dynamics are perfectly captured. Surveys show that South Sudanese strongly want to vote. At the same time, more than half of respondents say they feel unsafe just discussing politics, and nearly a quarter would feel very unsafe voting. This contradiction suits the elite. Popular demand for elections can be cited to donors, while fear ensures that mobilization remains shallow. In effect, elections are kept permanently "in preparation," useful as an idea, but dangerous as an actual event. Customary authorities are drawn into the same logic. Around 80 to 90 percent of disputes are resolved through traditional courts rather than formal ones. Chiefs and elders often command more trust than state institutions. Rather than integrate these structures into accountable governance, elites instrumentalize them. Intercommunal violence is framed as local and cultural, even when national actors incite it. In turn, it allows the center to deny responsibility, while benefiting from the disorder it helps sustain. A persistent humanitarian crisis also adds to this cycle. In 2025, nearly 60 percent of the population is projected to face crisis-level food insecurity during the lean season. Over 5 million people need water and sanitation support. Maternal mortality stands near 789 deaths per 100,000 live births, among the highest rates globally. These conditions should provoke political rupture. Instead, they are normalized. Aid fills gaps just enough to prevent collapse, while funding shortfalls ensure suffering remains widespread. The state is neither absent nor effective; it is selectively present. Worse yet, troubling regional woes add fuel. Spillovers from Sudan's war have disrupted trade, damaged oil infrastructure, and brought new arms and fighters across the border. Regional mediation continues, but with declining influence. International actors press for timelines and benchmarks, while lacking enforcement power. This suits Juba's elites, who trade compliance rhetoric for time, extensions, and diplomatic patience. To them, governing through instability ultimately ties elite survival to the persistence of crisis. Violence justifies emergency powers. Delays justify extensions of rule. Fragmentation justifies repression. Peace is invoked constantly, but only as a promise deferred. National unity is celebrated rhetorically while being structurally impossible under the current system. This is why South Sudan feels perpetually on the edge. The danger is not simply that another war might break out. It is that the political order is calibrated to make war always possible, but never decisive. In this system, peace would be more disruptive than conflict.

Trump Doles Out Syria's Golan Heights to Israel

Qamar Bashir



Despite Trump's claims of declining support, Israel continues to enjoy unparalleled diplomatic, military, and financial backing from the United States. Washington has repeatedly used its veto power at the United Nations to shield Israel from accountability, even when resolutions condemning occupation or settlement expansion enjoy overwhelming global support. This posture places the United States above the rules it demands others obey, undermining the credibility of the international system it helped construct. Trump's rhetoric thus exposed a contradiction between professed grievance...

DURING a White House Hanukkah celebration on December 16, 2025, President Donald Trump made a startling declaration about the Golan Heights, openly revisiting his 2019 decision to recognize Israeli sovereignty over territory internationally acknowledged as Syrian land occupied by Israel during the 1967 war. Trump boasted that no previous American president had dared take such a step, portraying his action as bold, swift, and unconstrained by diplomatic caution. He framed the recognition not as a complex legal judgment but as an act of personal resolve, reducing decades of international dispute to a matter he claimed required only minutes to decide. Trump described the decision making process with casual bravado, saying he asked then United States Ambassador to Israel David Friedman to explain the importance of the Golan Heights in five minutes or less. According to Trump, he interrupted after barely two minutes, declared that he understood everything necessary, and proceeded to approve recognition immediately. He joked that the land was worth trillions of dollars and remarked that he should have asked Israel for something in return. The remarks transformed a grave issue of sovereignty, occupation, and war into an anecdote of impulsive executive authority with profound geopolitical consequences worldwide today. Trump used the occasion to reaffirm his broader alignment with Israel and the Jewish community, listing what he described as historic achievements of his presidency. He cited moving the United States embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, backing the Abraham Accords, and withdrawing from the Iran nuclear agreement negotiated under President Barack Obama. According to Trump, that deal endangered regional security rather than containing Iran. He framed each policy as evidence of loyalty, friendship, and moral clarity, repeatedly portraying himself as the most reliable ally Israel has ever had in Washington during modern United States political history overall period today. He also spoke at length about his personal connections with Jewish Americans, recalling childhood interactions through his father and emphasizing long standing familiarity rather than political calculation. He referenced his daughter Ivanka Trump's conversion to Judaism after marrying Jared Kushner as further proof of closeness, though he avoided addressing persistent rumors about his own religious affiliation. These remarks blended personal narrative with state policy, reinforcing the impression that national decisions affecting millions were shaped through intimacy, sentiment, and loyalty rather than institutional deliberation or international legal frameworks governing norms, accountability, restraint, balance, precedent, credibility, neutrality,

consistency, legitimacy, stability, justice globally. The most revealing segment of Trump's speech came when he warned that Congress and the Senate were becoming increasingly antisemitic, claiming that traditional pro Israel influence in Washington was fading. He described this shift as dangerous and urged greater vigilance from supporters. The statement was remarkable, amounting to a rare acknowledgment that even within American political institutions discomfort with Israel's conduct is growing. Yet the warning also functioned as pressure, implying that loyalty to Israel should remain a litmus test for legitimacy within United States politics despite constitutional pluralism, debate, dissent, oversight, accountability, ethics, law, values, representation, balance, restraint, democracy. Despite Trump's claims of declining support, Israel continues to enjoy unparalleled diplomatic, military, and financial backing from the United States. Washington has repeatedly used its veto power at the United Nations to shield Israel from accountability, even when resolutions condemning occupation or settlement expansion enjoy overwhelming global support. This posture places the United States above the rules it demands others obey, undermining the credibility of the international system it helped construct. Trump's rhetoric thus exposed a contradiction between professed grievance and actual power exercised globally, institutionally, strategically, consistently, decisively, coercively, selectively, visibly, persistently, controversially, openly, repeatedly, internationally, historically, forcefully today. Trump's conduct cannot be examined in isolation from regional realities. Several Muslim majority states have normalized relations with Israel, expanded trade, and entered energy partnerships even as Gaza suffers devastation. Egypt's multibillion dollar gas agreements with Israel inject revenue into the Israeli economy during ongoing military campaigns. These arrangements are celebrated publicly, while Palestinian suffering continues largely unchecked. Such actions weaken moral criticism of Washington, revealing a regional order where economic interests and regime security override solidarity with Palestine principles, law, justice, humanity, ethics, responsibility, restraint, accountability, credibility, consistency, conscience, leadership, courage, unity, vision, balance, resolve, purpose, fairness, legitimacy, peace. Reports of military logistics and arms transfers passing through or involving regional actors have further deepened perceptions of complicity. Whether fully substantiated or not, these allegations reinforce a widespread belief that Palestinian blood is discounted in exchange for alliances and profits. In such a context, outrage directed solely at Trump or the United States appears selective and incomplete. Power is sustained not only by those who wield it, but also by

those who enable it through silence, cooperation, and convenience across borders, systems, institutions, markets, governments, cultures, alliances, blocs, regions, conflicts, wars, crises, decades, generations, history, memory, politics, morality globally. Trump's long promised Middle East peace initiative has effectively collapsed. The proposed international mechanisms to stabilize Gaza were never implemented, ceasefire enforcement remained absent, and settlement expansion continued unabated. Gaza remains devastated, its civilian population displaced and deprived, while accountability mechanisms remain paralyzed. The peace plan functioned less as a pathway to justice than as a political diversion, shifting attention while irreversible facts were imposed on the ground with minimal resistance from global media, institutions, publics, diplomacy, negotiations, law, norms, enforcement, conscience, outrage, empathy, solidarity, responsibility, leadership, resolve, courage, action, urgency, intervention, accountability, fairness, balance, restraint, morality, humanity, peace, justice. In this light, Trump's Hanukkah speech read less as celebration than confession. It revealed a worldview where power overrides principle, alliances eclipse law, and suffering becomes collateral. It also exposed the shared responsibility of Western governments and Muslim states that have tolerated, financed, or normalized this order. Condemning Trump alone is therefore insufficient. He acted openly, but he was enabled by a broader system unwilling to enforce its own rules or defend a truly universal standard of justice grounded in law, equality, sovereignty, dignity, humanity, restraint, accountability, consistency, legitimacy, balance, peace, order, ethics, norms, responsibility, credibility, fairness, stability, conscience globally. If peace and justice are to mean anything, the Muslim world must confront its own contradictions. It cannot decry occupation while financing its beneficiary, nor invoke international law selectively. Trump's words should be read as a mirror, reflecting the erosion of norms and collective failure to resist it. Until regional actors withdraw complicity and demand accountability consistently, Palestine will remain abandoned, international law weakened, and power unrestrained. Moral authority cannot be outsourced; it must be practiced through courage, sacrifice, and principled consistency rooted in justice, dignity, humanity, solidarity, responsibility, leadership, restraint, ethics, law, balance, fairness, credibility, legitimacy, peace, stability universally. – Press Secretary to the President (Rtd) Former Press Minister, Embassy of Pakistan to France Former Press Attaché to Malaysia Former MD, SRBC Macomb, Michigan, USA

Water is Pakistan's Lifeline

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



Pakistan is predominantly an agricultural country. Its fields, crops, and rural livelihoods are sustained by the uninterrupted flow of river waters. Any prolonged disruption risks turning fertile lands into barren stretches, triggering drought-like conditions, food shortages, and economic distress. Such outcomes would not remain confined within national borders...

PAKISTAN has always stood for peace, moderation, and the rule of law, both within the region and beyond. Its national ethos is rooted in coexistence, dialogue, and respect for international commitments. Despite enduring provocations and sustained hostility, Pakistan has consistently demonstrated restraint, believing that stability in South Asia can only be achieved through mutual respect and adherence to agreed norms. Unfortunately, this principled posture has repeatedly been tested by India, whose conduct often reflects an inclination toward coercion rather than cooperation. The recent attempt by India to challenge Pakistan through military adventurism was swiftly and decisively neutralised. Pakistan's calm yet resolute response restored balance within a single day, reaffirming that while it does not seek confrontation, it will not hesitate to defend its sovereignty. That episode should have served as a lesson in the futility of aggression. Instead, India has chosen a more dangerous and far-reaching course by resorting to water aggression—an act that strikes at the very survival of Pakistan and undermines the foundations of regional peace. At the heart of this crisis lies the Indus Waters Treaty, a landmark agreement concluded in 1960 under international auspices. For over six decades, the treaty has been celebrated as a rare success story in conflict management, surviving wars and prolonged political hostility. It clearly allocated the waters of the western rivers—Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab—to Pakistan, while granting India rights over the eastern rivers. The spirit of the treaty rested on a simple but profound understanding: water is a shared lifeline and must never be weaponised.

Today, that understanding is being deliberately eroded. India's actions in restricting and manipulating the flow of the Jhelum and Chenab rivers constitute a blatant violation of both the letter and spirit of the treaty. Reports of sharply reduced water levels have sent shockwaves across Pakistan, where millions depend on these rivers for agriculture, drinking water, and energy. This is not a technical dispute that can be brushed aside; it is a direct assault on Pakistan's economic stability and food security. Pakistan is predominantly an agricultural country. Its fields, crops, and rural livelihoods are sustained by the uninterrupted flow of river waters. Any prolonged disruption risks turning fertile lands into barren stretches, triggering drought-like conditions, food shortages, and economic distress. Such outcomes would not remain confined within national borders; they would destabilise the entire region. To knowingly push a downstream state toward such a scenario is to invite chaos and conflict. Water aggression is not merely an unfriendly act; it is a grave breach of international law. The deliberate violation of a binding treaty undermines trust and weakens the entire framework of global agreements. If the Indus Waters Treaty—long regarded as inviolable—can be disregarded at will, then no international commitment remains safe. This is why Pakistan has rightly raised the issue at the global level, calling upon the international community to recognise the seriousness of India's actions and to intervene before irreversible damage is done. Pakistan's preference remains peace. It has shown time and again that it values dialogue over discord and restraint over retaliation. However,

peace cannot be sustained at the cost of national survival. Water is Pakistan's lifeline, and no nation can be expected to compromise on something so fundamental. The experience of May 2025 demonstrated that when pushed, Pakistan is capable of responding decisively to protect its core interests. That resolve remains intact. It is therefore essential for Pakistan's leadership to convey a clear and unambiguous message to the world: water coercion is a red line. Preventive diplomacy, timely intervention, and strict enforcement of treaty obligations are imperative to avert a larger crisis. Silence or inaction by the international community would only embolden further violations and increase the risk of confrontation. India must be reminded that rivers cannot be held hostage to political ambition. Pakistan does not trade in abuse or threats, but it also does not submit to coercion. Its conduct has always reflected dignity and restraint, yet it reserves the right to defend what is essential for its people's survival. Shared rivers demand shared responsibility, not unilateral dominance. In the end, the region faces a clear and decisive choice. Respect for treaties and mutual restraint can preserve peace and stability, while the weaponisation of water will inevitably lead to consequences that no one can control. Do not push Pakistan to such an extent that, for the sake of its national and collective survival, it is compelled to sweep away all the barriers erected on the waters of its rivers. Pakistan's position is principled and clear; it seeks peace, but peace with justice. When lifelines are threatened, silence is not an option, and resolve becomes a necessity.

Briefs

Only state
can issue
Jihad
fatwa: CDS

FROM PAGE 01

He also drew parallels between Pakistan and the Islamic State established in Saudi Arabia 1,400 years ago. "Both are founded for the same reason [...], were founded in the same month, the Ramadan, and their establishment involved the element of migration." The CDF further said that no one could order jihad in an Islamic state other than the state itself. "No one can issue a fatwa for jihad without the order and permission and will of those vested with the authority," he said during the conference. The Field Marshal also cited multiple verses from the Quran during his address.

President
Zardari
conveys
goodwill...

FROM PAGE 01

He emphasized mutual respect, close cooperation, and the shared desire to further strengthen bilateral relations for the benefit of both nations. The President's message coincided with the Iranian nation's celebration of Yalda Night, a centuries-old civilizational tradition symbolizing hope, light, joy, and compassion, and marking the longest night of the year. He noted that the spirit of Yalda Night reflects values cherished by both societies and resonates strongly with the shared social and cultural affinities between Pakistan and Iran. President Zardari highlighted that Pakistan attaches great importance to its relationship with Iran and remains committed to promoting regional harmony, understanding, and people-to-people connections. He expressed warm wishes for the well-being and prosperity of the Iranian people and conveyed his hope that the enduring friendship between the two countries would continue to grow stronger. The goodwill gesture was warmly received and reflected Pakistan's consistent policy of fostering close ties with its neighbors based on mutual respect, shared traditions, and a common vision for peace and cooperation in the region.

Interpol
drops Zulfi
Bukhari
extradition
case

FROM PAGE 01

murder conspiracy from London to Gujarat and the alleged corruption cases during former prime minister Imran Khan's government – that the PTI leader was behind the murder case in Gujarat after leaving Pakistan over three years ago, and made money through corrupt means when in power. Against Bukhari, the interior ministry alleged in its Interpol complaint that he was involved in terrorism outside the Judicial Complex during PTI founder Khan's appearances, as well as other incidents of terrorism. The interior ministry had also told Interpol that Bukhari should be handed over to Pakistan for his role in the Al-Qadir Trust case, since he was the central character in the case alongside Bushra Bibi and Khan.

Iran
appreciates
President...

FROM PAGE 01

The Iranian ambassador noted that such thoughtful exchanges at the highest level underscore the historic, cultural, and civilizational ties that bind the two neighboring countries. He emphasized that Iran values its close relationship with Pakistan and views these expressions of goodwill as a reaffirmation of the strong foundations upon which bilateral relations continue to grow.

Australia stops in silence for
Bondi Beach shooting victims

The mass shooting has sparked national soul-searching about antisemitism, anger over the failure to shield Jewish Australians from harm, and promises to stiffen laws and penalties against hatred, extremists, and gun ownership

SYDNEY: Millions of Australians will light candles and observe a minute's silence on Sunday, a week after a pair of gunmen fired into crowds at a Jewish festival on Sydney's most famous beach and killed 15 people. A father and son are accused of targeting the family-thronged Hanukkah festival at Bondi Beach, striking on a sunny day at a tourism hotspot that is emblematic of Australians' ocean-loving lifestyle. Authorities say the attack, one of the deadliest in Australian history, was inspired by "Islamic State ideology". Exactly a week after the first reports of gunfire at 6:47 pm (0747 GMT), Australians will fall silent for a minute on a national day of reflection with the theme "light over darkness". Flags flew at half-mast across the nation, including over the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

People are being asked to light a candle in their windows in the evening to honour the victims and stand by the Jewish community, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said on the eve of the memorial. "Sixty seconds carved out from the noise of daily life, dedicated to 15 Australians who should be with us today," said the prime minister, who will join commemorations at Bondi Beach. "It will be a moment of pause to reflect and affirm that hatred and violence will never define us as Australians." Federal and state authorities are also in talks with Jewish community leaders about establishing a permanent memorial at Bondi Beach, as well as holding a national day of mourning in the new year. Many people have already marked the attack with unofficial acts of remembrance.

Hundreds of swimmers and surfers paddled out at Bondi Beach on Friday to join in a huge circle as they splashed the water and roared with emotion. On Saturday, surf lifesavers lined the shore of Bondi Beach and fell silent in memory of the dead, some crying or hugging each other in a ceremony mirrored by other ocean rescuers around the country. Gunman Sajid Akram, 50, was shot and killed by police during the December 14 assault. An Indian national, he entered Australia on a visa in 1998. His 24-year-old son Naveed, an Australian-born citizen who survived and remains in hospital under police guard, is facing charges including terrorism and 15 murders. The mass shooting has sparked national soul-searching about antisemitism,

anger over the failure to shield Jewish Australians from harm, and promises to stiffen laws and penalties against hatred, extremists, and gun ownership. New South Wales Premier Chris Minns said he would open an independent Royal Commission investigation into the shooting. Asked on Sunday if the attack could have been avoided, he said: "I don't know. I mean, it's something that I stay up at night wondering about and worrying about." The Australian government has announced a suite of national measures to crack down on gun ownership and hate speech, promising stricter federal laws and harsher penalties. The state of New South Wales says it plans to ban "hateful" slogans including "Globalise the Intifada" and symbols such as Islamic State group flags. – APP

Australia crush England
fightback to retain Ashes with
82-run victory in Adelaide

England have now lost the Ashes in three matches for fourth consecutive tour, while losing 16 of their last 18 Tests in country

SYDNEY: Mitchell Starc took three wickets to grind down a dogged England as Australia wrapped up an 82-run win on day five of the third Ashes Test to take an unassailable 3-0 lead in the series. Chasing a world record 435 runs to win, England battled bravely into the second session at Adelaide Oval but folded for 352, with Scott Boland taking the last wicket of Josh Tongue before tea. Much of the talk in the build-up to the Ashes had been the age profile of the Australia squad but Starc said the veterans had proved their worth. "We do laugh at some of the comments that get back to us about how old we are," the 35-year-old added. "I'm sure experience plays a part in going through your highs and lows [...] That plays a big part in all of this." England have now

lost the Ashes in three matches for the fourth consecutive tour, while losing 16 of their last 18 Tests in the country. Though two Tests remain, the latest surrender may top the previous tours for sheer disappointment. There were expectations of a genuine contest, fighting words from England captain Ben Stokes, and hope that "Bazball" might win the urn in Australia for the first time since 2010-11. All that was swept aside in Adelaide, where England ditched their trademark aggression, reverted to more traditional Test batting and were still beaten convincingly. "We obviously came here with a goal in mind and we haven't been able to achieve it. It hurts and it sucks," said England skipper Stokes. "They've been able to outdo us on

a much higher level [...] I thought we did incredibly well to take us where we did in this fourth innings. "We couldn't do what we came here to do but there was some good stuff to come out of this game." On day five, with England still needing 228 runs to win, Australia gave their front-line seamers a rest and had spinner Nathan Lyon and Cameron Green open the bowling against Will Jacks and Jamie Smith. In Green's second over, Jacks turned his ankle when trying to push off his crease for a run and hobbled around for a time, a fitting symbol for England's stumbles in a flawed campaign. It was not a start that engendered confidence and the pair scrapped unconvincingly for 40 minutes until rain halted play. England fans cheered but

it was just a passing squall, the ground bathed in sunshine within a half hour. The Surrey duo brought up a fifty-run partnership with the old ball and were soon spared the challenge of spinner Lyon, who clutched his hamstring and came off the ground limping after cutting off a four near the rope at fine leg. When the second new ball came, Smith attacked with gusto, smashing both Pat Cummins and Starc for back-to-back fours. But with the deficit trimmed to 150 runs he threw the bat at left-arm quick Starc trying for a third successive boundary and lost his wicket for 60, his attempted slog caught by a back-peddling Cummins at mid-on. Jacks played a steadier hand with tailender Carse, who survived a big lbw appeal off Starc before lunch. – APP

What they said as
Australia retain
Ashes – reaction

ADELAIDE: Australia retained the Ashes with an 82-run victory against England in the third Test in Adelaide on Sunday for an unassailable 3-0 lead in the five-match series.

AFP Sport picks out some of the best reaction:

"It feels pretty awesome. It wasn't easy today, but we got it done. It's an excited changing room."

– **Australia captain Pat Cummins.**

"They made us work for it. A bit of a flat wicket and they played pretty well but another Ashes win and it's been a great atmosphere all week, all series."

– **Australia fast bowler Mitchell Starc**

"Everyone is hurting and quite emotional about it. It hurts, it sucks, but we ain't going to stop."

– **England captain Ben Stokes**

"We know England are such a good cricket team and we're going to be challenged right to the end today it was a real grind."

– **Australia's player of the match Alex Carey**

"Having the immediate family here to look up at the heavens and score a hundred was something special."

– **Carey, whose father died in September**

"I think the boys were excellent today. They showed some great application. They bounced off each other and tried to take the game as deep as they could. We didn't get there, but I thought it was a fine achievement."

– **England head coach Brendon McCullum**

"A moment Scott Boland will never forget. He goes down in history as the man who took the wicket to win the Ashes. That is a special moment for any player and any team."

– **Former England captain Alastair Cook commentating on TV as the final wicket fell**

"It has been a thoroughly professional. Australia have out-thought England in many situations. You have got to take your hat off."

– **Former England spinner Phil Tufnell**

Soccer star
Mamoon
Moosa Khan
honoured

ISLAMABAD: A glittering reception was hosted in the federal capital on Saturday evening in honour of renowned football star Mamoon Moosa Khan, drawing a large gathering of diplomats, senior government officials, sports personalities, showbiz figures, journalists and other prominent members of society. The prestigious event, held at a leading venue in Islamabad, celebrated Mamoon Moosa Khan's outstanding contributions to football in Pakistan and served as a testament to the strong bonds of family, friendship and community. Representatives from the diplomatic community, including diplomats from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria and Romania, along with businessmen from China, graced the occasion, reflecting the wide respect and recognition Mamoon Moosa Khan enjoys both nationally and internationally. – APP

West Indies 43-0, need
419 more to win after
Conway joins elite

MOUNT MAUNGANUI: The West Indies were 43-0 at stumps Sunday on the fourth day of the third Test against New Zealand, needing a further 419 to win, after Devon Conway became just the 10th player in Test history to hit a double century and a century in the same match. Brandon King was on 37 and John Campbell two not out off 50 balls as the West Indies began a record chase after being set a target of 462. No team has scored more than 418 in the fourth innings to win in Test history, but the West Indies must do so to square the three-match series after losing in Wellington and drawing in Christchurch. New Zealand declared their second innings an hour before the close at 302-2 with Conway's 100 adding to his 227 in the first innings. He became just the sixth New Zealander to score a hundred in both innings of a Test. Moments later Tom Latham became the seventh, moving from 80 at tea to 101, having scored 137 in the first innings. Latham and Conway had a mammoth 323 opening partnership in the first innings, and set a world record for the opening wicket in combining for 515 runs in the match. Conway joined an illustrious list in scoring a double century and a century in the same Test match. Only Doug Walters, Greg Chappell, Marnus Labuschagne, Sunil Gavaskar, Shubman Gill, Lawrence Rowe, Brian Lara, Graham Gooch and Kumar Sangakkara had achieved the feat. Conway's 327 runs are the third highest for New Zealand in a single Test, behind Stephen Fleming's 343 (274 and 69) against Sri Lanka in 2003, and Martin Crowe's 329 (30 and 299) against Sri Lanka in 1991. Conway and Latham added 157 runs in the middle session at more than five an over as they looked for quick runs. Kane Williamson made 40 from 37 balls and Rachin Ravindra hit four sixes as he blasted 46 from 23 balls to take New Zealand past 300. West Indies century maker Kavem Hodge took 2-80 from 17 overs with his left-arm spin but captain Roston Chase was hammered for 106 runs in 13 overs. New Zealand took four wickets in the morning session as West Indies were 420 all out, a first innings deficit of 155, with Hodge left stranded unbeaten on a fine 123 from 275 balls, including 15 boundaries. Jacob Duffy finished with 4-86 including the first two wickets of the day, taking his tally for the three-match series to 18. – Agencies

Victims, lawmakers criticize partial
release of Epstein files

"If they're taking this down, just imagine how much more they're trying to hide," said senior Democrat Chuck Schumer. "This could be one of the biggest cover ups in American history"

WASHINGTON: Victims of convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein on Saturday expressed anger after a long-awaited cache of records from cases against him were released with many pages blacked-out and photos censored. The trove of material released by the US Justice Department included photographs of former president Bill Clinton and other famous names in Epstein's social circle including Mick Jagger and Michael Jackson. But blackouts of many of the documents – combined with control over the release by officials in President Donald Trump's administration – fueled allegations of a high-level cover-up. Democrats on Saturday demanded answers after one image that included a photo of Trump was no longer visible in the Justice Department's online release. "If they're taking this down, just imagine how much more they're trying to hide," said senior Democrat Chuck Schumer. "This could be one of the big-

gest cover ups in American history." Among scores of blacked-out sections, one 119-page document labeled "Grand Jury-NY" was entirely redacted. One Epstein survivor, Jess Michaels, said she spent hours combing the documents to find her victim's statement and communication from when she had called an FBI tip line. "I can't find any of those," she told CNN. "Is this the best that the government can do? Even an act of Congress isn't getting us justice." Even so, the files shed some light on the disgraced financier's intimate ties to the rich, famous and powerful – Trump, once a close friend, among them. At least one file contains dozens of censored images of naked or scantily clad figures. Previously unseen photographs of disgraced former prince Andrew show him lying across the legs of five women. Other pictures show Clinton lounging in a hot tub, part of the image blacked out, and swimming alongside a dark-haired

woman who appears to be Epstein's accomplice, Ghislaine Maxwell. When Trump's aides goaded Clinton over the photos, his spokesman responded that the White House "hasn't been hiding these files for months only to dump them late on a Friday to protect Bill Clinton. This is about shielding themselves." Among the paperwork were handwritten notes using phrases such as "I have a female for him" and "[redacted] has girl for tonight." Republican congressman Thomas Massie, who has long pushed for complete release of the files, said the release "grossly fails to comply with both the spirit and the letter of the law." That law required the government's case file to be posted publicly by Friday, constrained only by legal and victim privacy concerns. Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche told ABC that there was no attempt "to hold anything back" to protect Trump. Trump spent months trying to block the disclosure

of the files linked to Epstein, who died in a New York jail cell in 2019 while awaiting trial on sex-trafficking charges. The Republican president ultimately bowed to mounting pressure from Congress – including members of his own party – and last month signed the law compelling publication of the materials. Trump once moved in the same Palm Beach and New York party scene as Epstein, appearing with him at events throughout the 1990s. He severed ties years before Epstein's 2019 arrest and faces no accusations of wrongdoing in the case. But his right-wing base has long fixated on the Epstein saga and conspiracy theories alleging the financier ran a sex trafficking ring for the global elite. Maxwell, Epstein's former girlfriend, remains the only person convicted in connection with his crimes, and is serving a 20-year sentence for recruiting underage girls for the former banker, whose death was ruled a suicide. – Agencies

9 terrorists
killed in
KP areas

FROM PAGE 01

Another IBO was conducted in Bannu district, where "five more khawarij were effectively neutralised by the security forces", it added. The ISPR stated that weapons and ammunition were also recovered from the killed terrorists, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities against the security forces, law enforcement agencies, and the target killing of innocent civilians. Sanitisation operations were being conducted to eliminate any other terrorists found in the area, the military's media wing added. Pakistan has witnessed a sharp increase in terrorist attacks, particularly in the bordering provinces of KP and Balochistan, since the Afghan Taliban regime grabbed power in Afghanistan in 2021. Cross-border terrorism, emanating from Afghanistan, also resulted in week-long clashes between the two nations in October. The attack comes just days after Islamabad issued a demarche to the Afghan Taliban regime, conveying grave concern over the continued support and facilitation provided to Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The Foreign Office summoned the Afghan deputy head of mission on December 19 after four soldiers embraced martyrdom in a terrorist attack in KP's North Waziristan. "Pakistan condemns, in the strongest possible terms, today's terrorist attack carried out by Khwarij belonging to Kharij Gul Bahadur Group on a Pakistan Military camp in North Waziristan District," the FO spokesperson said in a statement. Pakistan said that the Afghan Taliban regime's continued support to terrorist groups enabled them to carry out terrorist attacks against the Pakistan military and the civilian population along the Pak-Afghan border and in adjoining areas. The FO also informed Kabul's envoy that Pakistan reserved the right to defend its sovereignty and protect its citizens, and will take all necessary measures to respond to terrorism originating from Afghan soil.

Dar, Iranian
FM review
relations,
regional
situation

FROM PAGE 01

the need for continued dialogue and coordination to promote peace, stability, and development in the region. Reaffirming their commitment to strengthening bilateral ties, Senator Ishaq Dar and Foreign Minister Araghchi agreed to work closely to deepen cooperation in trade, connectivity, and people-to-people contacts. They also reiterated their shared resolve to jointly contribute to regional peace and development through constructive engagement and enhanced diplomatic coordination. The conversation reflected the longstanding fraternal relations between Pakistan and Iran, rooted in shared history, culture, and mutual respect, and underscored both countries' commitment to further strengthening their partnership in the coming period.

Moroccan
runner wins
2nd Lok
Sahitha
International
Marathon
in Sukkur

DNA

SUKKUR: Moroccan runner Elhyssouf Abdelmajid won the 42km marathon in 2 hours, 22 minutes, and 35 seconds. Ethiopia's Ayalew Mihreter Neber came second (2:28:48) and Kenya's Jackson Maina third (2:31:06) in the second Lok Sahitha International Marathon held here on Sunday. In the women's 10km race, Kenya's Meuni Mutuku won in 40:25 minutes. Japan's Yuko Liguchi was second (44:49), and Lahore's Mah Noor Afzal third (43 minutes).

Briefs

GCC economy
to grow by
4.4% in 2026

RIYADH: Gulf Cooperation Council regional economies are expected to stay resilient in 2026, driven by strong domestic demand and a broadly steady global economy, according to an analysis. In its latest report, Oxford Economics highlighted that the real gross domestic product of the GCC region is expected to expand by 4.4 percent in 2026, up from the projected 4 percent this year. The projection is broadly aligned with the World Bank's December outlook, which expects growth in the GCC region to hit 3.2 percent in 2025 and 4.5 percent in 2026. Earlier this month, the International Monetary Fund said that GCC economic output is forecast to accelerate to an average of 3.3 percent in 2025, up from 1.7 percent in 2024. "Growth in the GCC will likely beat our expectations this year following two years of disappointment. US trade policy under President Donald Trump has had no notable impact on regional growth, and non-energy sectors have sustained their robust momentum," said Oxford Economics. It added: "Meanwhile, oil production has gradually increased, providing a boost to the region's economies. We expect GCC growth will rise to 4.4 percent in 2026, from 4 percent this year." In November, the GCC Statistical Center said that economic growth in the region is set to accelerate to 4.3 percent by 2027, driven by expanding non-oil. **APP**

KSA needs local
talent to build
modern financial
oversight

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia must invest in national talent alongside regulatory reforms to build a modern financial oversight system, Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan said. Speaking at the Financial Oversight Forum, Al-Jadaan said developing an effective oversight framework requires sustained investment in human capabilities through training and development programs. This aligns with Saudi Arabia's broader efforts to build future-ready skills, including the launch of the National Skills Platform in April to equip the workforce with capabilities aligned with global trends. It also comes as the Kingdom's financial ecosystem reached a record SR1 trillion (\$267 billion) in locally managed assets in 2024, marking a key milestone in its transformation under Vision 2030. "Institutions don't advance through systems alone, but also through the culture of their employees," Al-Jadaan said during his speech. **APP**

Middle East
AI adoption
reaches 75%,
beating global
average

RIYADH: Artificial intelligence is becoming embedded across Middle East workplaces, with 75 percent of employees using AI tools at work over the past year, a higher rate than the 69 percent global average, a new survey showed. According to PwC's Middle East Workforce Hopes and Fears Survey 2025, the region is outpacing global peers in adopting AI for everyday work, driven by government and corporate digital transformation efforts. Based on responses from 1,286 employees, the survey indicates AI use has moved beyond pilot stages, with 32 percent of workers using generative AI tools daily — above the global average of 28 percent and reflecting growing familiarity with AI-driven workflows. The survey findings align with trends observed in Saudi Arabia, where advanced technologies such as AI are being widely embraced across workplaces. In November, a report released by KPMG highlighted the Kingdom's progress in the technology sector, noting that 84 percent of CEOs in Saudi Arabia are ready to deploy AI responsibly — well above the 76 percent global benchmark — supported by the Kingdom's data governance ecosystem, including national initiatives led by the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority. **—APP**



LAHORE: Dr. Nasrum Iqbal MD FACP, Chairman APPNA Winter Meeting-2025, Dr. Zain Khan, Director, GEOPAK International Hospital and Syed Amir Raza, Project Director, APPNA called on the Acting President and Chairman Senate of Pakistan Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani.

Trump set to expand immigration crackdown

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump is preparing for a more aggressive immigration crackdown in 2026 with billions in new funding, including by raiding more workplaces — even as backlash builds ahead of next year's midterm elections. Trump has already surged immigration agents into major US cities, where they swept through neighborhoods and clashed with residents. While federal agents this year conducted some high-profile raids on businesses, they largely avoided raiding farms, factories and other businesses that are economically important but known to employ immigrants without legal status. ICE and Border Patrol will get \$170 billion in additional funds through September 2029 — a huge surge of funding over their existing annual budgets of about \$19 billion after the Republican-controlled Congress passed a massive spending package in July. Administration officials say they plan to hire thousands more agents, open new detention centers, pick up more immigrants in local jails and partner with outside companies to track down people without legal status. The expanded deportation plans come despite growing signs of political backlash ahead of next year's midterm elections. Miami, one of the cities most affected by Trump's crackdown because of its large immigrant population, elected its first Democratic mayor in nearly three decades last week in what the mayor-elect said was, in part, a reaction to the president.

Other local elections and polling have suggested rising concern among voters wary of aggressive immigration tactics. "People are beginning to see this not as an immigration question anymore as much as it is a violation of rights, a violation of due process and militarizing neighborhoods extraconstitutionally," said Mike Madrid, a moderate Republican political strategist. "There is no question that is a problem for the president and Republicans." Trump's overall approval rating on immigration policy fell from 50 percent in March, before he launched crackdowns in several major US cities, to 41 percent in mid-December, for what had been his strongest issue. Rising public unease has focused on masked federal agents using aggressive tactics such as deploying tear gas in residential neighborhoods and detaining US citizens. In addition to expanding enforcement actions, Trump has stripped hundreds of thousands of Haitian, Venezuelan and Afghan immigrants of temporary legal status, expanding the pool of people who could be deported as the president promises to remove 1 million immigrants each year — a goal he almost certainly will miss this year. So far, some 622,000 immigrants have been deported since Trump took office in January. White House border czar Tom Homan told Reuters Trump had delivered on his promise of a historic deportation operation and removing criminals while shutting down illegal immigration across the

US-Mexico border. Homan said the number of arrests will increase sharply as ICE hires more officers and expands detention capacity with the new funding. "I think you're going to see the numbers explode greatly next year," Homan said. Homan said the plans "absolutely" include more enforcement actions at workplaces. Sarah Pierce, director of social policy at the center-left group Third Way, said US businesses have been reluctant to push back on Trump's immigration crackdown in the past year but could be prompted to speak up if the focus turns to employers. Pierce said it will be interesting to see "whether or not businesses finally stand up to this administration." Trump, a Republican, recaptured the White House promising record levels of deportations, saying it was needed after years of high levels of illegal immigration under his Democratic predecessor, Joe Biden. He kicked off a campaign that dispatched federal agents to US cities in search of possible immigration offenders, sparking protests and lawsuits over racial profiling and violent tactics. Some businesses shut down to avoid raids or because of a lack of customers. Parents vulnerable to arrest kept their children home from school or had neighbors walk them. Some US citizens started carrying passports. Despite the focus on criminals in its public statements, government data shows that the Trump administration has been arresting more people who have not been charged

with any crimes beyond their alleged immigration violations than previous administrations. Some 41 percent of the roughly 54,000 people arrested by ICE and detained by late November had no criminal record beyond a suspected immigration violation, agency figures show. In the first few weeks in January, before Trump took office, just 6 percent of those arrested and detained by ICE were not facing charges for other crimes or previously convicted. The Trump administration has taken aim at legal immigrants as well. Agents have arrested spouses of US citizens at their green card interviews, pulled people from certain countries out of their naturalization ceremonies, moments before they were to become citizens, and revoked thousands of student visas. The administration's planned focus on job sites in the coming year could generate many more arrests and affect the US economy and Republican-leaning business owners. Replacing immigrants arrested during workplace raids could lead to higher labor costs, undermining Trump's fight against inflation, which analysts expect to be a major issue in the closely watched November elections, determining control of Congress. Administration officials earlier this year exempted such businesses from enforcement on Trump's orders, then quickly reversed, Reuters reported at the time. **—Agencies**

Swiss interior minister open to social media ban for kids

ZURICH: Switzerland must do more to shield children from social media risks, Interior Minister Elisabeth Baume-Schneider was quoted as saying on Sunday, signalling she was open to a potential ban on the platforms for youngsters. Following Australia's recent ban on social media for under-16s, Baume-Schneider told SonntagsBlick newspaper that Switzerland should examine similar measures. "The debate in Australia and the EU is important. It must also be conducted in Switzerland. I am open to a social media ban," said the minister, a member of the center-left Social Democrats. "We must better protect our children." She said authorities needed to look at what should be restricted, listing options such as banning social media use by children, curbing harmful content, and addressing algorithms that prey on young people's vulnerabilities. Detailed discussions will begin in the new year, supported by a report on the issue, Baume-Schneider said, adding: "We mustn't forget social media platforms themselves: they must take responsibility for what children and young people consume." Australia's ban has won praise from many parents and groups advocating for the welfare of children, and drawn criticism from major technology companies and defenders of free speech. Earlier this month, the parliament of the Swiss canton of Fribourg voted to prohibit children from using mobile phones at school until they are about 15, the latest step taken at a local level in Switzerland to curb their use in schools. **—APP**

London police using withdrawn powers to clamp down on pro-Palestine rallies

LONDON: London's Metropolitan Police have used powers that have been withdrawn to clamp down on pro-Palestine rallies in the capital, legal experts have said. The Guardian and Liberty Investigates obtained evidence that police officers had imposed restrictions on at least two protests based on the principle of "cumulative disruption." But that power was withdrawn by the Court of Appeal in May, according to legal experts. All references to cumulative disruption have been removed from relevant legislation, yet the Home Office and the Met continue to insist that police officers retain the power to consider the concept when suppressing protests. On May 7, five days after the powers were withdrawn, the Met banned a Jewish pro-Palestine group from holding its weekly rally in north London, citing the cumulative impact on the neighborhood's Jewish community. Last month, the Met forced the Palestine Coalition to change the route of its rally on three days' notice, highlighting the cumulative impact on businesses during Black Friday weekend. Raj Chada, a partner at Hodge, Jones & Allen and a leading criminal lawyer, said: "There is no reference to cumulative disruption in the original (legislation). The regulations that introduced this concept were quashed in May 2025, so I fail to see how this can still be the approach taken by police. There is no legal basis for this whatsoever." The Met appeared "not to care" if it was acting within the law, the Network for Police Monitoring said, adding that the revelation surrounding "cumulative disruption" demonstrated an "ongoing crackdown on protest" that had reached an "alarming point" by police in London. Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood announced plans in October to reintroduce the power to consider cumulative impact in toughened form. But Nick Glynn, a retired senior officer from Leicestershire Police, said: "The police have too many protest powers already and they definitely don't need any more. If they are provided with them, they not only use them (but) as in this case, they stretch them. "They go beyond what was intended. The right to protest is sacrosanct and more stifling of protest makes democracy worth less." Cumulative disruption was regularly considered and employed in regulations if protests met the threshold of causing "serious disruption to the life of the community." The Court of Appeal withdrew the power following a legal challenge by human rights group Liberty. Ben Jamal, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign's director, was reportedly told by Alison Heydari, the Met's deputy assistant commissioner, that her decision on imposing protest regulations "will be purely around the cumulative effect of your protests." She reportedly added that "this is not just about Saturday's protest but it's a combination of all the impacts of all the processions so far," referencing "serious disruption" to the business community. "You've used this route in November 2024, and you've used it a few times before then as well. So, there is an impact." The repeated disruption to PSC-hosted marches, the largest pro-Palestine events in London, was a "demobilizer," Jamal said. It also caused confusion about march starting points and led to protesters being harassed by police officers who accused them of violating protest conditions, he added. A Met spokesperson told The Guardian: "The outcome of the judicial review does not prevent senior officers from considering the cumulative impact of protest on the life of communities. **—APP**

Israel's security cabinet approves 19 new settlements in West Bank

JERUSALEM: Israel's security cabinet approved the establishment of 19 new settlements in the occupied West Bank, a move the country's far-right finance minister said on Sunday was aimed at preventing the establishment of a Palestinian state. The decision brings the total number of settlements approved over the past three years to 69, according to a statement from the office of Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich. The latest approvals come days after the United Nations said the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank — all of which are considered illegal under international law — had reached its highest level since at least 2017. "The proposal by Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and Defense Minister Israel Katz to declare and formalize 19 new settlements in Judea and Samaria has been approved by the cabinet," the statement said, without specifying when the decision was taken. Smotrich is a vocal proponent of settlement expansion and a settler himself. "On the ground, we are blocking the establishment of a Palestinian terror state," he said in the statement. "We will continue to develop, build, and settle the land of our ancestral heritage, with faith in the justice of our path." UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has recently condemned what he described as Israel's "re-

lentless" expansion of settlements in the occupied territory. It "continues to fuel tensions, impede access by Palestinians to their land and threaten the viability of a fully independent, democratic, contiguous and sovereign Palestinian State," he said earlier this month. Since the start of the war in Gaza, calls for the establishment of a Palestinian state have proliferated, with several European countries, Canada and Australia recently moving to formally recognize such a state, drawing rebukes from Israel. A UN report said the expansion of settlements was at its highest point since 2017, when the United Nations began tracking such data. "These figures represent a sharp increase compared to previous years," Guterres said, noting an average of 12,815 housing units were added annually between 2017 and 2022. "These developments are further entrenching the unlawful Israeli occupation and violating international law and undermining the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination." Excluding east Jerusalem, which was occupied and annexed by Israel in 1967, more than 500,000 Israelis live in the West Bank, along with about three million Palestinian residents. Smotrich's office said the 19 newly approved settlements are located in what it described as "highly strategic" areas, adding that two of

them — Ganim and Kadim in the northern West Bank — would be re-established after being dismantled two decades ago. Five of the 19 settlements already existed but had not previously been granted legal status under Israeli law, the statement said. While all Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territory are considered illegal under international law, some wildcat outposts are also illegal in the eyes of the Israeli government. Many of these, however, are later legalized by Israeli authorities, fueling fears about the possible annexation of the territory. US President Donald Trump has warned Israel about annexing the West Bank. "Israel would lose all of its support from the United States if that happened," Trump said in a recent interview to Time magazine. Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967, and violence there has soared since the Gaza war erupted in October 2023. Israeli troops or settlers have killed at least 1,027 Palestinians in the West Bank — both militants and civilians — since the start of the fighting in Gaza, according to an AFP tally based on Palestinian health ministry figures. At least 44 Israelis have been killed in the West Bank in Palestinian attacks or Israeli military operations during the same period, according to Israeli data. **—Agencies**

Taiwan police rule out 'terrorism' in metro stabbing

TAIPEI: Taiwan police on Sunday ruled out "terrorism" in a metro stabbing in the capital Taipei, where an attacker killed three and wounded 11. A 27-year-old man, identified by police by his family name Chang, set off smoke bombs at Taipei Main Station metro on Friday afternoon before launching into a three-hour stabbing spree. The attacker then moved to a shopping district near Zhongshan station, authorities said. "Based on what we have established so far in the investigation, the suspect Chang did not make or display any statements or views related to politics, religion, or any specific ideology, and we have preliminarily ruled out terrorism," a senior Taipei City Police Department official told AFP, under the condition of anonymity. "Terrorist attacks have a specific definition and the suspect does not meet that definition," he added. Taipei Mayor Chiang Wan-an said the suspect was found dead the same day, after jumping off a nearby building. The senior police official said investigators also found searches for "random killings" on Chang's iPad, including material related to a Taipei metro stabbing in 2014 when a man killed four people. Chang had served in the military but was discharged over driving under the influence of alcohol, according to police, who said he was wanted after he failed to report for reserve military training. **—APP**

San Francisco hit by electricity outage, leaving 130,000 people without power

SAN FRANCISCO: A huge electricity outage hit San Francisco, leaving 130,000 residents without power and prompting city authorities to ask residents to stay home, according to official and utility provider statements. Large parts of the West Coast tech hub, which has a population of more than 800,000 people, were plunged into darkness with disruptions to public transport and many traffic lights not working on a busy Christmas shopping weekend. "We are working with first responders and city officials on an outage in San Francisco affecting approximately 130,000 customers," said Pacific Gas & Electric Company, the city's main power provider, in a statement on X. The city's mayor told residents to stay off roads if possible, adding some traffic signals were out and authorities had sent police and traffic officers to manage intersections. **APP**

Oman's Islamic banking assets rise to \$24b

JEDDAH: Oman's Islamic banking assets climbed to about 9.2 billion Omani rials (\$23.9 billion) by the end of October, underscoring steady expansion in the sultanate's financial sector as credit growth remains robust. Assets held by Islamic banks and Islamic windows accounted for 19.5 percent of Oman's total banking system, up 10.8 percent from a year earlier, the Oman News Agency reported. Oman's banking sector performance reflects steady progress toward Vision 2040, which prioritizes economic diversification, private sector growth, and financial resilience. "As for the total financing provided by institutions engaged in this activity, it also rose by 10.4 percent, reaching around 7.4 billion Omani rials," the ONA reported, adding that deposits with Islamic banks and Islamic windows grew 11.9 percent to roughly 7.3 billion rials by the end of October. Rising credit flows, particularly to non-financial corporates and households, are fueling the development of small and medium-sized enterprises and domestic investment in Oman, supporting efforts to reduce reliance on hydrocarbons and build a more diversified economy. **APP**

Briefs

Iraq's
political
future in
limbo

DNA

BAGDAH: The government that eventually emerges will be inheriting a security situation that has stabilized in recent years, but it will also face a fragmented parliament, growing political influence by armed factions, a fragile economy, and often conflicting international and regional pressures, including the future of Iran-backed armed groups. Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani's party took the largest number of seats in the election. Al-Sudani positioned himself in his first term as a pragmatist focused on improving public services and managed to keep Iraq on the sidelines of regional conflicts.

While his party is nominally part of the Coordination Framework, a coalition of Iran-backed Shiite parties that became the largest parliamentary bloc, observers say it's unlikely that the Coordination Framework will support Al-Sudani's reelection bid. "The choice for prime minister has to be someone the Framework believes they can control and doesn't have his own political ambitions," said Sajad Jiyad, an Iraqi political analyst and fellow at The Century Foundation think tank.

Dollar
shortage
continues

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Despite authorities' best efforts, there is a dire shortage of dollars in the open market, and many currency exchanges are "only selling what they buy", causing consternation among those planning to travel abroad for the holidays, or in the new year. Visits to multiple exchange outlets across different parts of the metropolis revealed that currency dealers are facing a dearth of greenbacks in their accounts. Some have stopped selling dollars altogether, while others are rationing their supply, only allowing customers to purchase up to \$100 at a time. In addition, a small number of exchanges only have old-design dollar notes in stock.

Romanian Embassy concludes
cultural days with Christmas concert

Ambassador of Romania to Pakistan, Dan Stoenescu, warmly welcomed the guests and highlighted the importance of cultural diplomacy in strengthening people-to-people contacts and fostering mutual understanding between nations



SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Embassy of Romania concluded the Romanian Cultural Days in Pakistan with a special Christmas concert, held in a festive and heartwarming atmosphere that celebrated music, culture, and the universal spirit of peace and goodwill associated with the Christmas season. The event brought together members of the diplomatic community, cultural enthusiasts, and friends of Romania for an evening marked by artistic excellence and shared joy.

In his brief remarks, Ambassador of Romania to Pakistan, Dan Stoenescu, warmly welcomed the guests and expressed gratitude to the audience for their presence and continued interest in Romanian culture. Introducing the performers, the ambassador highlighted the importance of cultural diplomacy in strengthening people-to-people contacts and fostering mutual understanding between nations. The concert, hosted at Saint Thomas Church, Islamabad, featured renowned Romanian soprano Georgiana Costea-Glugă, accompanied by accomplished pianist Sheeza Maqsood. Together, they captivated the audience with a rich

and carefully curated repertoire of traditional Romanian carols and beloved seasonal melodies, offering a unique musical experience that blended Romania's cultural heritage with universally cherished Christmas classics. The programme included iconic Romanian carols such as "Mo Crăciun cu plete dalbe" and "O, ce veste minunată", alongside internationally celebrated pieces including "Silent Night" and other festive favourites. The soulful and expressive performances created a warm, joyful, and celebratory ambiance, resonating deeply with listeners and filling the historic church with the spirit of the season.

Members of the diplomatic corps, representatives of various faiths, the Romanian community in Pakistan, and music lovers from Islamabad attended the concert, reflecting the unifying power of music and cultural exchange. The event also underscored shared values of harmony, compassion, and coexistence that transcend national and cultural boundaries. As the closing highlight of the Romanian Cultural Days in Pakistan, the Christmas concert stood as a meaningful symbol of cultural dialogue and enduring friendship between Romania and Pakistan, leaving the audience with lasting memories of an evening rooted in tradition, artistry, and goodwill.

ADB inks agreement
for CPEC ML-1

ISLAMABAD, December 20 (: In major development, Asian Development Bank (ADB) has signed an agreement for Main Line One (ML-1) project, a major railway infrastructure project in Pakistan that is part of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). It involves the upgrading and modernization of Pakistan's existing railway line from Karachi to Peshawar, covering a distance of approximately 1,872 kilometers. Pakistan Railways official told Gwadar Pro that progress came into play during important meeting among Federal Minister for Pakistan Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi, ADB Director General Leah Gutierrez and Defence Secretary Lt Gen Muhammad Ali on 19th December (Friday) in Islamabad. The meeting was also attended by Secretary Power Division Dr Fakhar Alam Irfan and Director General of the National Logistics Cell, Major General Farrukh Shehzad Rao. He described ML-1 as the central rail corridor, saying it carries about 80% of passenger traffic and 90% of freight nationwide, and argued that ageing infrastructure requires urgent upgrades. He revealed that groundbreaking ceremony for the Karachi-Rohri section of ML-1 is planned for July 2026. Earlier, experts from the Asian Development Bank have already carried out on-ground inspections of the Karachi-Rohri section and reviewed existing infrastructure as part of a fact-finding exercise to assess financing options. ML-1 is aimed at improving Pakistan's rail network, enhancing its speed, capacity, and safety. Once completed, it is expected to play a crucial role in Pakistan's economy by reducing travel time, facilitating faster cargo transport, and promoting regional connectivity. According to sources, under the revised plan, the project consisted of three phases having a total length of 1,872km. Phase-1, 2, 3 and 4 comprise Karachi-Multan, Multan-Lahore, Lahore-Lalamusa and Lalamusa-Peshawar. The design speed would be up to 140 km per hour which can be increased to 160 km per hour on the upgraded track once the entire left/right of the track is fenced and some other upgrade work is done completely. The railway system in Pakistan is more than 100 years old, constructed during the British days. Since the country came into being 76 years back, the performance of railways has gone from bad to worse. The timeline of passenger trains from Karachi to Peshawar remained 24 hours. Railways also ended up with a loss of hundreds of billions of rupees over the last several decades, Gwadar Pro reported. - DNA

Zelensky says US must pile
pressure on Russia to end war

MIAMI: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Saturday called on the United States to put more pressure on Russia to end the war, as diplomats converged on Miami for fresh talks. Zelensky also said that Washington had proposed the first face-to-face negotiations between Ukraine and Russia in half a year, but later expressed skepticism that would help. Zelensky said that only the United States was capable of persuading Russia to end the war, and he called on Washington to increase pressure on Moscow to make that happen.

"America must clearly say: if not diplomacy, then there will be full pressure...Putin does not yet feel the kind of pressure that should exist," he said, stressing the need for more arms supplies to Ukraine and sanctions on the entire Russian economy. The Ukrainian leader's comments in Kyiv came as Russian envoy Kirill Dmitriev arrived in Miami where Ukrainian and European teams have also gathered for the negotiations, mediated by US special envoy Steve Witkoff and President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner. - Agencies

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Over 500,000
displaced in
Cambodia

PHNOM PENH: More than half a million people in Cambodia have been displaced from their homes by two weeks of deadly border clashes with neighbouring Thailand, Phnom Penh's interior ministry said Sunday. "At present, more than half a million Cambodian people, including women and children, are suffering severe hardship due to forced displacement from their homes and schools to escape artillery shells, rockets, and aerial bombardments carried out by Thailand's F-16 aircraft," the interior ministry said in a statement, giving the total number of people evacuated as 518,611. Around 400,000 people have been displaced in Thailand due to the reignited border conflict, Bangkok has said. The renewed fighting between the Southeast Asian neighbours this month, including with tanks, drones and artillery, has killed at least 22 people in Thailand and 19 in Cambodia, according to officials. The conflict stems from a territorial dispute over the colonial-era demarcation of their 800-kilometre (500-mile) border and a smattering of ancient temple ruins situated on the frontier. Each side has blamed the other for instigating the fresh fighting and traded accusations of attacks on civilians, after five days of clashes in July killed dozens. China, the European Union, the United States, the ASEAN regional bloc chair Malaysia and the United Nations have all called for a ceasefire. Foreign ministers of ASEAN nations, including Cambodia and Thailand, are set to meet on Monday in Kuala Lumpur where they will discuss the conflict. - APP