



Islamabad POST

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Detailed News On Page-08

Ukraine peace deal likely at trump meet

Detailed News On Page-08



Babar Azam dropped from Sri Lanka tour

Detailed News On Page-06



Briefs

Pakistan reaffirms support for Somalia sovereignty

ABID LATIF

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar received a call from Somalia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Abdissalam Abdi Ali. During the conversation, Ishaq Dar reaffirmed Pakistan's full support for Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, condemning any actions aimed at undermining it. The Somali Foreign Minister expressed gratitude for Pakistan's continued and sustained support, and requested Islamabad's assistance in raising Somalia's concerns at the United Nations Security Council. Dar assured that Pakistan will stand by Somalia at the UN and other multilateral fora.

Four Indian sponsored terrorists killed in Kalat District: ISPR

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Security forces killed four terrorists in an intelligence based operation (IBO) in Kalat District of Balochistan, on reported presence of terrorists, belonging to Indian proxy, Fitna al Hindustan. "During the conduct of operation, own forces effectively engaged the terrorists' location, and after an intense fire exchange, four Indian sponsored terrorists were sent to hell," said a news release issued by Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR). Weapons, ammunition and explosives were also recovered from the terrorists, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area. "Sanitization operations are being conducted to eliminate any other Indian sponsored terrorist found in the area. Relentless Counter Terrorism campaign under vision "Azam e Istehkam" (as approved by Federal Apex Committee on National Action Plan) by Security Forces and Law Enforcement Agencies of Pakistan will continue at full pace to wipe out menace of foreign sponsored and supported terrorism from the country," it further said.

French 'legend' Brigitte Bardot dead at 91

PARIS: French film icon Brigitte Bardot, a symbol of sexual liberation of the 1950s and sixties who turned her back on cinema to devote herself to protecting animals, has died aged 91, her foundation said Sunday. Bardot was hospitalised in October and, in November, released a statement denying rumours that she had died. The foundation did not say when or where she died, however. "The Brigitte Bardot Foundation announces with immense sadness the death of its founder and president, Madame Brigitte Bardot, a world-renowned actress and singer, who chose to abandon her prestigious career to dedicate her life and energy to animal welfare and her foundation," it said in a statement sent to AFP. Tributes were immediately paid to the star who became known as "BB" in her home country. - Agencies

Rare unity

Muslim world rejects Israel's recognition of Somaliland

These countries also reiterated full support of the sovereignty of the Federal Republic of Somalia, and the unequivocal rejection of any measures that undermine the unity of Somalia, its territorial integrity or its sovereignty over its entire territory

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Muslim and Arab countries, in a joint statement, unequivocally rejected Israel's recognition of the "Somaliland" region of the Federal Republic of Somalia, citing the serious repercussions of such unprecedented measure on peace and security in the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea and its serious effects on international peace and security as a whole, which they said also reflected Israel's full and blatant disregard to international law. The joint statement was shared by the Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan with media on Sunday. The joint statement included Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, the Union of the Comoros, the Republic of Djibouti, the Republic of The Gambia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Iraq, the State of Kuwait, the State of Libya, the Republic of Maldives, the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Sultanate of Oman, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the State of Palestine, the State of Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Federal Republic of Somalia, the Republic of the Sudan, the Republic of Türkiye,

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Pakistan, Egypt reaffirm commitment to regional peace

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Egypt have reaffirmed their shared commitment to promoting regional peace, stability, and development. The affirmation came during a telephonic conversation between Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar and Egypt's Foreign Minister Badr Ahmed Mohamed Abdelatty. Both leaders expressed satisfaction over the positive momentum in bilateral relations and agreed to further strengthen cooperation across diverse sectors. They also exchanged views on key regional and global developments, with particular focus on the situations in Somalia and Yemen, underscoring the importance of collaborative efforts for peace and stability.

Sitting in UK

MQM founder ordered Imran Farooq's murder

"I am ready to fully cooperate to ensure those responsible for Dr Farooq's murder are brought to justice," says senior MQM-P leader and health minister Mustafa Kamal

DNA

KARACHI: Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) senior leader Syed Mustafa Kamal said the MQM founder, Altaf Hussain, had orchestrated the murder of Dr Imran Farooq while under the influence of alcohol. Speaking to the media in Karachi, Kamal, once a close aide of Hussain, alleged that Dr Imran Farooq — one of the founding members of the party — was murdered as a "gift" on the MQM founder's birthday. Kamal, who holds the portfolio of the federal health ministry, also accused the MQM founder of creating "unnecessary controversy" over the death of Farooq's widow, who passed away recently. "Donations were collected from around the world in the name of sending the body to Pakistan," he alleged. His allegations come after Shumaila Imran Farooq passed away in London earlier this month after battling a form of cancer and several other health complications. She kept seeking justice for her husband, who was killed in 2010, and according to a Geo News report, was "abandoned by both MQMs — London and Pakistan."

Dr Farooq, who had served as the first secretary general of Mohajir Qaumi Movement, which was later renamed as Muttahida Qaumi Movement, was found murdered near the party's London office on September 16, 2010. Kamal said that he had remained silent on the matter for the past two years, but the exiled MQM founder had alleged that Dr Imran Farooq's killers are within the ranks of MQMP and the Pak-Sarazameen Party — a political party launched by Kamal that has now merged with MQMP. "He (Altaf), while under the influence of alcohol, told his workers in Pakistan that Dr Farooq was causing trouble," he said, adding that the workers then traveled to London and killed the former secretary general.

Continued on Page 06

India okays hydropower project on Chenab River

Project will generate up to 260MW of electricity; poses defence and strategic detriment for Pakistan

FAIAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: In a flagrant violation of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), India has finally given approval to the Dulhasti Stage-II hydropower project on the Chenab River in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJ&K). The project would cost 3,277.45 crore Indian rupees, and work could be started on the disputed hydropower project early next year. The project will be developed by a public sector Indian company, NHPC Limited. Sources have told the publication that the Dulhasti Stage-II project will generate up to 260 megawatts of electricity. New Delhi's decision is to be interpreted in the context of its decision to keep the IWT in abeyance following the Pahalgam incident, which led to the cross-border clashes between the two nuclear-armed neighbours after the former launched attacks inside Pakistan, prompting Islamabad to retaliate. Despite India's move, Pakistan has reaffirmed its commitment to the treaty, announcing that it will continue to fully

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BD police say Hadi's killers fled to India

NEWS DESK

DHAKA: Bangladesh police on Sunday said the alleged killers of popular student leader Sharif Osman Hadi had fled to India, in comments likely to further strain relations with its neighbour. Hadi, a vocal Indian critic who took part in last year's mass uprising, was shot by masked assailants in Dhaka earlier this month and later succumbed to his injuries at a hospital in Singapore. His death set off violent protests with angry mobs torching several buildings, including two major newspapers deemed to favour India, as well as a prominent cultural institution. With protests being held across the country almost daily, pressure has been growing on Bangladesh's interim government to arrest the killers of Hadi, who was set to contest the general elections in February next year. "The killing was premeditated. Those behind it have been identified," SN Nazrul Islam,

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ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Saudi Arabia Nawaf Saeed Al Maliki welcomes Ambassador of Sudan to his embassy. Both sides discussed matters of mutual interest. - DNA

Bilawal tells PTI


Renounce political extremism and 'return' to democratic fold

PPP chief calls for electoral reforms before polls, says elections not imminent

NAZIR SIYAL

LARKANA: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on Sunday urged the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) to renounce political extremism and rejoin democratic politics, warning that attacks on state institutions over leaders' arrests invite consequences. "You attacked our state institutions just because of a meagre NAB case against your leader [PTI founder Imran Khan], then don't complain," Bilawal said while speaking to the media in Larkana. "Do away with political extremism and return to the democratic fold. This will be better not only for their party but their workers as well," he added. The PPP chief, who has served as the foreign minister and whose party is an ally of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), has repeatedly urged PTI to shun its hardliner stance and show responsible political behaviour. While there were talks of imposing a ban on the Khan-founded party recently, Bilawal maintained that he was against such ideas.


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Bilawal opens ICU for kids in Larkana

LARKANA: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, has said that Sindh has the best health facilities available, and no one can compete with the Sindh government in the health sector. The Sindh government is taking comprehensive measures for the welfare of the people. He expressed these views while talking to the media on Sunday after inaugurating the Intensive Care Unit for children and newborns at the Children's Hospital in Larkana, under the Sindh Institute of Child Health and Neonatology. He said that before the Pakistan Peoples Party government, the infant mortality rate was high in Sindh. The mortality rate in Sindh is now decreasing rapidly. A lot of work has been done in the health sector

in Sindh after the 18th Amendment. The Sindh government is taking robust measures for the welfare of the people. Like NICVD, NICH also exists in Karachi in Sindh. There are four centers of it in Karachi. Besides, its centers are also present in Nawabshah, Sukkur, Larkana, and Jamshoro. PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said that the Sindh government was doing work that was not happening in other provinces. In Sindh, patients are being provided 100 percent free medical facilities. We are trying to provide children with 100 percent free medical facilities according to international standards, he added. He said that the common man was struggling to make ends meet with his salary. It is essential to provide

the public with quality treatment and healthcare facilities. It is our duty to provide facilities to the people, he said. In response to a question, he said that we are very grateful to Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif and PML-N leader Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, who sent their delegation to Garhi Khuda Bakhsh Bhutto on the occasion of the martyrdom anniversary of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto. On this occasion, Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah, PPP Sindh President Nisar Ahmed Khuhro, Health Minister Sindh Dr. Azra Fazal Pechuho, MPA Nida Khuhro, MNA Khursheed Ahmed Junejo and others were present.—APP

KP releases funds for boys, girls' schools in province

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has approved release of non-salary funds for first two quarters of the financial year 2025-26 for provision of basic facilities and repair and maintenance in government schools. According to a statement issued by the provincial finance department on Sunday, directives have been issued to transfer a total amount of Rs 2,738.736 million to District Account No. 4. The funds have been released under PTC fund, which will ensure minor repairs and renovation of classrooms in schools. Rs 1,047.229 million has been allocated for girls' schools in the province and Rs 1,691.506 million for boys' schools. According to the document, this amount has been transferred to 28 districts of the province. The details of some major districts are included: Peshawar Rs 218 million, Mardan Rs 225 million, Swat Rs 181, DI Khan Rs 138, Abbottabad Rs 125 and Mansehra Rs 161 million.—APP

DC takes steps to revitalize Municipal Library Bannu

PESHAWAR: Deputy Commissioner Bannu, Muhammad Fahim initiated a comprehensive renovation plan for Municipal Public Library, a century-old institution that has been a beacon of knowledge in the region. The municipal public library, was established in 1905 as Queen Victoria Library, has been in a state of disrepair for years, but the recent visit by the Deputy Commissioner has brought new hope for its revival.

Accompanied by senior officials, including Assistant Commissioner Wazir Sub division, Dr. Ishtiaq Ahmad, and Tehsil Municipal Officer Yousaf Khan, Muhammad Fahim reviewed the renovation plan and directed the authorities to expedite the work. The Deputy Commissioner emphasized that a book-friendly environment is essential for the intellectual growth of the younger generation, and the renovation of the Municipal library is crucial to achieving this goal.

"We are committed to preserving our cultural heritage and providing modern facilities to our students and citizens."

Fahim said that with its rich history and cultural significance, the library has the potential to become a hub of learning and intellectual property in the region.

The initiative is expected to not only restore the library to its former glory but also provide a platform for the community to come together and engage in meaningful discussions and activities.

He further added that renovation plan is expected to be completed within a stipulated time-frame, and the library is likely to become a vibrant center of learning, equipped with modern facilities and resources.—APP

RUDA advances plantation work

LAHORE: Significant progress has been made in the plantation project at the Mahmood Booti dumping site under the Ring Road Rehabilitation initiative.

RUDA official sources told APP that due to the presence of seven protective layers at the dumping site, the plantation of large trees will be avoided. Instead, shallow-rooted trees, shrubs, and selected shrubs will be planted to ensure environmental safety. Once the old dumping area was fully covered, plantation will begin in a phased manner. The project will be implemented over an area of approximately 42 acres and was expected to significantly reduce air pollution and enhance the aesthetic appeal of areas adjacent to the Ring Road.—APP

Snowfall expected across northern Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's picturesque northern valleys and hill stations are set to receive a generous spell of fresh snowfall just in time for New Year celebrations, offering thousands of winter vacationers the perfect backdrop for their holiday getaways. As families take advantage of winter school holidays and office workers utilize their remaining annual leave before year-end expiry, tourists from across the country have flocked to scenic mountainous regions to experience snowfall along with celebrating the arrival of 2026. The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) has forecast widespread rain and snowfall that will blanket popular tourist destinations from December 30 through January 02, 2026, creating ideal conditions for those who have planned their vacations specifically to witness the magic of winter in destinations like Murree, Swat, Hunza, Naran, and Kashmir valleys at this time. The National Weather Forecasting Centre, Pakistan Meteorological De-

partment (PMD) announced that a westerly wave is likely to approach the western parts of Pakistan from the night of December 29, and is expected to strengthen from December 30. This weather system is anticipated to grip most upper and central parts of the country on December 31, and will persist in upper regions until the morning of January 02, 2026. The timing coincides perfectly with the peak winter tourism season, when hotels and guesthouses in northern areas are fully booked with families and office workers eager to make the most of their year-end vacations and welcome the new year amid snow-covered mountains and pristine valleys. In Balochistan and Sindh, rain, wind, thunderstorms with snowfall over the hills are expected in Quetta, Ziarat, Chaman, Pishin, Qila Abdullah, Qilla Saifullah, Noushki, Harnai, Zhob, Kalat, Barkhan, Sibi, Loralai, Musakhel, Turbat, Gawadar, Jiwhani, Lasbella, Kech, Awaran, Chagi, Panjgur, Khuzdar, Washuk and Kharan from the night of Decem-

ber 29 to December 31 with occasional gaps. In Sindh, isolated light rain and drizzle is expected in Karachi, Hyderabad, Dadu, Jacobabad, Kashmore, Larkana, Thatta, Badin and surrounding areas on December 30. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, home to some of Pakistan's most beloved tourist valleys including Swat, Naran, and Kaghan, will witness rain, wind, thunderstorms with moderate to few heavy snowfalls in upper areas. The affected regions include Chitral, Dir, Swat, Shangla, Kohistan, Battagram, Mansehra, Abbottabad, Haripur, Buner, Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, Waziristan, Peshawar, Charsadda, Nowshera, Swabi, Bannu, Karak, Dera Ismail Khan, Tank and Kohat from December 30 to January 01 with occasional gaps. Tourists currently enjoying winter vacations in these scenic valleys can expect fresh snowfall that will transform the landscape into a winter wonderland, creating perfect opportunities for snow activities, photography.—APP

Sahulat On-the-Go Bazaar emerges as major public attraction

LAHORE: Punjab's first-of-its-kind 'Sahulat On-the-Go Bazaar', launched on the directions of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, has emerged as a major public attraction in Lahore by providing essential commodities at DC-notified rates while ensuring dignified livelihoods for street vendors. More than 400 stalls have been allotted to vendors through an open balloting process, offering fruits, vegetables, chicken and grocery items along with facilities including security, sanitation, clean washrooms and a drive-through shopping option. In the first phase, the bazaars have become operational at multiple locations including Gulshan Ravi, Shadman, Madar-e-Millat Road, Madina Market, Township, Sundar Road, Kotha Pind, Faisal Town, Kharak Nala, Awan Town, Valencia and Shahdara, officials said, adding that five more On-the-Go Bazaars would be made functional in Lahore by February, while projects in Barki, Sadar, Nishtar Town, Raiwind Phase-II, Moon Market and Ferozewala are nearing completion. Vendors welcomed the initiative, saying they had moved from operating roadside pushcarts to running proper shops under a regulated and respectable system, and thanked the chief minister for providing a sustainable alternative instead of eviction. Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif said the project reflects Nawaz Sharif's vision of a clean and beautiful Lahore. The CM also appreciated the efforts of the Punjab Sahulat Bazaar Authority, noting that the initiative would help reduce the need for Ramadan-specific subsidies by ensuring the year-round availability of affordable essential commodities.—APP

Pindi to get iconic monuments at key interchanges, roads

The DG RDA assured that the RDA team would continuously monitor and maintain quality control to ensure timely completion of the projects and visible benefits for the citizens.

RAWALPINDI, Dec 28 (APP): The Director General, Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA), Kinza Murtaza, visited the Mumtaz City Interchange near the New Islamabad International Airport and the Check Post at Peshawar Mor, Rawalpindi. During the visit, she conducted a detailed review of the ongoing development projects in the city. On the occasion, the DG RDA emphasized the importance of beautifying Rawalpindi City. The city is set to receive iconic monuments at key interchang-

es and major roads. She directed the Engineering Directorate of RDA to construct high quality, visually appealing, and landmark monuments at Mumtaz City Interchange, Top City Interchange, Chour Chowk Rawalpindi, and Old Airport Road, aiming to enhance the prominence and attractiveness of the city's main entry and exit points. The DG RDA stated that these projects aim to enhance the beauty and aesthetics of the city and to highlight Rawalpindi as a modern, beautiful, and developed city. She direct-

ed the concerned officers to ensure that the work is completed within the prescribed standards and timeframe. She further emphasized that the convenience and safety of citizens remain a top priority and that these development initiatives will strengthen the city's infrastructure while improving the quality of life for residents. The DG RDA assured that the RDA team would continuously monitor and maintain quality control to ensure timely completion of the projects and visible benefits for the citizens.—APP



ISLAMABAD: A statue of a horse placed on a green belt alongside a road, in the Federal Capital.

Efforts afoot to protect religious, cultural minority communities

LARKANA: The Special Assistant to the Chief Minister of Sindh on Minority Affairs, Dr. Sham Sunder Advani, on Sunday inaugurated the project for the restoration and renovation of the historic Jai Shankar Mandir located on Masan Road, Larkana city. While addressing the ceremony, Dr. Sham Sunder Advani stated that the Government of Sindh is taking practical steps to protect the religious, cultural, and historical heritage of minority communities. He said that the restoration of Jai Shankar Mandir will not only revive its historical significance but will also provide facilities for the Hindu community to perform their religious rituals.

He further said that, under the vision of the Chairman of the Pakistan Peoples Party and the Government of Sindh, priority is being given across the province to the improvement, restoration, and protection of all minority places of worship, so that religious harmony and brotherhood may be further promoted. On this occasion, respected leaders of the Hindu community, local dignitaries, and officials of the Minority Affairs Department were also present and appreciated this initiative of the Government of Sindh.

Call for strengthened ties with regional economies

LAHORE: Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) Coordinator Saif-ur-Rehman has said regional economic cooperation is no longer an option but a necessity for long-term economic stability and shared prosperity.

Talking to a traders delegation here Sunday, he said, Pakistan must adopt a proactive and pragmatic trade policy to strengthen economic ties with neighboring and regional economies.

The Coordinator urged the government to narrow down trade deficit with regional countries by offering a comprehensive package of incentives aimed at promoting economic integration. He cited that trade with Afghanistan, China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Iran, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives has dipped 17.05 percent to USD 1.635 billion during the last five months. He emphasized that enhanced regional trade, supported by targeted incentives, could significantly reduce the trade imbalance while boosting industrial growth and export competitiveness. Highlighting Pakistan's strategic geographical location, he said the country could emerge as a regional trade and transit hub if trade facilitation measures were aligned with regional economic realities. He stressed that stronger economic integration would not only help conserve foreign exchange reserves but also generate employment, enhance productivity and stabilize the national economy. Saif-ur-Rehman said, the proposed incentive package should include preferential tariffs, simplified customs procedures, reduced non-tariff barriers, and improved logistics and connectivity. Promoting cross-border investment would further facilitate trade flows and build mutual trust among regional partners, he concluded. —APP

Police finalizes security plan for new year night

LAHORE: The Punjab Police have finalised a comprehensive security plan to ensure law and order on New Year night across Lahore and the province. According to a spokesperson, a total of 419 Inspectors, 1,267 sub-inspectors, 2,189 assistant sub-Inspectors, 1,408 head constables, and 16,977 constables and other personnel will be deployed across the province. In Lahore alone, more than 5,000 officers will perform security duties. All activities will be monitored through CCTV cameras and the Safe City system.

IGP Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar has ordered high alert measures to prevent one-wheeling, aerial firing, display of weapons, and hooliganism. Strict action will be taken against individuals harassing women and citizens, who will be sent to lockups. The IGP directed the police to ensure coordinated traffic arrangements, with the Dolphin Squad, PRU, Elite Force, and PHP teams intensifying patrolling on roads and highways. He also instructed regular search and sweep operations and the ob-

taining of surety bonds from previously identified one-wheelers and offenders involved in aerial firing last year. Dr. Usman Anwar emphasized that CCPO Lahore, RPOs, and DPOs should personally supervise all arrangements, while the CTO Lahore and district traffic officers deploy additional personnel to ensure smooth traffic flow. The IG Punjab appealed to citizens to report any elements involved in one-wheeling, weapon display, or aerial firing by calling 15.—APP

Strategic int'l collaboration can boost fashion exports

LAHORE: Strategic international collaboration, especially with Italy, can significantly boost Pakistan's fashion exports and help position the country as a competitive player in the global fashion industry. Board of Industrial Collaboration to Enhance Fashion Exports (BICEFE) Chairperson Mian Kashif Ashfaq stated this while chairing a board meeting here Sunday. Pakistan Institute of Fashion and Design (PIFD) VC PIFD Ms Hina Tayyaba Khalil was also present among other directors of the board. Pakistan possesses immense potential in fashion and textiles due to its strong cotton base, skilled workforce and rich

cultural heritage, but lacks adequate global branding and innovation. The PIFD as a premier fashion education institution, he said, would play a pivotal role in bridging this gap by aligning local talent with international market requirements. The Institute would actively seek international collaboration, particularly from Italy, to promote Pakistan's fashion exports in the global trade arena. Mian Kashif said that enhancing fashion exports would not only diversify Pakistan's export basket but also create employment opportunities for youth, particularly women, while contributing to sustainable econom-

ic growth. He urged the government and private sector to support PIFD's international outreach initiatives through policy facilitation, incentives and funding. The chairperson said, Italy is internationally recognised for its excellence in fashion design, textiles, leather goods and value-added apparel, and collaboration with Italian institutions and fashion houses would help upgrade Pakistan's design capabilities to international standards. He added that such partnerships would focus on joint training programmes, faculty exchange, curriculum development, and exposure of Pakistani designers to global fashion trends.—APP

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Islamabad Metropolitan
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Rawal Town.....5773343
Water Tank
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Encroachments turn Islamabad’s Sector G-8 into chaotic place

In stretches such as G-8 Markaz and G-8/4, pedestrians are forced onto the roads as footpaths remain blocked by vehicles. Residents complain that CDA enforcement teams routinely turn a blind eye, allowing businesses to operate freely in violation of municipal by-laws

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Encroachments in Islamabad’s Sector G-8 have reached alarming proportions, transforming once orderly streets into congested corridors of chaos. Despite repeated complaints from residents, the Capital Development Authority (CDA) and Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) appear to be doing little beyond issuing hollow statements and conducting superficial operations that fail to tackle the root of the problem. Over the past several years, open spaces, service roads, and even footpaths in G-8 Markaz and adjoining areas have been overtaken by car showrooms, workshops, and informal businesses. What was originally envisioned as a balanced commercial and residential hub has now morphed into a sprawling

encroachment zone, where nearly every inch of public space has been commercialized. The most glaring violations are visible outside car showrooms that have virtually taken over service roads and sidewalks, using them as parking lots and display areas. In stretches such as G-8 Markaz and G-8/4, pedestrians are forced onto the roads as footpaths remain blocked by vehicles. Residents complain that CDA enforcement teams routinely turn a blind eye, allowing businesses to operate freely in violation of municipal by-laws. “The situation has become unbearable,” said one resident of G-8. “We cannot even park our own cars near our homes because showrooms and workshops occupy every available space. The CDA only wakes up when the media highlights the issue, and even then, they remove a few temporary setups while leaving the main violators untouched.” The Is-

lamabad Traffic Police have also come under fire for what locals describe as “lip service” and “cosmetic actions.” Despite visible traffic chaos in and around the Markaz, ITP’s response has largely been limited to placing cones or posting officers for a few hours. Vehicles parked illegally on footpaths, greenbelts, and double lanes remain unchecked. Traffic congestion during peak hours has become routine, particularly around the main commercial areas and near government offices in G-8/4 such as AGPR, PEMRA, PTCL, and the Post Office. Commuters often find themselves trapped in long lines of traffic, worsened by haphazard parking and unauthorized roadside businesses. “Every other day there’s a traffic jam here. Instead of clearing the encroachments, the authorities just fine a few drivers and move on,” complained a shopkeeper. Urban planners and civic activists argue

that unchecked encroachments reflect a deeper governance failure. “The CDA’s enforcement wing is either under pressure from commercial interests or simply lacks the will to act. This neglect not only ruins the city’s aesthetics but also discourages law-abiding citizens,” remarked a former CDA official on condition of anonymity. Residents have demanded immediate and meaningful measures, not symbolic drives. They are calling for strict enforcement of building and parking regulations, removal of illegal car showrooms, and continuous monitoring to prevent re-encroachment. Until such steps are taken, Sector G-8 risks losing its planned urban character altogether, turning instead into another congested and unlivable commercial sprawl – a stark symbol of administrative apathy in the heart of Pakistan’s federal capital.



RAWALPINDI: Kalash delegation comprising community leaders from all three Kalash valleys called on Mr. Isphanyar Bhandara to discuss the development of the Kalash valleys. Mr. Bhandara assured the delegation that the development of the three valleys and the uplift of the Kalash people remain a priority. DNA

Call for training cyber scouts against online crimes

ISLAMABAD :Cyber security expert Zubair Khan has urged the government to sensitize Information Technology (IT) stakeholders and launch structured training programmes to develop “cyber scouts” who could support institutions such as the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) and cyber police in eradicating the growing menace of cyber crime in the country. Talking to APP, he proposed the development of trained cyber scouts from universities and IT institutions, who could be deployed in coordination with NCCIA and cyber police to address resource shortages. These cyber scouts, he said, could initially serve in training or internship-based roles and later be absorbed as professionals, creating a sustainable talent pipeline for national cyber security. He said a large number of youngsters in Pakistan are increasingly interested in ethical hacking, which is a core domain of cyber security, but lack clarity about the proper pathway, courses and certifications needed to enter the field professionally. Zubair Khan said

the absence of clear guidance has created confusion among aspiring IT professionals regarding eligibility, education requirements and internationally recognised certifications. He stressed that senior IT professionals, training institutions and policy makers must step forward to guide youth about structured learning routes so their interest can be converted into meaningful careers. He clarified that there is no rigid educational threshold for becoming an ethical hacker, citing global examples where even teenagers have demonstrated exceptional cyber skills. However, he added that a recognised academic degree plays an important role as a professional gateway, while practical skills, hands-on experience and continuous learning remain the real foundation of success. Explaining certification pathways, he said genuine cyber security certifications are vendor-based and issued after passing standardized international examinations, and should not be confused with local training certificates. Organizations such

as EC-Council and Offensive Security, he said, offer globally accepted beginner-level certifications that provide a clear starting point for aspiring ethical hackers. Zubair Khan said youngsters should first build a strong base in operating systems, networking fundamentals and scripting languages, particularly Python, before moving towards specialised certifications. He added that most entry-level certifications require around 72 hours of focused study and practice, followed by formal examinations. Highlighting the need for practical exposure, he encouraged youth to engage in self-study, online labs, Capture the Flag challenges, hackathons and global cyber security communities to develop real-world problem-solving skills. Concluding, Zubair Khan said that with proper guidance from IT professionals, structured certification pathways and hands-on training, Pakistani youth can play a vital role in strengthening the country’s cyber security ecosystem and combating cybercrime effectively.—APP

Chairman CDA reviews Shaheen Chowk Underpass project

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, paid a visit to the Shaheen Chowk Underpass project and reviewed the ongoing construction work, inspecting various sections of the site. Officials briefed the chairman that the project has entered its final stages ahead of schedule, with over 95 per cent of development work completed. They informed him that the structural work has been finalized, while finishing works are progressing at a fast pace. The briefing further highlighted that landscaping and horticulture work is being carried out around the project to enhance its aesthetic appeal. In addition, permanent decorative lighting is being installed to further improve the outlook of the underpass. Expressing satisfaction over the pace and quality of work, Randhawa said that high construction standards had been ensured alongside timely completion. He directed the concerned departments to expedite all remaining beautification works and complete them before the inauguration. The CDA chairman said the Shaheen Chowk Underpass would provide signal-free movement for students of nearby educational institutions as well as daily commuters, resulting in significant savings of time and fuel. He added that the project would help reduce traffic congestion in the federal capital and improve overall travel facilities. “Providing modern infrastructure and the best possible travel facilities to the citizens of Islamabad remains one of our top priorities,” he said.—APP

Grand search operation in Sangjani nets 41 suspects

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police on Sunday conducted a major grand search and combing operation in different areas of Sangjani, arresting 41 suspects, including four Afghan nationals, and recovering arms, ammunition and narcotics. An official told APP that the operation was carried out under the supervision of SP Saddar Zone Kazim Naqvi, while police personnel were given a special briefing before the action. During the operation, police checked 177 individuals, searched 66 houses, 35 motorcycles and 15 vehicles. The official said that 12 motorcycles and four vehicles lacking proper legal documentation were shifted to the police station for further verification. He added that weapons, ammunition and drugs were recovered during the search, while 41 suspicious persons, including four Afghan nationals, were taken into custody for further investigation.—APP

Firing incident in Islamabad leaves one dead, police constable injured

Police officials said efforts were underway to identify and apprehend the attacker at the earliest, adding that strict action would be taken against those responsible for the incident

ISLAMABAD: A 30-year-old man was killed while a police constable was injured in a target killing incident near Shakarparian , triggering a search operation in the area. The Police official told APP on Sunday that the incident occurred near the Open Air Theatre at Shakarparian when an unidentified armed man opened fire at close range and fled the scene. The deceased was identified as Sanaullah, son of Ameer Nawab Umar, a resident of district Karak, who was living in Islamabad. He sustained critical bullet injuries and was rushed to Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS), where he succumbed to his injuries. The body was shifted to PIMS for post-mortem. The official said that during the firing, Constable Hussain Shah, who was performing checking duty at the entry point, was also injured when a bullet grazed his right leg. He was shifted to the hospital, where his condition was reported to be stable and out of danger. According to initial findings, the assailant approached the victim from behind, wearing a shawl, and opened fire about 10 to 15 metres before the entry point. Preliminary investigation suggests personal enmity as a possible motive, though all aspects are being examined. Following the incident, police cordoned off the area, collected forensic evidence and launched a search operation to trace the suspect. Special teams have been constituted to arrest those involved. Police officials said efforts were underway to identify and apprehend the attacker at the earliest, adding that strict action would be taken against those responsible for the incident.—APP

Serious offences down 69pc in federal capital

ISLAMABAD Crime in the federal capital witnessed a historic decline in 2025, with overall crime dropping by 37 per cent and serious offences reducing by 69 percent compared to 2024, reflecting the improved law and order situation under Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police. An ICT Police spokesperson told APP on Sunday that under the command of Inspector General of Police Islamabad Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, Islamabad Police carried out across-the-board operations against criminal elements, leading to significant improvements in public safety. The official said that due to effective policing, a leading international journal also ranked Islamabad among the world’s safer cities, highlighting the capital’s improved peace and security situation. During 2025, Islamabad Police traced and resolved more than 20 high-profile cases in less than 24 hours, demonstrating professional investigation and rapid response capabilities. The official said police arrested 23,683 accused persons during the year and recovered stolen property worth over Rs2 billion. In cases of dacoity, robbery, car and motorcycle theft, 578 gangs were busted and 1,308 gang members were arrested, leading to the recovery of 375 vehicles and 851 motorcycles. He said strong action against murder cases resulted in the arrest of 187 accused, while over 4,000 proclaimed offenders and repeat criminals were also apprehended during the year. Islamabad Police also launched indiscriminate action against land grabbers, registering 157 cases and arresting 161 accused, while more than 200 persons involved in aerial firing were taken into custody. Under the “Armed-Free Islamabad” campaign, police arrested 2,308 accused involved in illegal weapons, recovering 304 rifles, 92 guns, over 2,200 pistols, 294 daggers and 37,491 rounds of ammunition.—APP

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Briefs

PIAF urges govt action as short-term inflation pressure continues

DNA

ISLAMABAD: — The Pakistan Industrial & Traders Association Front (PIAF) has called for urgent policy measures to mitigate rising costs for businesses and consumers, as the country continues to face short-term inflationary pressures. PIAF Chairman Faheemur Rehman Saigol, along with Senior Vice Chairman Nasrullah Mughal and Vice Chairman Tahir Manzoor Chaudhary, emphasized that industry-friendly policies are critical to support economic growth while keeping essential commodity prices under control. Speaking at a press briefing, Faheem Saigol noted that rising energy and staple food costs are putting pressure on both consumers and traders. “Short-term inflation, driven by gas, wheat flour, and sugar, is a concern for households and businesses alike. Collaborative government-private sector strategies are needed to protect livelihoods and stabilize markets,” he said. Nasrullah Mughal added that the PIAF proposals, developed in consultation with chambers of commerce and industrial forums, focus on tax rationalization, energy cost management, and investment facilitation. Chaudhary stressed that without coordinated policy action, the rising cost of production and utilities could dampen industrial activity and employment prospects. Data from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) shows that the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI) increased 2.83% year-on-year (YoY) for the week ending December 24, 2025. On a week-on-week (WoW) basis, the SPI decreased slightly by 0.09%, indicating marginal relief in the cost of essential goods. Out of 51 monitored items, 13 prices rose, 11 declined, and 27 remained stable, reflecting a broadly balanced weekly movement. However, sharp increases in gas charges (up 29.85%), wheat flour (22.56%), sugar (16.32%), beef (13.01%), gur (12.46%), and bananas (11.24%) contributed to overall inflationary pressure. Conversely, perishable vegetables provided some respite, with tomatoes plunging 74.92%, potatoes 49.79%, garlic 38.17%, and onions 29.23% YoY. Similarly, declines were observed in tea, pulse mash, pulse masoor, electricity charges, and LPG, helping to moderate overall price pressures.

NDRMF to pioneer first disaster risk insurance framework

ISLAMABAD: Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of National Disaster Risk Management Fund (NDRMF), Bilal Anwar has said that the Fund was evolving from a facilitating and funding entity to a catalytic fund leading on disaster risk reduction measures and climate resilience paradigm in the country. The fund is going to introduce the nation's first ever nationwide Disaster Risk Insurance framework to ensure climate proof resilience. The NDRMF has been serving the country since its inception as a facilitation vehicle and has accredited around 32 non-governmental organizations as fund implementing partners (FIPs) that have been trained, capacitated on system design and advancement of especially designed and first of its kind natural catastrophe (NatCat) model during two different training sessions that included specialized training on the model, said Chief Executive Officer (CEO), NDRMF, he said in an exclusive interview with APP on Sunday sharing the recent development and initiatives being taken by the Fund CEO Bilal Anwar said Disaster Risk Insurance framework development and initiative is the mandate of the Fund and is enshrined the responsibility to define the contours of different disaster risk transfer mechanisms including the Disaster Risk Insurance. “This effort is to facilitate and strengthen private sector finance-based funding streams to finance post-disaster rehabilitation.—APP

Italy allocates 3-year labour quota for Pakistani workers

The annual quota includes 1,500 seasonal and 2,000 non-seasonal jobs, covering a wide range of sectors. These include shipbreaking, hospitality, healthcare, and agriculture

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD, In a significant breakthrough for overseas employment, Pakistan has successfully secured a job quota of 10,500 positions from Italy over the next three years, opening new doors for Pakistani workers in the European labor market.

According to a spokesperson for the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, the quota has been allocated as a result of special efforts made by the ministry under the leadership of Federal Minister Chaudhry Salik Hussain.

Under this arrangement, 3,500 Pakistani workers will be employed in Italy each year for the next three years.

The annual quota includes 1,500 seasonal and 2,000 non-seasonal jobs, covering a wide range of sectors. These include shipbreaking, hospitality, healthcare, and agriculture. Skilled and semi-skilled Pakistani workers will be eligible for employment in professions such as welding, technical trades, cooking and catering, hotel services, housekeeping, nursing, medical technology, farming, and agricultural work. The ministry spokesperson stated, “Italy is the first European country to formally allo-

cate a labor quota specifically for Pakistan, calling it a landmark development in Pakistan-Europe labor cooperation. A second meeting of the Pakistan-Italy Joint Working Group is scheduled to take place in Islamabad in February 2026 to further strengthen collaboration.”

Federal Minister Chaudhry Salik Hussain welcomed the development and congratulated the nation, terming Italy's allocation of a labor quota to Pakistan a historic milestone. He said that after sustained and dedicated efforts, employment opportunities for the Pakistani workforce in Italy are finally materializing. “This development marks an important

step in exploring new employment opportunities for Pakistan in the European labor market,” the minister said. He reaffirmed the government's commitment to providing dignified employment opportunities to Pakistani workers at the global level.

Chaudhry Salik Hussain also highlighted the vital role of overseas Pakistanis, describing them as ambassadors of the country and a backbone of the national economy. He expressed optimism that in the near future, more European countries would open their doors to the Pakistani workforce, further expanding international employment opportunities.



ISLAMABAD: Children enjoying at UAE Park along with their parents as winters vacation of students and weekend of parents, crowded the parks and tourists destination in Federal Capital.

ICCI hosts growth summit to boost digital entrepreneurship

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), in collaboration with Connected Pakistan, successfully hosted Growth Summit-25, bringing together leading entrepreneurs, technology experts, digital innovators, and aspiring startups to discuss pathways for sustainable economic growth through innovation and entrepreneurship. President ICCI Sardar Tahir Mehmood, who graced the occasion as Chief Guest, while addressing the summit said that Pakistan's future economic strength lies in technology-driven enterprises, skilled youth, and globally competitive startups. He emphasized that platforms like Growth Summit-25 play a vital role in connecting young entrepreneurs with knowledge, mentorship, and market opportunities. He stated that Pakistan is blessed with a large youth population, which must be transformed into a productive force through skill development, innovation, and digital enablement. “If we provide the right ecosystem, our youth can build global brands, create employment, and significantly contribute to national exports,” he added. The ICCI President highlighted that the Chamber is fully committed to promoting IT, startups, SMEs, and digital entrepreneurship, and is actively working to strengthen linkages between industry, academia, and government. He said ICCI's collaboration with Connected Pakistan reflects a shared vision to foster a digitally connected and innovation-led economy. Earlier, the summit featured master training sessions by prominent industry experts, including Syed Ahmad, Shahid Iqbal, Hamid Mahmood and Shajeel Afzal focusing on leadership and innovation, high-impact web solutions, international brand building, modern digital commerce, and emerging trends in social and e-commerce platforms. A special interactive session titled “Ask the Millionaires” provided participants with firsthand insights into entrepreneurial journeys and success strategies. Speaking on the occasion, the organizers from Connected Pakistan appreciated ICCI's leadership including Dr. Muhammad Usman, Convener ICCI Software Development Committee and Aizaz Mohammad Convener ICCI IT, Telecom and Computer Hardware Committee, stating that such collaborations are essential for empowering startups and accelerating Pakistan's digital transformation. The event was attended by Senator Mian Atiq, Vice President ICCI Irfan Chaudhry, hundreds of youth, professionals, ICCI Executives including Mohammad Waseem Chaudhry, Zulqurnain Abbasi Arslan Shah from Connected Pakistan and ICCI member Israr- ul-Haq Mashwani. The President ICCI also distributed Certificates and souvenirs marking the successful conclusion of Growth Summit-25.=DNA

AIOU announces Spring 2026 admissions schedule

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has announced that admissions for the Spring Semester 2026, covering all academic programmes from Matriculation to PhD level, will open simultaneously across the country from January 1, 2026. This facility will be available in all four provinces, as well as Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan and the northern areas, said a press release issued here Sunday. Various academic programs at different lev-

els are also being offered for Pakistanis residing abroad and for international students. According to the university administration, admission forms and prospectuses for all programs will be available online from January 1 on the official university website, enabling students to apply easily from home. To ensure effective guidance and support for students, the Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood has issued special instructions to the heads of the university's 53 regional offices across the country. As per these instructions, Student Facilitation Centers will be established at all regional campuses prior to the start of admissions where students will receive complete guidance. In addition, these centers will provide free computer and internet facilities to students so that they do not face any difficulties while applying online. The university administration stated that this initiative aims to further ease access to education and provide students with every possible facility.—APP

Pakistan's crisis not just economic: It is the crisis of decision making

AMNA ZAFAR

ECONOMIC ills are known to return often via familiar indicators: inflation rises, debt increases, and foreign exchange reserves dwindle. These are the figures highlighted by headlines and that dominate public debate, and by most yardsticks, it is reasonable to conclude that the problem with Pakistan is a fiscal one. This, however, is basically a superficial assessment, failing to capture a more prime and persistent predicament: it is not economic scarcity but chronic defects in decision-making that create the recurring cycle of economic crises in Pakistan. For years, the leadership has been conscious of various key structural vulnerabilities in the economy—from narrow tax bases and energy problems to state-owned enterprises in distress. In spite of this recognition, effective reforms have been slow, uneven, or even reversed under social and political pressures. The governments increasingly resort to short-term palliatives such as price controls, emergency subsidies, or temporary borrowing. Such remedies can alleviate the hardships

people face but do nothing to help strengthen the economy over time. Given this pattern of reactive policies and quick fixes, deep-seated systemic issues have been successfully circumvented.

This is the pattern in the history of Pakistan's reforms. Whenever met with resistance from special interests or unpopular public opinion, governments roll back their intended adjustments. The fiscal deficits remain large, energy crises persist, and institutional inefficiencies show no significant sign of dispersing. Incoherent policy erodes public confidence and dampens foreign and local investment. Effective planning and sustained growth can hardly be achieved in this environment.

But political instability worsens these problems: all too short electoral cycles; the struggle of instituted conflicts among themselves; and chronic changes in government result in hesitation in decisions being taken. Economic governance is essentially reactive because in the best scenario, it would be concerned with the long-term interests of the nation. With the absence of political continuity, reformist efforts cannot surge ahead, no matter how well-intentioned. Instead of structural changes

engineered over time, what results is a vicious circle of crisis management.

Weak decision-making also bears considerable social consequences. For many, economic hardship has become the new normal, easing the pressure on the government to pursue genuine reforms. As opportunities and living standards decline, so do the public's expectations of governance. This gradual accommodation to the crisis clearly diminishes accountability, perpetuating the possibility of inertia in policymaking and maintaining a status quo of unresolved systemic problems.

The decisionmaking dilemma in Pakistan is also underscored by the pattern of its dealings with foreign financial institutions. The support from abroad is perceived as an expedient rather than an opportunity for genuine reform. Once short-term relief is attained, commitments agreed to in international pressure often lose momentum, thus maintaining the vicious circle of vulnerability and dependency. Even reforms that have some backing from outside sources generally cannot result in long-lasting effects without adequate persistent domestic leadership and clear long-term plans. Economic challenges include an excessive

reliance on short-term solutions. Temporary borrowings, price controls, and emergency subsidies may bring about immediate relief, but they also distort market signals and undermine the solid bases of a sound economy. Long-term projects, essential infrastructure investments, and structural adjustments are usually sacrificed and replaced with continuous shortages, financial disequilibria, and increasing social unrest.

Ultimately, the economic crisis in Pakistan is one of lacking political will rather than resources or knowledge. Everything needed for reform is available to the country, including frameworks, expertise, and resources; what is persistently missing is governance with a resolve to address the situation. The prioritization of long-term national interests over short-term political gains remains key but is absent. Without it, economic stability will remain uncertain. A sustained recovery has to be based on policy continuity, strategic planning, and the political courage to take difficult but essential decisions, even when they might not enjoy immediate popularity.

China's mobile payment ecosystem offers seamless experience

DNA

ISLAMABAD: China's mobile payment ecosystem offers Seamless Experience to global visitors, China Economic Net (CEN) reported on Sunday. As the afternoon light bathed the ancient eaves of Nanjing's Confucius Temple Scenic Area, Hugo from France navigated the bustling streets with remarkable ease. During his first visit to China, with scheduled visits to Wuhan and Shenyang, he spoke highly of the nation's seamlessly integrated digital ecosystem. “The immigration process was remarkably smooth, and now my phone handles everything,” he said, displaying his Alipay app. “While we rely on cash and cards in France, here life operates through a smartphone—from shopping to subway rides. Alipay has become my essential travel companion.” His friend Thomas shared this enthusiasm, noting, “China's digital payment system surpasses anything I've encountered elsewhere—it's fundamentally simpler and more seamlessly integrated into daily life.” Thomas rated his Chinese experience a perfect 10, a sentiment bolstered by the recent expansion of China's visa-free policy, which has made such technological discoveries more accessible to international visitors. This digital immersion extends beyond tourists to international students and long-term residents. Tony Cross, a British student who arrived in Nanjing four months ago, demonstrated how deeply digital tools are woven into daily life. “WeChat keeps me connected, while WeChat Pay and its mini-programs handle everything from payments to service bookings—it's an all-in-one lifestyle platform,” he explained. “I've also noticed my classmates participating in major shopping events like Double Eleven through these platforms.” Nearby, Tony's family from Britain were enjoying their first Christmas holiday in China.

Gwadar to launch Climate School

ISLAMABAD, Dec. 28 (): A Balochistan-based environmental organization has announced to establish Gwadar's first climate school and install a new RO water plant to strengthen climate awareness and improve access to clean drinking water in the port city. Environmental activist Nafeesa Baloch, the only non-government member of the Provincial Environmental Protection Council headed by the Chief Minister of Balochistan, shared details of the initiatives during a meeting with Gwadar Development Authority (GDA) Director General Moin-ur-Rehman Khan. According to a Gwadar Pro's report, Baloch said her organization, Zameenk Balochistan, an indigenous, youth-led registered organization dedicated to climate education and the rehabilitation of climate-affected areas, has decided to launch the climate school to train young people in environmental leadership and climate resilience. “The climate school will equip Gwadar's youth with the knowledge and confidence to understand climate change and lead community-based solutions,” Baloch said. “Our aim is to build local climate leadership from the ground up.” She added that Zameenk Balochistan will also install an RO water plant in Gwadar, which is expected to contribute to improving the city's supply of clean drinking water. Moin-ur-Rehman Khan welcomed the initiatives and assured full institutional support. “GDA stands committed to promoting sustainable development, environmental protection and climate resilience in Gwadar,” he said. “We will continue to work closely with partners such as Zameenk Balochistan to support meaningful community-focused initiatives.” Earlier in August, Zameenk Balochistan successfully completed a 30-day Climate School program in Gwadar, marking the graduation of its first batch of young climate learners. The five-week initiative introduced children to climate science, environmental responsibility and local identity. Topics included Gwadar's history, the difference between climate and weather, global warming, adaptation and mitigation strategies, and water conservation. The program concluded with students taking on roles as “young climate ambassadors of Gwadar.” The organization called the program the realization of a long-term vision to build climate literacy and leadership among children in Balochistan, noting that participants demonstrated growing environmental awareness and responsibility. Baloch has represented Balochistan at several high-level international climate forums, including the UN Water Conference 2023 and South Asia Convening, where she highlighted regional climate and environmental challenges. She has also worked extensively in Gwadar on community-based awareness, youth engagement and climate-focused advocacy. She said the upcoming climate school and RO plant would help ensure that local communities, especially young people, are better equipped to shape the future of environmental stewardship in Gwadar, the report added.—DNA

Media campaigns for Peace

NOOR-E-HIRA

PEACE journalism, first coined by Johan Galtung, involves an academic form of transformative and reflexive journalism of prioritizing constructive resolution, humanizing all parties involved, and seeing the real causes of conflicts, as opposed to the traditional paradigm of war journalism that tends to point to binary winners and losers. The aims of peace journalism are to build on knowledge, generate non-violent options and also preempt the stories of peacekeeping agents and as such, peace journalism is a source of dialogue building that focuses on the points of intersection and systemic upheavals which perpetrate conflict. This point of view applies specifically in areas where long-term adversarial activities have occurred like the South Asian zone where media reporting often fuels the clash because of biased or distortionary reporting. The media industry of the South Asian environment (particularly Pakistan-India nexus) is inseparably connected with the historical enmity such as Kashmir crisis, cross border terrorism and nuclear arms race. In Pakistan as an example, media faces internal insurgencies like the Taliban trouble and Baloch nationalist militancy where in reporting, it will either reinforce fracturing or foster reconciliation. Peace-oriented media campaigns are the instruments that have proved to be very important amid such provocations and they operationalize the principles of peace journalism in concrete situations. This essay assesses such campaigns, with a focus on Aman ki Asha, and lessons in methodology can be derived on the results and flaws of such campaigns thus highlighting the ability of the media to play a peacebuilding role and shedding light on the long-term structural barriers. Peace journalism has its foundation on a series of ontological and epistemological principles that re-assemble the conflict coverage process based on the themes of inclusivity, voice, and systemic criticism. Galtung has placed peace journalism within the framework of war journalism by promoting participation of all sides of the case and listening to voiceless and exposing behind the scenes cultural plans instead of demonizing an opponent. It focuses on active investigation of the non-violent solutions, including economic affiliation and cultural interchange, without being pompous with elite propaganda. This is as expressed in its practical sense the shift of reactive coverage of violence to the humanizing narratives where affected populations are humanized and the sense of empathy is felt. Applied to modern media metrics these principles challenge the magnification of divisions which is characteristic of traditional reporting. Outlets also often give prominence to the views of elites or sensational happenings in the conflict environment hence fanning the flames of revenge. A counterpoint is included by peace journalism by leveraging the heterogeneous voices such as women, youth, and marginalized groups of people and questioning struc-

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Trump's War Paradox

Qamar Bashir



The Western Hemisphere—historically considered America's strategic backyard—has not been spared this assertiveness. In December, the United States intensified its maritime campaign against Venezuela, intercepting and seizing tankers accused of violating sanctions. For Washington, these are enforcement actions. For Caracas, they are economic warfare—moves designed to choke off the country's primary source of foreign revenue and weaken the government. The optics of US ships stopping sovereign vessels...

DONALD TRUMP has long styled himself as a man of peace, a leader determined to end America's "forever wars." Yet the reality of his second term tells a very different story. From Africa to the Middle East to the Caribbean, U.S. military power is being projected more aggressively than at any time in recent years, often outside clear multilateral mandates and sometimes against the wishes of the nations affected. The paradox is striking: a president who boasts of stopping wars now presides over an expanding web of military strikes, naval seizures, economic blockades, and strategic pressure campaigns that are reshaping how the world sees the United States. In late December 2025, U.S. airstrikes in northwest Nigeria targeted militants linked to alleged ISIS. The operation was presented as a counter-terror measure, with Washington emphasizing the need to hit extremist networks before they metastasize. American firepower raining down on a sovereign African nation on Christmas Day, reinforcing the impression that the United States reserves the right to strike anywhere it perceives a threat, whether or not there is a public, formal mandate from international bodies. For many Nigerians, the attack stirred anger and unease, highlighting how fragile sovereignty can become when global superpowers decide their security extends into another nation's airspace. Just days earlier, the United States had already intensified air operations in Syria following the deaths of American personnel in an attack blamed on Islamic State affiliates. What was once framed as a limited U.S. footprint in Syria has quietly evolved into a semi-permanent military presence, supported by regular offensive strikes. Trump may describe these operations as decisive anti-terror action, but to much of the world they appear as continued involvement in a foreign conflict with no end in sight, in a country where the United Nations never authorized an open-ended U.S. role. Somalia tells a similar story. Throughout 2025, U.S. drone and air operations there continued against alleged ISIS-Somalia and other militant groups. These strikes are often coordinated with Somali authorities, yet they form part of a much longer, largely undeclared military engagement that has persisted across multiple administrations. Trump campaigned on ending such interventions. Instead, the map of U.S. kinetic action has only widened, blurring the line between targeted counter-terrorism and perpetual low-grade war. The Western Hemisphere—historically considered America's strategic backyard—has not been spared this assertiveness. In December, the United States

intensified its maritime campaign against Venezuela, intercepting and seizing tankers accused of violating sanctions. For Washington, these are enforcement actions. For Caracas, they are economic warfare—moves designed to choke off the country's primary source of foreign revenue and weaken the government. The optics of U.S. ships stopping sovereign vessels in international waters evoke images of a superpower imposing its will far beyond its shores. To many observers, this resembles coercive regime-pressure more than a narrowly targeted law-enforcement effort. Overlaying all this is Trump's revived fixation on Greenland. He has again stressed its strategic importance to U.S. security, hinting at deeper American control or acquisition. To the people of Greenland and Denmark, such language is unsettling. It suggests a view of sovereignty as negotiable when strategic interests are at stake, reinforcing fears that U.S. policy is moving away from partnership and toward an overtly transactional and hegemonic posture. This growing pattern of unilateral action sits uneasily with America's post-war legacy. The United States was not only central to the creation of the United Nations; it championed the concept that the use of force should be governed by collective legitimacy. Even when Washington bent those principles in the past, it generally paid lip service to them. Today, the tone has shifted. The U.S. frequently vetoes UN resolutions on conflicts such as Gaza, insulating allies from accountability while asserting its own right to strike elsewhere without global consent. To critics, this makes Washington appear less like the guardian of a rules-based order and more like an exception-claiming power that enforces rules on others while exempting itself. For much of the world, this has accelerated the erosion of U.S. soft power. Soft power rests not on aircraft carriers or sanctions, but on trust, perceived fairness, and moral authority. It once enabled Washington to lead coalitions, shape norms, and attract global goodwill. But each unilateral strike, each tanker seizure, each veto against widely supported humanitarian resolutions chips away at that intangible asset. Allies increasingly hedge their bets. Neutral nations edge closer to alternative power centers. And countries hit by U.S. pressure look elsewhere for protection or partnership. China in particular benefits from this shift. Beijing projects itself—rightly or wrongly—as a power that avoids military entanglement and prefers development-based engagement. When Washington acts as global enforcer, and when those actions are seen as

destabilizing or self-serving, it pushes many states into China's orbit almost by default. The message becomes simple: if partnership with the United States carries risk, unpredictability, or coercion, perhaps alternative relationships offer greater stability, even if they come with their own compromises. The tragedy of this trajectory is that it is not inevitable. U.S. leadership historically derived its strength from a mix of capability and consent. It was powerful, but also persuasive. It spoke the language of international law, legitimacy, and collective decision-making, even imperfectly. Today that balance is tipping. The more the United States acts alone, the more alone it may ultimately find itself. There is also a domestic contradiction at play. Trump continues to present himself as a peace-first president, the man who avoids wars others might start. Yet the record of strikes, seizures, and escalating pressure tells a different story. The actions may be justified individually as tactical necessities. But collectively they signal a strategy of global projection, not global restraint. The rhetoric of peace is being used to mask a footprint of expanding conflict. If this trajectory continues, America's reputation risks hardening into something damaging and enduring: not the indispensable nation, but the unpredictable enforcer. That perception would not only undermine its moral authority but weaken its alliances, constrain its influence, and embolden rivals. Nations do not abandon superpowers overnight—but over time, they recalibrate. The alternative path is still open. It lies in rediscovering the principle that force abroad should carry a legitimacy beyond national assertion alone, and that the institutions America helped build should not be dismissed when inconvenient. When diplomacy is prioritized over coercion, when multilateral consent tempers unilateral action, and when sovereignty is respected even in the face of threat, U.S. leadership strengthens rather than diminishes. Donald Trump's presidency will ultimately be judged not by how forcefully America acted, but by how wisely. Ending the paradox between the rhetoric of peace and the practice of war is the first step toward restoring global trust. Only then can the United States reclaim the soft power and moral authority that once made it a leader in both name and spirit.

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A Border Held by Truce, Not Trust

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



Turkey has similarly offered its good offices, but faces its own constraints, balancing its NATO commitments with its regional ambitions. The limitations of these external efforts underscore a harsh truth: no amount of shuttle diplomacy can substitute for direct, politically courageous engagement between Islamabad and Kabul. Mediators can provide the room, but the leaders must fill it with substance

THE dust, it is said, never truly settles along the Durand Line. This 2,640-kilometre frontier, snaking through mountainous terrain dividing Pakistan and Afghanistan, is more than a geographical marker. It is a historical wound, a political fault line, and in recent years, an increasingly active battlefield. Despite fleeting ceasefires and third-party mediation, a brittle calm prevails, one perpetually undercut by deep-seated grievances and the tremors of larger geopolitical realignments. Local actors alone do not dictate the stability of this border; it is increasingly hostage to the retreating footsteps of distant powers and the hesitant diplomacy of those seeking to fill the void. The root of the contention is a colonial legacy. The Durand Line was established in 1893 as an agreement between Sir Mortimer Durand of British India and Amir Abdur Rahman of Afghanistan. For Kabul, the line was always a temporary demarcation of spheres of influence, not a permanent international border. Its ratification by successive Afghan governments remains a point of fierce national dispute. For Pakistan, inheritor of the British colonial administrative boundary, it is the legitimate international frontier, central to its sovereignty and national security paradigm, particularly regarding militancy. This historical dissonance translates into direct, often deadly, confrontation. Clashes between Pakistani and Afghan Taliban border forces have become tragically routine. Torkham, a vital commercial crossing, frequently shuts down under a hail of mortar and machine-gun fire. Each incident follows a familiar pattern: a dispute over new border post construction, or the movement of militants, escalates into sustained exchanges. Ceasefires are brokered, only to fracture weeks or months later. These are not mere skirmishes; they represent a fundamental failure of shared understanding. Pakistan seeks to formalize and tighten control over a porous border it views as a conduit for security threats. Afghanistan's de facto authorities, while also combating their own internal challenges, reject any move that lends legitimacy to a line they contest, seeing it as an affront to national identity and a potential precedent for the division of ethnic Pashtun populations. Into this volatile mix steps the broader trend of strategic recalibration by external powers, most notably the United States. The long-predicted American pivot away from direct, large-scale military engagement in the broader region is no longer theoretical. The withdrawal from Afghanistan was its most dramatic manifestation, but the trend speaks to a wider re-evaluation of strategic priorities. This repositioning creates not a simple vacuum, but a complex and

unsettling fluidity. The predictable, if fraught, order of the past two decades is gone. In its place is an arena where regional actors feel both the burden of greater responsibility and the temptation of increased agency. This shift profoundly affects the Durand Line equation. For Pakistan, the perceived reduction in American reliance on its logistical support alters a key influence point. Simultaneously, it amplifies Islamabad's primary security anxiety: that an unstable Afghanistan will remain a sanctuary for groups hostile to the Pakistani state. Its border actions are, in part, driven by this acute sense of being alone with a perennial problem. For Afghanistan's rulers, the departure of foreign forces is a core ideological victory, strengthening their sovereign claim. It emboldens their stance on issues like the border, which they frame as a liberation from externally imposed structures. Furthermore, the changing landscape encourages other regional powers—Iran, India, China, and Russia—to reassess their engagements, creating new, and sometimes competing, networks of influence that both Pakistan and Afghanistan may seek to exploit, further complicating bilateral resolution. It is within this context of local intransigence and global shift that mediation efforts assume critical, yet fragile, importance. Recently, Qatar has emerged as a pivotal intermediary, hosting talks that have yielded temporary halts in fighting. Its role is telling of the new diplomatic geometry. Possessing channels to all sides, unburdened by colonial baggage, and wielding significant economic and diplomatic capital, Doha presents itself as an honest broker. However, the fragility of this mediation was laid bare in the nuanced language of its own diplomacy. Following a round of talks, Qatari statements notably omitted any explicit reference to the "border," instead calling for dialogue concerning "security issues" along the "Durand Line." This was not an oversight but a calculated diplomatic sidestep. To mention the "border" would be to accept Pakistan's position; to avoid the term entirely would alienate Islamabad. This delicate phrasing reveals the core impediment: mediators can only paper over the fundamental disagreement for so long. They can facilitate a ceasefire, but they cannot, from the outside, forge the political consensus required for a lasting settlement. The mediation is precarious because it must navigate the symptoms of violence without being permitted to address the disease of the border's disputed status. Turkey has similarly offered its good offices, but faces its own constraints, balancing its NATO commitments with its regional ambitions. The limitations of these external efforts underscore a harsh truth: no amount of shuttle diplomacy

can substitute for direct, politically courageous engagement between Islamabad and Kabul. Mediators can provide the room, but the leaders must fill it with substance. The broader narrative, therefore, is one of dangerous interconnection. The clashes at Torkham or Chaman are not isolated events. They are local expressions of a world in strategic flux. The repositioning of Western powers alters the calculus of regional states, making old disputes more volatile and entwining them with new great-power competitions. A border skirmish can quickly draw in questions of Chinese investment security in Pakistan, Iranian concerns about Sunni militancy, or Russian outreach to the Afghan regime. The Durand Line becomes a microcosm of a multipolar, less-ordered region. What, then, is the path forward? Lasting stability demands moving beyond the cyclical pattern of fire and talk. First, it requires diplomatic clarity couched in patience. Both sides must agree to formally and explicitly separate the issue of border security from the ultimate political status of the Durand Line. This is a painful but necessary compromise. Joint mechanisms to prevent cross-border militancy and manage crossings are urgently needed, even if the agreement establishing them is tactically silent on the long-term legal question. This is a practical, if uneasy, coexistence. Second, regional cooperation must evolve from rhetoric to structured engagement. Neighboring states, each with a stake in stability, should form a contact group not to impose a solution, but to collectively incentivize dialogue and manage fallout. This includes encouraging economic connectivity; trade has a way of building its own logic for peaceful borders. The most critically, it demands internal political resilience. In both nations, the Durand Line issue is deeply emotive and tied to nationalist narratives. Leaders will need to build domestic understanding that a managed, peaceful frontier is not a surrender of principle, but a precondition for addressing the profound economic and security challenges their people face. The space for such diplomacy is narrow, but it is the only space where a lasting solution can grow. The Durand Line will not be redrawn. Nor is its contested status likely to be resolved soon. The objective, then, must be to drain it of violence. This can only happen if both Pakistan and Afghanistan recognize that their standoff is now amplified by the wider tremors of a changing world. In an era of great-power retrenchment, the cost of perpetual conflict on the frontier grows higher, not lower. The quieting of this unquiet border begins with the acknowledgment that its tensions are no longer just bilateral; they are a bellwether for regional stability in an age of transition. The time for managing crises is past; the precarious work of managing the peace must begin.

Briefs

Muslim world rejects Israel's recognition...

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the Republic of Yemen, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. "Their condemnation in the strongest terms of such recognition, which constitutes a grave violation of the principles of international law and the United Nations Charter, which explicitly stipulates the imperative of protecting the sovereignty of states and their territorial integrity, and reflects Israel's expansionist," the statement said. They also reiterated full support of the sovereignty of the Federal Republic of Somalia, and the unequivocal rejection of any measures that undermine the unity of Somalia, its territorial integrity or its sovereignty over its entire territory. The recognition of parts of states constituted a serious precedent and threatened international peace and security and violated the cardinal principles of international law and the United Nations Charter, it emphasised. "The full rejection of any potential link between such measure and any attempts to forcibly expel the Palestinian people out of their land, which is unequivocally rejected in any form as a matter of principle," it further added.

MQM founder ordered Imran...

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The federal minister said that he possesses evidence against the killer, adding that he is ready to fully cooperate to ensure that those responsible for Dr Farooq's murder are brought to justice. He said the actions of the MQM founder had damaged Muhajirs' reputation and set them back 200 years, particularly in terms of education and civic development. The federal minister claimed that Scotland Yard also knew who was responsible for Dr Farooq's killing, adding that the children of the slain leader were hidden for 15 days following the murder for security reasons. "Dr Imran Farooq's children have now grown up," Kamal said and advised them to pursue legal action to investigate their father's murder. "This man (Altaf) used to orchestrate murders and then mourn the same."

KP CM, Aleema slam Punjab govt, warn of street...

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she asked, conveying Imran Khan's message that if asked to mobilise, PTI supporters would come out on the streets. She said the authorities' ultimate aim was to force the PTI chairman into submission. Speaking to the media alongside the wife and son of detained PTI leader Ejaz Chaudhry, the KP CM said witnessing the resilience of Chaudhry and other prisoners held unjustly gave them strength and courage. "We salute their struggle and pay tribute to their resilience and sacrifices," he said, adding that their steadfastness under difficult circumstances served as a source of inspiration. Afridi highlighted that in KP, opposition leaders are allowed to speak freely in the assembly without interruption. "The attitude we are witnessing here is beyond understanding," he said, calling it an approach that spreads division among citizens of different provinces. He accused the ruling elite of using power for personal gain, alleging, "Their only objective is to accumulate wealth when in government and flee the country when out of power."

Babar dropped, Shadab returns as Pakistan name squad for Sri Lanka T20I series

Shaheen Afridi, Haris and other senior players featuring in BPL have not been included in 15-member squad

DNA

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Sunday announced a 15-member squad for the upcoming three-match T20I series against Sri Lanka, with all-rounder Shadab Khan returning to the side and uncapped wicketkeeper-batter Khawaja Nafay earning his maiden call-up. Senior players, including Babar Azam, Shaheen Afridi, Mohammad Rizwan, and Haris Rauf, who are currently featuring in the Big Bash League (BBL) 15, have not been included in the squad. The squad was announced amid uncertainty over the availability of players featuring in the BBL, as the series schedule overlaps with the T20 league.

Shadab, who is also participating in the BBL, has been recalled after last representing Pakistan in June before undergoing shoulder surgery earlier this year. "Following a successful rehabilitation programme at the National Cricket Academy, the all-rounder has regained full fitness and is currently playing his trade in Australia's Big Bash League, prompting selectors to recall him for the series," the PCB said in a statement. The squad also includes uncapped wicketkeeper-batter Khawaja Nafay. The 23-year-old right-hander, who has been part of the Pakistan Shaheens setup, has featured in 32 T20 matches and boasts a strike rate of 132.81, earning his maiden call-up to the national side. According to the PCB, Salman Ali Agha

will continue to lead the side after captaining Pakistan in a record 34 T20I matches this year – the most by any Pakistan player in a single calendar year. Pakistan are set to depart for Sri Lanka in the first week of January, with all three T20Is scheduled to be played at the Rangiri Dambulla International Cricket Stadium in Dambulla on January 7, 9 and 11. "The series will provide Pakistan an opportunity to finalise their squad for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, scheduled to take place in India and Sri Lanka from February 7 to March 8," the PCB added. **Squad:** Salman Ali Agha (captain), Abdul Samad, Abrar Ahmad, Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Khawaja Nafay (wk), Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad

Salman Mirza, Mohammad Wasim Jr, Naseem Shah, Sahibzada Farhan (wk), Saim Ayub, Shadab Khan, Usman Khan (wk), Usman Tariq **Team management:** Naveed Akram Cheema (manager), Mike Hesson (head coach), Ashley Noffke (bowling coach), Hanif Malik (batting coach), Shane McDermott (fielding coach), Cliffe Deacon (physiotherapist), Grant Luden (strength and conditioning coach), Talha Ejaz (analyst), Syed Naeeem Ahmad (media manager), Col Usman Anwari (security manager), Dr Wajid Ali Rafai (team doctor) and Muhammad Ehsan (masseur). **Series schedule** **First T20I: January 7** **Second T20I: January 9** **Third T20I: January 11**

Rural South Punjab sees unprecedented boom in cricket tournaments

MULTAN: As winter vacations arrive, rural areas of South Punjab transform into vibrant cricket arenas, where open fields, harvested farmlands and village grounds echo with cheers, commentary and the sound of tennis balls wrapped in tape striking bats. December, in particular, brings with it an unmistakable cricket fever that grips almost every village across the region. From Multan to Vehari, Layyah to Muzaffargarh, cricket tournaments have become an inseparable part of winter holidays. In nearly every union council, comprising around eight villages, it is difficult to find a single village where cricket matches are not being played. For the youth of South Punjab, winter vacations and cricket festivals have become inseparable companions. What makes these tournaments distinctive is their purely rural and community-based structure. Unlike open tournaments, where teams can recruit players from anywhere, most village-level events strictly follow a "pure desi system." Under this format, each team must consist solely of players belonging to the same village. This rule not only strengthens local identity but also produces highly competitive and emotionally charged matches, as players represent their own communities.

Matches are generally played in short formatsoften six overs per side, using tennis balls tightly wrapped with tape, a popular innovation that allows fast-paced cricket without expensive equipment. While international cricket rules are largely followed, local adaptations add their own charm and excitement. One such tournament was recently held at Chak No. 69/WB in Maili Tehsil of Vehari district, where around 16 village teams participated. Each team represented a single village, and the matches attracted hundreds of spectators, including elders, children and families. The enthusiasm extended beyond the ground, as matches were streamed live on social media platforms, with outstanding performances quickly going viral. Tournament organisers including Dr Mehran, Naveed, Tasawar, Muazzim, Harris and Yousuf talking to APP stated that it was one of the best event of South Punjab. They started making arrangements for the mega event for almost three months ago. Million of rupees were being spent to create attraction in the healthy event. Similarly, another major tournament took place at Chak No. 198-EB, featuring around 32 village teams. Local sponsors played a crucial role by supporting teams financially and covering

expenses, reflecting the strong community involvement in these events. In recent years, a new and thrilling format, single-wicket cricket, has gained rapid popularity in rural South Punjab. In this format, each team consists of only two players: one batsman and one bowler. Matches are limited to a single over, making every ball crucial. Interestingly, only sixes are counted; singles, doubles and even fours do not add to the score. Victory goes to the player who hits the maximum number of sixes. The rules of single-wicket cricket add an extra layer of excitement. If a match ends in a tie, a super over of three balls is played. If the tie persists, the decision is made through a toss. Due to the two-player team structure, a large number of teams can participate, resulting in fast-paced, high-intensity contests that keep spectators on edge. Sports observers believe this growing cricket culture is playing a vital role in promoting local talent. Many young players who showcase exceptional skills in these tournaments gain recognition beyond their villages, with some even catching the attention of club-level and district-level selectors. Beyond competition, these tournaments serve as a major source of entertainment, social bonding and positive engagement for rural youth. – **Agencies**

Baku hosts planning conference of “Shield of Peace 2026”

BAKU: The main planning conference of "Shield of Peace 2026" exercise to be held with the participation of a group of servicemen from the Azerbaijan Army and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Armed Forces was held in Baku on December 25, the Ministry of Defense told AZERTAC. At the event organized at the Ministry of Defense, the military delegations of both countries engaged in extensive discussions on the objectives of the exercise to be held in the UAE in February, 2026, the activities to be carried out in successive phases, and other related issues. Briefings were delivered on the tasks to be executed during the "Shield of Peace 2026" exercise, and questions of mutual interest were addressed. Within the framework of the UAE delegation visit to Azerbaijan, delegates visited several military units of the Azerbaijan Army. The guests were provided with detailed information on the conditions established at the military units and the training levels of the servicemen., December 27, AZERTAC The main planning conference of "Shield of Peace 2026" exercise to be held with the participation of a group of servicemen from the Azerbaijan Army and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Armed Forces was held in Baku on December 25, the Ministry of Defense told AZERTAC. At the event organized at the Ministry of Defense, the military delegations of both countries engaged in extensive discussions on the objectives of the exercise to be held in the UAE in February, 2026, the activities to be carried out in successive phases, and other related issues. Briefings were delivered on the tasks to be executed during the "Shield of Peace 2026" exercise, and questions of mutual interest were addressed. Within the framework of the UAE delegation visit to Azerbaijan, delegates visited several military units of the Azerbaijan Army. The guests were provided with detailed information on the conditions established at the military units and the training levels of the servicemen. – **Agencies**

Myanmar junta stages election after five years of civil war

YANGON: A trickle of voters made their way to Myanmar's heavily restricted polls on Sunday, with the ruling junta tout-ing the exercise as a return to democracy five years after it ousted the last elected government, triggering civil war. Former civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi remains jailed, while her hugely popular party has been dissolved and is not taking part. Campaigners, Western diplomats and the UN's rights chief have all condemned the phased month-long vote, citing a ballot stacked with military allies and a stark crackdown on dissent. The pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party is widely expected to emerge as the largest bloc, in what critics say would be a rebranding of martial rule. "We guarantee it to be a free and fair election," junta chief Min Aung Hlaing told reporters in the capital Naypyidaw, where he cast his ballot after polls opened at 6:00 am (2330 GMT Saturday). "It's organised by the military, we can't let our name be tarnished." The Southeast Asian nation of around 50 million is riven by civil war and there will be no voting in areas controlled by rebel factions which have risen up to challenge military rule. Snaking queues of voters formed outside polling stations in the last election in 2020, which the military declared void a few months later when it ousted Aung San Suu Kyi and seized power. But this time journalists and polling staff outnumbered early voters at a downtown Yangon station near the gleaming Sule Pagoda – the site of huge pro-democracy protests after the coup. – **Agencies**

Bulgaria adopts euro amid fear and uncertainty

SOFIA: Bulgaria will become the 21st country to adopt the euro on Thursday, but some believe the move could bring higher prices and add to instability in the European Union's poorest country. A protest campaign emerged this year to "keep the Bulgarian lev", playing on public fears of price rises and a generally negative view of the euro among much of the population. But successive governments have pushed to join the eurozone and supporters insist it will boost the economy, reinforce ties to the West and protect against Russia's influence. The single currency first rolled out in 12 countries on January 1, 2002, and has since regularly extended its influence, with Croatia the last country to join in 2023. But Bulgaria faces unique challenges, including anti-corruption protests that recently swept a conservative-led government from office, leaving the country on the verge of its eighth election in five years. Boryana Dimitrova of the Alpha Research polling institute, which has tracked public opinion on the euro for a year, told AFP any problems with euro adoption would be seized on by anti-EU politicians. Any issues will become "part of the political campaign, which creates a basis for rhetoric directed against the EU", she said. While far-right and pro-Russia parties have been behind several anti-euro protests, many people, especially in poor rural areas, worry about the new currency. "Prices will go up. That's what friends of mine who live in Western Europe told me," Bilyana Nikolova, 53, who runs a grocery store in the village of Chuprene in northwestern Bulgaria, told AFP. The latest survey by the EU's polling

agency Eurobarometer suggested 49 percent of Bulgarians were against the single currency. After hyperinflation in the 1990s, Bulgaria pegged its currency to the German mark and then to the euro, making the country dependent on the European Central Bank (ECB). "It will now finally be able to take part in decision making within this monetary union," Georgi Angelov, senior economist at the Open Society Institute in Sofia, told AFP. An EU member since 2007, Bulgaria joined the so-called "waiting room" to the single currency in 2020, at the same time as Croatia. The gains of joining the euro are "substantial", ECB president Christine Lagarde said last month in Sofia, citing "smoother trade, lower financing costs and more stable prices". Small and medium-sized enterprises stand to save an equivalent of some 500 million euros (\$580 million) in exchange fees, she added. One sector expected to benefit in the Black Sea nation is tourism, which this year generated around eight percent of the country's GDP. Lagarde predicted the impact on consumer prices would be "modest and short-lived", saying in earlier euro changeovers, the impact was between 0.2 and 0.4 percentage points. But consumers – already struggling with inflation – fear they will not be able to make ends meet, according to Dimitrova. Food prices in November were up five percent year-on-year, according to the National Statistical Institute, more than double the eurozone average. Parliament this year adopted empowered oversight bodies to investigate sharp price hikes and curb "unjustified" surges linked to the euro changeover.

Melbourne Cricket Ground curator in ‘state of shock’ after Ashes Test carnage

Chief executive Todd Greenberg on Sunday estimated that the Melbourne shortfall alone would cost the governing body more than Aus\$10 million (US\$6.7 million)

MELBOURNE: Melbourne Cricket Ground head curator Matt Page said Sunday he was in a "state of shock" watching the carnage unfold during the two-day fourth Ashes Test which has left Cricket Australia facing millions of dollars in revenue shortfall. Page and his team left 10 millimetres of grass on the wicket, providing fast bowlers with excessive seam movement and bounce which made batting treacherous. Thirty-six wickets tumbled in 142 overs, 20 on the first day, and the game was all over in the evening session of day two as England won by four wickets for their first victory in Australia since January 2011. More than 90,000 fans were expected for day three and many more for days four and five. But with ticket sales having to be refunded, Cricket Australia faces another big financial hit after the Ashes series opener in Perth also ended within two days.

Chief executive Todd Greenberg on Sunday estimated that the Melbourne shortfall alone would cost the governing body more than Aus\$10 million (US\$6.7 million). It is the first time the same series has had multiple two-day Tests for 129 years, dating back to the time when wickets were left uncovered to the weather. "I was in a state of shock," Page said. "I've never been involved in a Test match like it and hopefully never involved in a Test match like that again. "We know this hasn't gone as we planned. We will look at what we need to do to improve." A year ago the grass on the pitch had been shaved down to seven millimetres and produced a thrilling Test that went all the way to the final session on day five as Australia beat India. Page said that cool and wet weather leading into this year's Test combined with forecast

heat on days three and four meant he had needed to take a different approach. "We're trying to balance that contest between bat and ball throughout, over the four or five days, to provide that captivating Test for all," he said. "We left it longer because we knew we were going to get (hot) weather at the back end that we knew we needed our grass (for)." International Cricket Council referee Jeff Crowe is yet to deliver his assessment of the pitch, pondering whether to give it an "unsatisfactory" rating which would see the venue slapped with a demerit point. England captain Ben Stokes and Australia counterpart Steve Smith were both critical of the surface, as were a string of former greats. "Being brutally honest, that's not really what you want," Stokes said. Smith added: "It was tricky. No one could really get in. When you see 36 wickets across two days, that's probably too much."

Former England captain Michael Vaughan labelled the pitch "a joke". Greenberg said Cricket Australia would undertake an end-of-season review of the management of Test wickets, conceding that the financial deficits "sting". "With the way batters are batting, and the way the game is evolving, are the preparation of our wickets in lock-step with that?" he told cricket.com.au. "If they're not, how do we make sure that they are so that we can try to balance the commercial imperatives versus the performance?" Despite the controversy, MCG chief executive Stuart Fox backed Page and his ground staff to continue. "We bought Matt on eight years ago because he's considered one of the best in the country, if not the best," Fox said. "I still believe that, and I always will. "You can see he's disappointed. He carries that responsibility and my job as a leader is to support people." – **Agencies**

Renounce political extremism and ‘return’

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He had also pointed out that political polarisation was damaging democracy, the economy, and national security. "If Pakistan is to be pulled out of the political crisis, it will automatically help the country emerge from the economic crisis as well," he said. Commenting on the economy today, the PPP chairman said the country's real economic condition could be judged by asking ordinary citizens about their financial situation. "If the federal government wants to tackle the economic crisis, it should consider public-private partnerships," he said.

India okays hydropower project on Chenab River

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participate in the Neutral Expert proceedings in good faith. In August, the Permanent Court of Arbitration had declared India shall "let flow" the waters of the western rivers for Pakistan's unrestricted use. The waters of the Chenab River Basin have been shared between Pakistan and India under the 1960 IWT, but the Dulhasti Stage-II project has been transgressing the provisions of the treaty. Under the IWT, Pakistan has control over the waters of the Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab rivers, while the Ravi, Beas and Sutlej rivers were under India's control. Following the illegal suspension of the treaty, India has decided to fast-track several disputed hydroelectric projects in the Indus Basin. These projects include Sawalkot, Ratle, Bursar, Pakal Dul, Kwar, Kiru, and Kirthal-I and 2. Dulhasti Stage-II is considered part of this strategy. Meanwhile, the latest project on the Chenab River could be detrimental from a defence and strategic point of view for Pakistan. The Chenab River falls within Pakistan's territory, and Dulhasti Stage-II construction would negate IWT, which India has declared as suspended by defying international agreements. Dulhasti Stage-II will utilise the existing infrastructure of Dulhasti Stage-I project. Notably, the 390 MW Dulhasti Stage-I is a run-of-the-river scheme that was commissioned in 2007. The project will utilise the existing dam, reservoir and power intake of Stage-I. In this phase, water will be drawn from the Marusudar River, which will be brought to the Dulhasti Dam through the Pakal Dul project. The objective is to ensure additional power generation by making maximum use of available water resources.

BD police say Hadi's killers fled to India

FROM PAGE 01

a senior Dhaka Metropolitan Police officer, said at a news conference. Suspects Faisal Karim Masud and Alamgir Sheikh left Bangladesh through the Haluaghat border with India shortly after attacking Hadi on December 12, Islam said. They were received at the border by two Indian citizens, who escorted them into the northeastern state of Meghalaya before handing them over to two accomplices. Bangladeshi investigators were in contact with their Indian counterparts who had arrested the two suspected accomplices, Islam said. "We are communicating with Meghalaya police, who have confirmed the arrest of two Indian nationals," he added. Two senior Meghalaya police officers, however, did not comment when contacted by AFP. The Indian foreign ministry had earlier said it rejects "false narratives" about New Delhi's involvement in Hadi's killing. Ties between the neighbours have deteriorated since the ousted prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, fled the pro-democracy uprising and sought refuge in India. India says it is still considering Dhaka's requests to extradite Hasina, who was sentenced to death in absentia for orchestrating a deadly crackdown on the uprising.

Briefs

Libya holds funeral for military officials killed in plane crash

TRIPOLI: Libya on Saturday held a military funeral for the military chief of western Libya and four of his officers who died in a plane crash in Türkiye. The bodies arrived at Tripoli International Airport in caskets draped with Libyan flags and were carried in a funeral procession with soldiers holding their photographs. The private jet with Gen. Mohammed Ali Ahmad Al-Haddad, four other military officers, and three crew members crashed on Tuesday after taking off from Ankara, Türkiye's capital, killing everyone on board. Libyan officials said a technical malfunction on the plane caused the crash, but the investigation is still ongoing in coordination with Türkiye. Our martyrs were not just military leaders but also statesmen who were wise and disciplined and carried responsibility and believed that the national Libyan army is the country's shield and that building institutions is the real path toward a stable and secure Libya. Libya plunged into chaos after the country's 2011 uprising toppled and killed longtime leader Muammar Qaddafi. The country split, with rival administrations in the east and west. Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah's government governs the country from Tripoli, and Prime Minister Oussama Hammad's administration governs the east.—APP

Arab coalition warns against military moves undermining de-escalation in Yemen

DUBAI: The Arab coalition supporting Yemen's internationally recognised government warned on Saturday that any military movements undermining de-escalation efforts would be dealt with immediately to protect civilians, according to the Saudi Press Agency. The coalition's spokesperson, Major General Turki Al-Maliki, said the warning follows a request from Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council to take urgent measures to protect civilians in Hadramout Governorate amid what he described as serious humanitarian violations by groups affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council. The statement said the measures are part of ongoing joint Saudi-Emirati efforts to reduce tensions, facilitate the withdrawal of forces, hand over military camps, and enable local authorities to carry out their duties. Al-Maliki reaffirmed the coalition's support for Yemen's internationally recognized government and called on all parties to exercise restraint and engage in peaceful solutions, the agency reported.—APP

ADB condoles death of Dr Shamsad Akhtar

ISLAMABAD: The Asian Development Bank (ADB) Country Director for Pakistan, Emma Fan, on Sunday, expressed deep grief over the passing of former Director General of ADB and former federal minister for finance and ex-governor of the State Bank of Pakistan Dr Shamsad Akhtar, paying tribute to her outstanding contributions to policy reforms and development in the region. In a condolence message posted on X, Emma Fan said they were deeply saddened by the demise of Dr Shamsad Akhtar, describing her as a dedicated leader whose significant role in advancing policy reforms and development initiatives had left a lasting impact. She extended heartfelt condolences to Dr Shamsad Akhtar's family, friends and colleagues during this difficult time, adding that her legacy would be remembered and cherished at the Asian Development Bank. "We are deeply saddened by the passing of Dr. Shamsad Akhtar, former Director General of the ADB and former Pakistani finance minister and governor of the central bank.—APP

Freezing rain floods Gaza camps



KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza: Rain lashed the Gaza Strip over the weekend, flooding makeshift encampments with ankle-deep puddles as Palestinians displaced by the two-year war attempted to stay dry in tents frayed by months of use. Muddy water soaked blankets and mattresses in tents in a camp in Khan Younis and fragile shelters were propped up with old pieces of wood. Children wearing flip-flops and light clothing ill-suited for winter waded through the freezing puddles, which turned dirt roads into rivers. Some people used shovels to try to push the water out of their tents. "We drowned last night," said Majdoleen Tarabein, a woman displaced from Rafah in southern Gaza. "Puddles formed, and there was a bad smell. The tent flew away. We don't know what to do or where to go." She showed blankets and the remaining contents of the tent, completely soaked and covered in mud, as she and family members tried to wring them dry by hand. "When we woke up in the morning, we found that the water had entered the tent," said Eman Abu Riziq, also displaced in Khan Younis, as she pointed to a puddle just outside. "These are the mattresses — they are all completely soaked. My daughters' belongings were soaked. The water is entering from here and there," she said, gesturing toward the ceiling and the corners of the tent. Her family is still reeling from her husband's recent death, and the constant struggle to stay dry in the winter rains. At least 12 people, including a 2-week-old infant, have died since Dec. 13 from hypothermia or weather-related collapses of war-damaged homes, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, part of the Hamas-run government. Emergency workers warned people not to stay in damaged buildings because they could collapse at any moment. But so much of the territory reduced to rubble, there are few places to escape the rain. In July, the United Nations Satellite Center estimated that almost 80 percent of the buildings in Gaza have been destroyed or damaged. Since a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas went into effect on Oct. 11, 414 people have been killed and 1,142 wounded in Gaza, according to the Health Ministry. The overall Palestinian death toll from the war has risen to at least 71,266. The ministry, which does not distinguish between militants and civilians in

its count, is staffed by medical professionals and maintains detailed records viewed as generally reliable by the international community. Aid deliveries into Gaza are falling far short of the amount called for under the US-brokered ceasefire, according to an Associated Press analysis of the Israeli military's figures. The Israeli military body in charge of humanitarian aid said in the past week that 4,200 trucks full of humanitarian aid entered Gaza, plus eight garbage trucks to assist with sanitation, as well as tents and winter clothing as part of the winterization efforts. But it refused to elaborate on the number of tents. Humanitarian aid groups have said the need far outstrips the number of tents that have entered. Since the ceasefire began, approximately 72,000 tents and 403,000 tarps have entered, according to the Shelter Cluster, an international coalition of aid providers led by the Norwegian Refugee Council. "Harsh winter weather is compounding more than two years of suffering. People in Gaza are surviving in

sy, waterlogged tents and among ruins. There is nothing inevitable about this. Aid supplies are not being allowed in at the scale required," Philippe Lazzarini, the commissioner-general of the top UN group overseeing aid in Gaza, wrote on X. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu traveled to Washington to meet with US President Donald Trump in Florida about the second stage of the ceasefire. Netanyahu is expected to meet with Trump at Mara-Lago on Monday. Though the ceasefire agreement has mostly held over the past 2 1/2 months, its progress has slowed. Israel has said it refuses to move on to the next stage of the ceasefire while the remains of the final hostage killed in the attack on Oct. 7, 2023, that sparked the war are still in Gaza. Challenges in the next phase of the ceasefire include the deployment of an international stabilization force, a technocratic governing body for Gaza, the disarmament of Hamas and further Israeli troop withdrawals from the territory. Both Israel and Hamas have accused each other of truce violations.—Agencies

Pak-Tajik PTA key to trade liberalization, targeting \$300m in bilateral trade

DUSHANBE: Pakistan's Ambassador to Tajikistan, Muhammad Saeed Sarwar, stated that a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) between the two nations is a strong possibility, emphasizing trade liberalization's role in fostering regional economic integration. Bilateral trade could reach \$300 million in the coming years, with the business communities of both countries playing a pivotal role in linking potential sectors, the Ambassador said during a joint interactive session with an eight-member Pakistani media delegation and local businessmen at the Embassy of Pakistan in Dushanbe. He highlighted vast opportunities in the halal meat sector, noting Pakistan's planned export of 143,000 tons worth \$14.5 million to Tajikistan, which would expand trade in halal products. On direct flights, Ambassador Sarwar stressed the importance of effective marketing and travel agents to ensure their regular operation. He added that resuming these flights would boost economic and trade activities while promoting mutual tourism. Tajikistan remains a key trade partner for Pakistan, essential to regional economic integration, he said. Pakistan's envoy said that Central Asian nations like Tajikistan are vital for Pakistan, with both ready to deepen future economic and trade connections. The Ambassador pointed to Tajikistan's robust 8 percent annual GDP growth as evidence of its fast-expanding economy. High-level visits continue, including Pakistan's Prime Minister, Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif in May this year. Recently, Tajikistan's Minister of Culture inaugurated the first-ever Tajik Cultural Week in Islamabad, signaling strengthening people-to-people and cultural ties, he said. "Pakistan and Tajikistan share deep commonalities in faith, history, culture and literature," he noted. The Ambassador said that Pakistan was among the first to recognize Tajikistan's independence and establish diplomatic relations. He said that the two nations enjoyed strong historical, cultural, social, linguistic and religious bonds. The Embassy of Pakistan remains committed to advancing academic and educational ties between the countries, the envoy concluded.—DNA

Sweden's death toll from storm rises to three

HELSINKI: The death toll in Sweden rose to three after a storm battered Scandinavia Saturday and overnight, with thousands still without power on Sunday. The storm, dubbed Johannes in Sweden, swept over large parts of the northern half of the country and western parts of Finland. A man in his 60s who had been working in the forest was hit by a falling tree on Saturday in Hofors in Sweden, police said on Sunday. He later died of his injuries in the hospital. The fatality adds to the two reported on Saturday: a man in his 50s died at the hospital after also being hit by a falling tree near the Kungsberget ski resort in central Sweden, Mats Lann of Gävleborg police told AFP. Further north, regional utility Hemab said that one of its employees had died in an accident "in the field." Broadcaster SVT reported that the worker had also been caught under a falling tree. Strong gusts toppled trees, disrupted traffic and caused large power outages in Sweden and Finland. In Finland, more than 85,000 homes were still without power around 12 am local time (10 gm) on Sunday after a peak of over 180,000. Energy companies warned the repair work might take several days. Meanwhile, Swedish news agency TT reported that at least 40,000 Swedish homes were still left without electricity on Sunday morning.—APP

Thais, Cambodians fear returning home despite border truce

BANGKOK: At a Thai university-turned-shelter for displaced people, Kanlaya Somjettana is reluctant to go home even after a truce halted weeks of border clashes with Cambodia, fearing the violence may not be over. She said some people forced to flee the fighting began returning home on Sunday, a day after the ceasefire was announced, but many evacuees on both sides of the border preferred waiting for an official word that it was safe. Some cited a lack of trust that the neighbouring country would respect the truce, after previous ones had been broken. "I really hope this ceasefire will last long and we can return home," 21-year-old homemaker Kanlaya told AFP from the university campus in Thailand's Surin city. "But I will not go back home as long as authorities do not confirm that it is safe," she said, adding that the evacuation centre was now less crowded, although hundreds remained there. On the Cambodian side, 35-year-old So Choeun said she expected to give birth within days and hoped to then take her baby home, about one kilometre (0.6 miles) from the border.

But not yet, said the woman sheltering with family under makeshift tents at a Buddhist pagoda in Banteay Meanchey province. "Despite the ceasefire, we dare not return home yet. We are still frightened," she told AFP. "We will wait to see the situation for a few days, if it will stay calm." Officials on both sides said the day-old ceasefire was holding on Sunday, but for most areas, there has been no all-clear notice just yet.—APP

CCP wraps up with strong enforcement against cartelization

ISLAMABAD: The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) took strong enforcement action in 2025 against cartelization, price fixing, and other anti-competitive practices across key sectors, including sugar, steel, poultry, fertilizer, education, transport, advertising, power supply, and manufacturing, to protect consumers and ensure fair markets. In the sugar sector, CCP issued show cause notices to ten sugar mills in Punjab for colluding on the start of the crushing season and fixing the sugarcane procurement price at Rs. 400 per maund. The Commission found that the mills jointly decided to delay crushing during a meeting held on November 10, 2025, in violation of Section 4 of the Competition Act, 2010, according to press release issued by CCP here Sunday. In a major enforcement action, CCP imposed heavy penalties on Aisha Steel Mills Limited and International Steels Limited for cartelization and price fixing. Aisha Steel Mills was fined Rs. 648 million, while International Steels was penalized Rs. 914 million. The inquiry found coordinated pricing, exchange of sensitive information, and an average steel price increase of 111 percent over three years. To protect parents and students, CCP issued show cause notices to seventeen major private school systems for abusing dominance by forcing parents to purchase expensive, logo-branded notebooks, workbooks, and uniforms from selected vendors. In the poultry sector, CCP imposed a collective fine of Rs. 155 million on eight major poultry hatcheries for cartelization and price fixing of day-old broiler chicks, which contributed to higher poultry prices. In the fertilizer sector, CCP imposed penalties of Rs. 50 million each on six major urea manufacturers and Rs. 75 million on a leading industry association, totaling Rs. 375 million, for coordinated conduct that restricted competition. CCP also fined the Transporters of Goods Association and the Local Goods Transport Association Rs. 5 million each for rate fixing through collective decisions that restricted independent pricing by transporters. Strong enforcement actions were also taken through raids and inspections. CCP conducted raids in Lahore on entities linked to cartelization in the out-of-home advertising market over alleged price fixing and bid coordination. Similar raids were carried out on suppliers involved in transformer reclamation materials for power distribution companies over suspected bid rigging. In Gujrat, CCP conducted search and inspection operations at the premises of two electric fan manufacturers and their industry association over suspected cartelization and price fixing, securing documents and digital evidence. Moreover, significant progress was made on the litigation front, as the Competition Appellate Tribunal (CAT) upheld key cartelization cases. CAT disposed of the long-pending Pakistan Poultry Association (PPA) cartel case, upheld CCP's findings, and ordered recovery of a reduced penalty of Rs25 million. The Tribunal also upheld CCP's order against the Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA) for fixing wheat flour prices and directed payment of a Rs35 million fine. In the poultry sector, CAT admitted and fixed for hearing the appeals of eight hatcheries fined Rs155 million for cartelization in day-old chick prices, while attempts to stall the proceedings were rejected by the Lahore High Court.—DNA

Multicultural UK town bids to turn page on troubled past

LUTON: One of Britain's most multicultural towns, long tarnished by extremist links, is increasingly seeking to celebrate its identity, despite a bitter immigration debate and US President Donald Trump's warning that Europe risks "civilizational erasure" from migrants. Luton, north of London, is among a small number of UK towns and cities with a non-white majority. An estimated 150 languages and dialects are spoken in the town of 230,000 people. Notorious far-right agitator Tommy Robinson and misogynist influencer Andrew Tate, who faces court cases in Britain and Romania, hail from the town, where about a third of residents are Muslim. Both have used Luton and its post-industrial struggles with deprivation and community cohesion in their stories. Robinson in particular has presented himself as homegrown resistance to "Islamic extremism." A number of jihadists behind UK attacks have had links to the town. But neither Robinson, 43, nor the self-proclaimed misogynist Tate, 39, are seen there these days, and residents eschew their divisive beliefs to defend Luton's diversity. "That non-love energy, spirit, that comes from Tommy, that comes from Andrew ... that is definitely not representative of Luton," lifelong resident Glenn Jenkins, 62, told AFP from a community space he founded. Housing a music studio, among other things, it sits near Marsh Farm, a once-notoriously deprived public housing complex where US-born Tate grew up. He branded it "the worst area of the

worst town." "Luton is highly multicultural, which is one of its treasures," Jenkins added. Luton — best known for its airport serving budget airlines and a football team with top-sporty fortunes — was for centuries an industrial town. Its factories were once renowned for hat-making then, more recently, vehicle manufacturing. But like many places, it has struggled with the loss of heavy industry and some of its neighborhoods are among Britain's most deprived. Robinson — whose real name is Stephen Yaxley-Lennon — first garnered national attention by forming the now-defunct far-right English Defense League (EDL) there in 2009. That followed Islamist demonstrators staging an anti-war protest during a parade of soldiers returning from Iraq. Seven Muslim men from Luton appeared in court for branding soldiers rapists, murderers and baby killers. The town saw occasional clashes between the EDL, counter-protesters and police in subsequent years, and plenty of what locals call "bad press." Supported by X owner Elon Musk, Robinson drew up to 150,000 people to Britain's biggest-ever far-right march in London in September. But in Luton, with its sizeable Irish and eastern European heritage communities alongside a big British-South Asian population, leaders say they have worked hard — and successfully — at cohesion. "We're a workshop for peace," Peter Adams, a lay member of the Anglican St. Mary's Church for nearly two decades, told AFP. The town council has long been

Labour-controlled and the center-left ruling party holds its two parliamentary seats. Luton's ceremonial mayor, Amy Nicholls, aged 30 when nominated earlier this year, is its youngest and first from the LGBTQ community. But populist Nigel Farage's hard-right Reform UK, which leads in national polls, could be poised to make inroads. It nearly won a recent by-election for a local government seat. Ex-Labour now-Conservative councillor Aslam Khan said Reform has aired valid concerns over "illegal immigration" but accused the party of "demonizing certain communities" like his own, of Pakistani Muslim heritage. "Criticizing and stigmatizing and demonizing a community is very unfair," he told AFP. Khan and others argue economic regeneration plans — which include a £1.7-billion (\$2.3-billion) town center renovation and repurposing the former Vauxhall car plant — are the best way to counter far-right narratives. But Tricia, 75, whose family has lived there for generations, told AFP: "You feel like a foreigner in your own town." "I think the English are just being pushed out, all over the country," she said, beneath a World War I memorial bearing relatives' names. Perhaps tellingly, Tricia noted her views are not endorsed by her adult sons, denying their accusations of racism. For Jenkins, "two different takes on the world" are playing out in Luton and beyond. "I know people who love Tommy, and they're my friends and brothers — I grew up with them — but they're a minority," he said.—Agencies

Guinea junta strongman headed for victory in presidential vote

CONAKRY: Guineans vote in a presidential election Sunday with victory all but assured for Mamady Doumbouya, a general who led the junta that seized power in the west African country four years ago. By running, the strongman is reneging on a pledge not to stand for office and to hand the country back to civilian rule by the end of 2024. Instead, he has sought to silence dissent. All the main opposition leaders have been barred from standing in the election. UN human rights chief Volker Turk said Friday the campaign had been "marked by intimidation of opposition actors, apparently politically-motivated enforced disappearances, and constraints on media freedom." Guinea's opposition has called for a boycott of the vote, in a country rich in minerals but where 52 percent of the population lives in poverty, according to World Bank figures. While long blighted by coups, Guinea experienced a democratic transition with the November 2010 election of Alpha Conde, the country's first freely elected president. Doumbouya overthrew him in September 2021.—APP

Winter storm snarls holiday travel across US Northeast, Great Lakes

BOSTON: More than a thousand flights were canceled or delayed across the Northeast and Great Lakes regions due to snow as thousands took to roads and airports during the busy travel period between Christmas and New Year's. New York City received about 4 inches (10.2 centimeters) of snow Friday night into early Saturday — slightly under what some forecasts had predicted. At least 1,500 flights were canceled from Friday night, according to flight-tracking service FlightAware. But by the morning, both the roads and the skies were clearing. "The storm is definitely winding down, a little bit of flurries across the Northeast this morning," said Bob Oravec, a Maryland-based forecaster at the National Weather Service. Oravec said the storm was moving from the northwest toward the Southeast, with the largest snowfall in the New York City area reaching over 6 inches (15 centimeters) in central eastern Long Island. Farther north in the Catskills, communities saw as much as 10 inches (25 centimeters). Newark Liberty International, John F. Kennedy International and LaGuardia airports posted snow warnings on the social media platform X on Friday cautioning that weather conditions could cause flight disruptions.—APP

Syrian Alawites protest in coastal heartland after mosque bombing

LATAKIA: Syrian Alawites took to the streets on Sunday in the coastal city of Latakia to protest after a mosque bombing that killed eight people in Homs two days before The attack, which took place in an Alawite area of Homs city, was the latest against the religious minority, which has been the target of several episodes of violence since the December 2024 fall of longtime ruler Bashar Assad, himself an Alawite. Security forces were deployed in the area, and intervened to break up clashes between demonstrators and counter-protesters, an AFP correspondent witnessed. "Why the killing? Why the assassination? Why the kidnapping? Why these random actions without any deterrent, accountability or oversight?" said protester Numeir Ramadan, a 48-year-old trader. "Assad is gone, and we do not support Assad... Why this killing?" Sunday's demonstration came after calls from prominent spiritual leader Ghazal Ghazal, head of the Islamic Alawite Council in Syria and Abroad, who on Saturday urged people to "show the world that the Alawite community cannot be humiliated or marginalized." "We do not want a civil war, we want political federalism. We do not want your terrorism. We want to determine our own destiny," he said in a video message on Facebook. Protesters carried pictures of Ghazal along with banners expressing support for him, while chanting calls for decentralized government authority and a degree of regional autonomy.—APP

Briefs

Government declares Adil Raja 'proscribed person'

Federal cabinet orders to submit implementation report within seven days to division

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: The federal cabinet has approved a summary imposing a ban on former Pakistan Army Major Adil Raja under the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997, declaring him a proscribed person. The notification, issued by the cabinet division on December 26, stated that the federal cabinet approved the ban under Section 11[EE] of the ATA 1997. "The Cabinet considered the summary dated 23rd December, 2025 submitted by the Interior and Narcotics Control Division, which was circulated in terms of rule 17(1)(b) read with rule 19(1) of the Rules of Business, 1973 for 'Proscription of Mr Adil Farooq Raja under Section 11ee of the Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997' and approved the proposal at para 8 read with para 6 of the summary," read the notification. The cabinet division directed the authorities concerned to furnish a report on the implementation of the decision within seven days of receipt of the decision. Raja, who is based in the United Kingdom, was among the two retired Pakistan Army officers convicted and sentenced under the Army Act, and for violations of the provisions of the Official Secrets Act in 2023.

Trade deficit with Middle East countries swells

MONITORING DESK

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's trade deficit with the Middle East swelled by 7.88 per cent during the first five months of 2025-26, driven by a surge in imports and a decline in exports to the region. In absolute terms, the trade gap with the Middle East widened to \$5.948 billion in July-November from \$5.514bn in the same period last year, according to data compiled by the State Bank of Pakistan. In FY25, the deficit with the region increased 7.37pc to \$13.974bn from \$13.014bn in the preceding year. The swelling trade deficit is a cause for concern among policymakers, primarily due to the rising influx of petroleum products from the region. Increase was noted in imports from the region, reflecting higher oil imports from United Arab Emirates (UAE), followed by Saudi Arabia and other countries. Exports to the Middle East fell 9.85pc to \$1.217bn in 5MFY26 from \$1.350bn over the corresponding months of last year. In FY25, exports to the Middle East fell 1.52pc to \$3.107bn from \$3.155bn over the same period last year.

Iran Pays Tribute to Benazir Bhutto

DNA

ISLAMABAD: On the solemn occasion of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Day, the Islamic Republic of Iran has extended heartfelt sentiments to the Government and people of Pakistan, honoring the memory of the distinguished leader whose courage and vision left an enduring mark on history. In a statement, Iran paid respectful tribute to the late Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, recalling her legacy of public service, advocacy for human values, and dedication to the empowerment of the people of Pakistan. Her sacrifices for the principles of social justice, the message noted, remain a source of reflection and resolve for generations across Pakistan and the wider region. The Islamic Republic of Iran reaffirmed its solidarity with Pakistan in commemorating Bhutto's life and ideals.

Islamabad to become Pakistan's first capital smart city: Naqvi

From January 1, vehicles without an M-Tag will not be allowed entry into Islamabad, as part of new measures to regulate traffic and enhance security

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Federal Interior Minister

Mohsin Naqvi has announced that Islamabad will become Pakistan's first Capital Smart City, with a comprehensive plan to transform the existing Safe City project

into a modern, technology-driven model for urban management and public safety. Speaking during his visit to the Safe City Headquarters alongside Minister of State

Talal Chaudhry, Naqvi reviewed the city's monitoring systems on the digital wall and inspected advanced security surveillance at the special Chinese desk in the control room. He emphasized that reforms and effective use of technology in Safe City are the need of the hour. From January 1, vehicles without an M-Tag will not be allowed entry into Islamabad, as part of new measures to regulate traffic and enhance security. During a high-level meeting chaired at the Safe City Headquarters, Naqvi directed officials to accelerate work on the Capital Smart City project. He stressed that citizen services such as Rescue 1122, traffic management, security, and CDMA will be integrated into a centralized system to improve efficiency and public convenience. Naqvi further stated that the scope of the Capital Smart City initiative will be expanded nationwide, with Islamabad serving as a model to make it the safest city in Pakistan. "The Capital Smart City project will be adopted as a model to ensure peace, security, and modern urban facilities," he remarked. The Inspector General of Islamabad Police gave a detailed briefing on the transition from Safe City to Capital Smart City, noting that during Muharram, the use of Safe City cameras saved both time and resources. Senior officials including the Federal Secretary for Interior, Chief Commissioner Islamabad, and Additional Deputy Commissioner General were also present at the occasion.



Zelensky looks to close out Ukraine peace deal at Trump meet

The meeting, hosted by Trump at his opulent Mar-a-Lago residence, will be the pair's first in-person encounter since October, when the US president refused to grant Zelensky's request for long-range Tomahawk missiles

PALM BEACH: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky will sit down Sunday with Donald Trump and seek to secure the US president's stamp of approval for a new proposal to end the nearly four-year conflict with Russia. The 20-point plan, which emerged from weeks of intense US-Ukraine negotiations, lacks Moscow's approval, and the face-to-face in Florida comes in the wake of a massive Russian missile and drone attack on Kyiv. The meeting, hosted by Trump at his opulent Mar-a-Lago residence, will be the pair's first in-person encounter since October, when the US president refused to grant Zelensky's request for long-range Tomahawk missiles. During a stopover in Canada on Saturday, Zelensky said he hoped the talks would be "very constructive" and said

Russian leader Vladimir Putin had shown his hand with the latest assault on the Ukrainian capital.

"This attack is again, Russia's answer on our peace efforts. And this really showed that Putin doesn't want peace," he said. While in Canada, Zelensky held a conference call with European leaders who, according to German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, pledged their full support for his peace efforts. Russia has accused Ukraine and its European backers of trying to "torpedo" a previous US-brokered plan to stop the fighting. EU chiefs Ursula von der Leyen and Antonio Costa, who participated in the conference call, said the European Union's backing for Ukraine would never falter and vowed to maintain pressure on the Kremlin to come to terms.

Trump has so far been non-committal on the new peace proposal. Zelensky "doesn't have anything until I approve it," the president said in an interview with Politico on Friday. "So we'll see what he's got."

The talks will address a plan that would stop the war along its current front lines and could require Ukraine to pull back troops from the east, allowing the creation of demilitarized buffer zones. As such, it contains Kyiv's most explicit acknowledgement yet of possible territorial concessions.

But is does not envisage Ukraine withdrawing from the 20 percent of the eastern Donetsk region that it still controls



– Russia's main territorial demand. Trump has made ending the Ukraine and Gaza wars the centerpiece of his self-proclaimed second term as a "president of peace." But the Ukraine war has, by his own admission, proved far harder than he expected, and the president has repeatedly voiced his frustration with both sides for failing to secure a truce. In Canada, Zelensky told reporters that security guarantees would be a key focus of the talks in Florida. "Security guarantees must be simultaneous with the end of the war, because we must be confident that Russia will not start aggression again," he stressed. "We need strong security guarantees. We will discuss this and we will discuss the terms." Ukraine insists it needs more European and US support in terms of funding and weaponry – especially drones. – APP

Groundwork for ML-1 to begin in July next year

Ahsan Iqbal orders Sukkur-Hyderabad Motorway be completed within three years

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal chaired a review meeting on key Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) projects in the railways, highways and water sectors, directing the relevant ministries to prioritise timely execution, quality assurance and realistic financial planning for the next three years to ensure delivery of nationally critical infrastructure, The News reported on Sunday. The meeting held here reviewed major transport and water sector interventions under PSDP 2025-26, a news release said on Saturday. Member Infrastructure Dr Waqas Anwer gave a detailed presentation on the progress, scope, and funding requirements of priority projects, while senior officials from the Ministry of Railways, National Highway Authority (NHA) and Ministry of Water Resources were present. While reviewing the railway sector initiatives, the planning minister was briefed on the status of the Main Line-1 (ML-1) project, particularly the Karachi-Rohri section, for which groundwork is expected to be laid in July 2026. The meeting also reviewed the upgradation of 884 kilometres of Main Line-3 (ML-3) and the Thar Coal Railway Connectivity Project, a strategic initiative aimed at improving logistics for energy supply and industrial development. The Thar Coal Railway Connectivity Project, with an estimated cost of Rs53.7 billion, consists of three packages, including

construction of a new single-track railway line from the Thar coal mines to the new Chorr station over a distance of 105 kilometres, a new double-track line of approximately nine kilometres from Bin Qasim to Port Qasim, while Package Three covers the development of a coal unloading pit at Port Qasim and Lakhra Power Plant station. The project is expected to be completed by June 2026. Iqbal directed Ministry of Railways to submit a clear assessment of funding requirements for the next three years, stressing that "there should be no compromise on speed and quality in any of these strategic projects, as they represent long-term national assets and must be built to the highest standards". Meeting also reviewed the National Highway Authority's portfolio under PSDP 2025-26, which comprises 71 projects with a total cost of approximately Rs3,407 billion. The minister directed that the Sukkur-Hyderabad Motorway be completed within three years and be treated as a top-priority project. He further instructed that the work on the Karakoram Highway (KKH) phase 2 project should be expedited and completed by 2028 to save the KKH from being cut off due to the Diamer Bhasha Dam lake. Under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) framework, the minister emphasised the Sambrial-Kharan-Rawalpindi motorway, M-8 in Balochistan and the Mashkel-Panjgur-Chahgi road projects as high-priority initiatives requiring accelerated implementation. He directed the NHA to prepare a comprehensive portfolio of critical projects and present its funding requirements for the next three years to ensure uninterrupted progress and timely completion.

Italy arrests nine over Hamas funding

DNA

ROME: Italian prosecutors said on Saturday they had arrested nine people on suspicion of financing Hamas through charities based in Italy, in an operation coordinated by anti-mafia and anti-terrorism units. The suspects are accused of "belonging to and having financed" the Palestinian group, which the European Union designates as a terrorist organization, prosecutors in the northern Italian city of Genoa said in a statement. Those arrested allegedly diverted to Hamas-linked entities around 7 million euros (\$8.24 million) raised over the last two years for ostensibly humanitarian purposes, prosecutors said. Police seized assets worth more than 8 million euros. The investigation began after suspicious financial transactions were flagged and expanded through cooperation with Dutch authorities and other EU countries, coordinated through the EU judicial agency Eurojust. Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni thanked the authorities for "a particularly complex and important operation" which had uncovered financing for Hamas through "so-called charity organizations."

UK secures migrant return deal

NEWS DESK

LONDON: Angola and Namibia have agreed to accept the return of illegal migrants and criminals after the British government threatened visa penalties for countries refusing to cooperate, the UK Home Office said late on Saturday. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has been stripped of fast-track visa services and preferential treatment for VIPs and decision-makers after failing to meet Britain's requirements to improve cooperation, the Home Office said. Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood said Britain could escalate measures to a complete halting of visas for the DRC unless "co-operation rapidly improves." "We expect countries to play by the rules. If one of their citizens has no right to be here, they must take them back," the Home Secretary added.

Afghanistan says working with Tajikistan to investigate deadly border clash

Malicious elements seek to damage ties between neighbouring nations, says Afghan FM

KABUL: Afghanistan's Taliban authorities said on Saturday they were working with neighbouring Tajikistan to investigate a border clash earlier this week that killed five people, including two Tajik guards. Tajikistan announced on Thursday that three members of a "terrorist" group had crossed into the Central Asian country "illegally" at Khatlon province, which borders Afghanistan. Tajik security forces killed the trio, but two border guards also died in the clash, the Tajik national security committee said. Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi said on Saturday that "we have started serious investigations into the recent 'incidents' on Tajik soil. "I spoke to the foreign minister of Tajikistan, and we are working together to prevent such incidents," he told an event in Kabul. A frontier guard stands on a bridge to Afghanistan across Panji river in Panji Poyon border outpost, south of Dushanbe, Tajikistan, May 31, 2008. – Reuters "We are worried that some malicious circles want to destroy the relations between the two neighbouring countries," the minister added, without elaborating. Tajikistan shares a mountainous border of about 1,350 kilometres (839 miles) with Afghanistan and has had tense relations with Kabul's Taliban authorities, who returned to power in 2021. Unlike other Central Asian leaders, Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon, who has been in power since 1992, has criticised Taliban and urged them to respect rights of ethnic Tajiks in Afghanistan. – DNA



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