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Ukraine deal near but still a long way to go, says Trump

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Agencies to Probe chaos in assembly

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Pakistan values ties with China, says Isahq Dar

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Briefs

Three Turkish police officers, six Daesh militants killed

Turkiye's fight against "bloody-handed villains" will continue within and beyond its borders, says Erdogan

NEWS DESK

YALOVA: Three Turkish police officers and six Daesh militants were killed in a gunfight in northwest Turkey on Monday, the Interior Minister said, a week after more than 100 suspected Daesh members were detained for planning Christmas and New Year attacks. Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said eight police and another security force member were wounded in a raid on a property in the town of Yalova, on the Sea of Marmara coast south of Istanbul, but more than 100 addresses were raided nationwide early on Monday. Turkey has stepped up operations against suspected Daesh militants this year, as the group returns to prominence globally. The US carried out a strike against the militants in northwest Nigeria last week, while two gunmen who attacked a Hanukkah event at Sydney's Bondi Beach this month appeared to be inspired by Daesh, Australian police have said.

Faiz Hameed files appeal against sentence

MONITORING DESK

ISLAMABAD: Former chief of ISI Faiz Hameed's lawyer confirmed on Monday that an appeal had been filed against the ex-spymaster's sentencing by a military court. "Yes, we have appealed his sentencing," Hameed's lawyer, Mian Ali Ashfaq, but did not share any details about the appeal. Hameed was sentenced to 14 years rigorous imprisonment by a military court on December 11 after being convicted on four counts related to violating secrecy laws, engaging in political activities, misuse of authority and causing harm to others. He had a 40-day window following his conviction and sentencing to appeal against the FGCM decision, according to Section 133B of the Pakistan Army Act. The appeal is first reviewed by a Court of Appeals, led by a major general or higher, as designated by the army chief.

NDMA forecasts intense cold weather

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The NDMA on Monday, issued a weather alert as a westerly wave is set to enter the country and affect various parts over the coming days. The NDMA, in its advisory, said that the westerly wave is likely to enter the western parts of the country tonight (December 29) and is expected to intensify from December 30. The authority said the system is projected to grip most upper and central parts of the country on December 31 and persist in the upper regions till the morning of January 2, 2026. According to NDMA, snowfall under the influence of the weather system may lead to road closures and slippery conditions in Naran, Kaghan, Dir, Swat, Kohistan, Mansehra, Abbottabad, Shangla, Astore, Hunza, Skardu, Murree, Galliat, Neelum Valley, Bagh, Poonch and Haveli from the night of December 30 till the morning of January 2, 2026.

Suicide attacks

BLA attempt to groom child foiled

Social media firms urged to block extremist content; Tarar says security agencies prevented major incident in Karachi

DNA

KARACHI: The law enforcement agencies (LEAs) in Karachi have rescued a minor girl from a Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) suicide bombing plot after what authorities said she was contacted and radicalised through Instagram and other social media platforms by the militant outfit. Addressing a joint press conference in Karachi alongside CTD Additional Inspector General (AIG) Azad Khan and Karachi police chief Javed Alam Odho, Sindh Home Minister Zia Lanjar said the child was approached online and gradually indoctrinated by militants. "Terrorists contacted the girl through social media, narrated fabricated stories and brainwashed her," Lanjar said, adding that she was prepared to become a suicide bomber. He added that the girl was being prepared to act as a suicide bomber before law enforcement intervened in time. Sindh home minister further said militant propaganda relied on falsehoods. "[The] terrorists' narrative is based on lies. Through social media, they spread a false narrative against the state," he

said, urging parents to closely monitor their children's online activity. "She has two brothers, one of whom serves in the police," the home minister noted. Lanjar also stressed that the state stood with the Baloch community, saying, "The state is standing with the Baloch people." Speaking on the occasion, CTD AIG Azad Khan said a BLA terrorist first contacted the girl on Instagram and later added her to a WhatsApp group, where she was exposed to hate-filled content and anti-state narratives. "Initially, she was given extremist material, followed by continuous indoctrination," Azad Khan said. He said the girl used social media like other children of her age and came from a family with no apparent militant background. Azad Khan further said the child was taken out of Karachi as part of the plot, but was intercepted during snap checking outside the city. "Because of her age, we do not consider her an accused," he said, adding that the authorities were not taking the matter towards the criminal justice system. The family was informed of the entire situation after the girl's recovery. "They will be provided protection," Khan added.

US Think-Tank report Pakistan conflict with India, Afghanistan may escalate into clashes

American think tank warns rising regional flashpoints could threaten global peace next year

CENTRELINE REPORT

ISLAMABAD: According to the report, renewed armed conflict between Pakistan and India carries a moderate likelihood and moderate impact over Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), which could push both nuclear-armed neighbours back towards military confrontation. The report cautioned that escalating violence and coercive policies in occupied Kashmir could once again lead to direct military clashes between Islamabad and New Delhi, posing serious risks to regional stability. Pakistan and India went to war in May after India launched an unprovoked attack on Pakistan following the attack on tourists in the IIOJK. New Delhi maintains that the terrorists who killed 26 tourists in IIOJK's Pahalgam were Pakistanis — a charge that Islamabad has denied and has also asked India to partake in a neutral investigation. Pakistan, during the 87-hour conflict, downed its six fighter jets, including three Rafale, and dozens of drones. The war between the two nuclear-armed nations ended

on May 10 with a ceasefire agreement brokered by the United States. The think tank also flagged the risk of renewed Pakistan-Afghanistan conflict, citing resurgent cross-border militant attacks from the Afghan border as a trigger. It assessed this scenario as having moderate likelihood but low impact, warning that continued instability could inflame tensions between the two neighbours. Islamabad and Kabul engaged in border clashes in October after the Afghan Taliban and militants launched unprovoked attacks against Pakistan's border posts. The resulting clashes led to the killing of over 200 Taliban and affiliated militants, while 23 Pakistani soldiers were martyred defending the motherland. Pakistan also conducted "precision strikes" deep inside Afghanistan, targeting terrorists in Kandahar province and Kabul. However, despite many rounds of talks, both countries failed to reach a ceasefire due to the Afghan Taliban regime's reluctance to take action against terrorist outfits.

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ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani among with ambassador of Belarus, UAE, Iran, Morocco, Turkiye and Uzbekistan, cutting cake to celebrate the birth anniversary of the Founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. — DNA

Pakistan Army Major martyred

DNA

PESHAWAR: A Pakistan Army major was martyred while five terrorists were killed during an intelligence-based operation (IBO) conducted by security forces in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Bajaur district, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said on Monday. In a statement, the military's media wing said that the IBO was conducted in Khar area on the reported presence of terrorists belonging to India proxy Fitna al-Khawarij. During the operation, security forces killed five terrorists due to effective engagement, the ISPR stated. "However, during the intense fire exchange, Major Adeel Zaman (age: 36 years, resident of Dera Ismail Khan District), a brave officer who was leading his troops from

Continued on Page 06

Over 3,000 migrants died while trying to reach Spain

DNA

MADRID: More than 3,000 migrants died while trying to reach Spain this year, a report released by a Spanish migration rights group said on Monday, a sharp decline from 2024 as the number of attempted crossings fell. Caminando Fronteras (Walking Borders) said most of the 3,090 deaths recorded until December 15 took place on the Atlantic migration route from Africa to Spain's Canary Islands, considered one of the world's most dangerous.

Continued on Page 06

Pak urges global action to protect minorities in India

Islamabad expresses "deep concern" over persecution of minorities including Muslim community in India

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has expressed deep concern over the "persecution of minorities in India," calling upon the international community to take note of incidents of vandalism during Christmas and violence against Muslims, the Foreign Office said in a statement on Monday. In a statement, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Tahir Andrabi cited "condemnable incidents of vandalism during Christmas" and what he described as "state-sponsored campaigns targeting Muslims". He said actions such as the demolition of Muslims' homes and "repeated lynchings" had "deepened fear and alienation among Muslims", pointing in particular to the case of Muhammad Akhlaq, in which he said the state worked to shield the perpetrators from accountability.

Continued on Page 06

Indian lawmaker to stay in jail

NEWS DESK

NEW DELHI: India's Supreme Court has put on hold a controversial order that had suspended the life sentence of a former lawmaker convicted of raping a teenager. Kuldeep Singh Sengar, formerly of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), was found guilty in 2019 under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Pocso) Act. But last week, the Delhi high court suspended his sentence and granted him conditional bail — although Sengar remained in jail in a separate case related to the death of the survivor's father. The high court order sparked outrage and protests,

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E-mail: karachi@freelinemovers.com

Lahore
7-4, Gulberg Centre,
Main Boulevard, Lahore.
Tel: (+92 42) 3575881, 35751085
Fax: (+92 42) 3571142
E-mail: lahore@freelinemovers.com

Peshawar
Office No. C-8, 2nd Floor, Zaher Plaza,
Left Aroad, Ring Road, Peshawar.
Tel: (+92 31) 2927778
Fax: (+92 31) 2928588
E-mail: peshawar@freelinemovers.com

Kabul
House # 4, Street # 4,
Chandri Ahsai Road, Shahr-e-Nasr,
Kabul - Afghanistan
Tel: (+92 7002) 771, 83 757985, 838, 83 779489, 838
E-mail: kabul@freelinemovers.com

Imran Khan, Bushra Bibi challenge Toshakhana-2 case conviction in IHC

Former PM, spouse term Toshakhana-2 case verdict "politically motivated and part of victimisation campaign"

FAISAL SHEIKH

RAWALPINDI: Jailed Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi on Monday filed separate appeals in the Islamabad High Court (IHC) against their convictions in the Toshakhana-2 case, challenging the 17-year prison sentences awarded by a special court earlier this month. The appeals contest the December 20 verdict by a special judge, who sentenced the former prime minister and his spouse to 17 years' imprisonment each over the under-priced purchase of luxury state gifts. The couple were also fined Rs16.4 million in the case. The conviction relates to the alleged acquisition of an expensive Bulgari jewellery set from the Toshakhana, the state repository for gifts received by public office holders, at a nominal price. Special Judge Central Shahrukh Arjumand handed down the verdict after conducting around 80 hearings at Adiala jail. Under the ruling, Imran and Bushra were sentenced to 10 years each under sections 34 and 409 of the Pakistan Penal Code, along with an additional seven years' imprisonment each under section 5 of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1947. In their appeals, the couple have sought to have the Toshakhana-2 judgment set aside,

Continued on Page 06

LHC judges hears PTI petition on property

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: Lahore High Court's Justice Faisal Zaman said on Monday that the matter of the new property protection law "should not be politicised", as he took up a petition filed by two PTI-backed lawmakers challenging the Punjab Protection of Ownership of Immovable Property Ordinance, 2025. The ordinance, which empowers deputy commissioner-led committees to decide property disputes, has become a point of contention with LHC Chief Justice Aalia Neelum suspending its operation on December 22 and the provincial government voicing opposition to the court decision. Today, Justice Faisal Zaman Khan took up a petition filed by two members of the Punjab Assembly against the ordinance. The petition was filed by MPAs Imtiaz Mahmood and Ijaz Shafi — who are both backed by the PTI, which is in the opposition in Punjab — on Saturday.

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Railways transports 8.2m tonnes of freight in fiscal year

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways transported 8.2 million tonnes of freight during the financial year 2024-25, carrying petroleum products, containers, coal, rock phosphate, fertilizer, wheat and other bulk commodities. As per the National Transport Policy 2018, the department is envisaged to play a primary role in long-haul freight movement between industrial zones across the country and to seaports, said an official in the Ministry of Railways. However, the official said that ageing infrastructure, limited line capacity and shortages of rolling stock have constrained freight operations. To address these challenges, the official said Pakistan Railways has initiated several measures to enhance freight transportation. Among them is the construction of a 105-kilometre railway line, in collaboration with the Sindh government, to link Thar coal mines with the main railway network, he added. The project aims to facilitate coal transportation across the country and help reduce the import bill on account of imported coal—APP

Agricultural revolution underway in Punjab: CM

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has said that an agricultural revolution is underway in the province under the vision of PML-N President Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, with historic initiatives aimed at empowering farmers and freeing them from exploitative middlemen. In a statement, she said that over 800,000 farmers have received Kissan Cards for the first time in the country's history, while Rs. 250 billion in interest-free loans have been disbursed within a year, a record milestone. The Kissan Card scheme allows farmers to purchase fertilizer, seed and pesticides directly through registered dealers instead of relying on middlemen. Hundreds of dealers have been registered across Punjab under the scheme, boosting agricultural business activity. Around 20 percent of farmers have also used the card to purchase diesel, helping them avoid debt and interest-based borrowing.—APP

Role of intelligence agencies in rescuing Baloch girl lauded

KARACHI: Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon praised the role of the intelligence agencies in rescuing a Baloch girl, stating that timely information and coordinated action not only ensured the girl's safety but also led to the recovery of a suicide jacket from her. He said the girl is a minor and that the government made a wise decision not to imprison her, as she had been exploited by terrorists who were attempting to carry out a dangerous and horrific act through her, a communiqué said on Monday. He said that the terrorists lured the girl through social media, brainwashed her, and attempted to use her for their nefarious purposes.—APP

Ahsan reviews Rs 1t power, seeks three-year completion plan

This disciplined approach aims to ensure that public investments are translated into operational assets and energy security without further cost escalations or delays

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Monday chaired a review-meeting to assess the progress of critical Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) projects within the Power and Water Resources Divisions during the meeting, the Joint Chief Economist (Ops.) highlighted a massive financial throw-forward exceeding Rs 1 trillion, contrasted against a total allocation of Rs 122 billion earmarked in the PSDP 2025-26, a news release said. The minister took serious note of the low fund utilization, which currently stands at only 10% for Power Division projects and 6% for hydel power projects under the Water Resources Division. Ahsan Iqbal stressed that these sectors are the heavy consumers of the development budget and directed officials to expedite progress on critical

Pakistan, China vow to elevate ironclad ties

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar received Ambassador Mr. Jiang Zaidong of the People's Republic of China this afternoon. Ambassador Jiang conveyed Season's Greetings and best wishes for new year to DPM/FM on behalf of FM Wang Yi. While reciprocating New Year's greetings, DPM/FM appreciated China's strong support for Pakistan's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and national development. DPM/FM reaffirmed Pakistan's firm support for China on all core issues including the adherence to the One-China Principle. He reiterated that Pakistan recognizes the People's Republic of China as the sole legitimate government representing all China, with Taiwan being an inalienable part of China. Both sides reviewed the overall state of bilateral relations and agreed that their All-Weather Strategic Partnership remains a cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy and an anchor for regional peace and security.



CDA accelerates digitization of land records in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD: A meeting regarding the digitization of land records in Islamabad was held at the CDA Headquarters under the chairmanship of Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa. The meeting was attended by Member Administration Talat Mehmood Gondal, Member Environment Esfandiyar Baloch, Director ICT, Assistant Deputy Commissioner General, relevant officers from CDA and ICT and DG PLRA Capt. (R) Ikram ul Haq. Meeting was informed that the scanning and data entry of land record of 95 mouzas out of 114 mouzas in the Federal Capital, Islamabad, have been completed. The meeting was told that 24 mouzas have been digitized and notified, after which regular computerized fards are being issued in these mouzas. It was further in-

formed that 11 more mouzas will be fully digitized and notified within the next two weeks. Following this, regular computerized transactions will also commence in these mouzas. The meeting was briefed that the digitization of CDA's record is also progressing rapidly. In this regard, the scanning of most records of CDA's formations including Estate Management I, Estate Management II, Estate Affairs, BCS and Revenue Record has been completed. It was informed that soon one entire sector of CDA will be completely digitized as a model. The meeting was informed that the process of digitization will be completed after the scanning phase. This initiative will bring transparency and better facilities to citizens in land-related matters. Chairman CDA and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, said that this initiative is

extremely important for safeguarding citizens' investments and their property records. The meeting was also updated on the progress regarding the launch of e-stamp paper. It was informed that the necessary staff training related to e-stamp paper has been completed. Chairman CDA and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, directed that necessary training arrangements regarding the launch of e-stamps should also be made for the general public. The meeting was told that, in light of these directives, a schedule for imparting training to citizens about this facility will be issued. Chairman CDA and Chief Commissioner Islamabad said that the purpose of these measures is to adopt an e-governance model and further improve service delivery.—APP

Govt releases Rs 348.97b uplift funds

ISLAMABAD: The government has authorized the utilization of development funds amounting to Rs348.97 billion during the first five months (July–November) of the fiscal year 2025-26 under the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP), out of a total allocation of Rs1,000 billion. According to the latest data released by the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, the total federal PSDP allocation for 2025-26 stands at Rs770.50 billion for federal ministries and divisions and Rs229.50 billion for corporations. The data showed that federal ministries and divisions were authorized Rs237.76 billion during the period under review, while actual expenditure stood at Rs68.41 billion. For corporations, an amount of Rs111.20 billion was authorized, against which Rs23.49 billion was spent. Among federal ministries and divisions, the highest authorization of funds was made for Provinces and Special Areas, amounting to Rs68.03 billion, followed by the Water Resources Division with Rs45.11 billion and the Cabinet Division with Rs43.17 billion. The Higher Education Commission was authorized Rs15.74 billion, Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Division Rs8.14 billion, Railways Division Rs7.84 billion, Interior Division Rs6.46 billion, Federal Education and Professional Training Division Rs6.50 billion, and Information Technology and Telecommunication Division Rs5.67 billion during the July–November period. Other notable releases included Rs5.02 billion for the National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination Division, Rs4.16 billion for the Defence Division, Rs3.99 billion for the Revenue Division, Rs1.68 billion for the Science and Technological Research Division, and Rs1.48 billion for the National Food Security and Research Division. For corporations, the National Highway Authority (NHA) was authorized Rs79.44 billion, while the Power Division entities—NTDC and PEPCO—received Rs31.76 billion during the period.—DNA

LDA seals 103 illegal commercial properties

DNA

LAHORE: On the directives of Director General Lahore Development Authority (LDA) Tahir Farooq, the LDA Town Planning Wing has intensified its crackdown against illegal commercial buildings and properties defaulting on commercial fees. During an operation conducted in various housing schemes and LDA-controlled areas, LDA teams sealed a total of 103 properties found involved in illegal commercial use or non-payment of prescribed commercial fees. The operations were carried out in Gulberg, Faisal Town, Audit and Accounts Society (College Road), Samanabad, Gulshan Ravi, Allama Iqbal Town, and Azam Garden. Due to unauthorized commercial use and non-payment of commercial fees, 17 properties were sealed in Gulberg and Faisal Town, 55 properties in Audit and Accounts Society on College Road, and 12 properties in Samanabad and Gulshan Ravi. Additionally, during recovery operations, 19 properties were sealed in Allama Iqbal Town and Azam Garden. The sealed properties included schools, clinics, bakeries, pharmacies, hardware stores, auto workshops, showrooms, restaurants, beauty salons, food points, grocery stores, shops, offices, and other commercial units. The operations were conducted under the supervision of Chief Town Planner-I Asad-uz-Zaman and Chief Town Planner-II Azhar Ali. According to the DG LDA, indiscriminate actions against illegal commercial buildings and commercial fee defaulters will continue to ensure compliance with building regulations and urban planning laws.

82% drop in head injuries after helmet enforcement

LAHORE: Punjab recorded zero traffic accidents in 23 districts and an 82 per cent reduction in head injuries following strict enforcement of amended traffic laws. This was said by Inspector General of Police Punjab Dr Usman Anwar on Monday while chairing a meeting at the Central Police Office. The meeting reviewed the implementation of amended traffic laws introduced by Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif, improved traffic management measures and the overall law and order situation in the province. The IGP Punjab indiscriminate legal action against non-standard number plates, strict enforcement of helmet usage, and action

against one-way violations, overloading and other traffic offences. He directed DPOs and district traffic officers to personally remain in the field to improve traffic flow and closely monitor traffic performance indicators. During the briefing, Additional IG Special Branch Punjab Rao Abdul Karim said that the Special Branch was regularly monitoring traffic accidents, violations of traffic laws and drug peddling. DIG Traffic Punjab Waqas Nazir said effective enforcement had led to a visible decline in serious accidents across Punjab, including Lahore. He said that over the past three weeks, 2.5 million citizens obtained driving licences, while 111,000 li-

cences were issued through mobile licensing units. CTO Lahore Athar Waheed said that during the past month, traffic accidents in Lahore had decreased by 47 percent. Dr Usman directed further improvement in traffic management in districts including Lodhran, Nankana Sahib, Chiniot, Bahawalnagar, Dera Ghazi Khan, Bahawalpur and Khanewal. The meeting was attended by Additional IG Special Branch Rao Abdul Karim, Additional IG Operations Punjab Muhammad Ali Naikokara, DIG Traffic Waqas Nazir, CTO Lahore/DIG PHP Athar Waheed, SSP Traffic Syed Nadeem Abbas and other officers, while Additional IG South Punjab.—APP

Population growth, climate change pose major threats to food security

LAHORE: Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Rana Tanveer Husain has said that rapid population growth and climate change have emerged as the most serious challenges to Pakistan's food security. He warned that failure to increase crop production could prevent the country from meeting its future food requirements. He was chairing a meeting on the National Food Security Policy at the Centre of Excellence in Molecular Biology (CEMB), Punjab University, here on Monday. The meeting was attended by Chairman Pakistan Academy of Sciences Professor Dr Kausar Abdullah Malik, Director CEMB Dr Muaz ur Rehman, leading scientists, food security experts, policymakers, and researchers. Addressing the meeting, the federal minister said Pakistan does not lack talent in any sector, but emphasized that sustained research is essential for long-term development and improvement. He noted that while the benefits of institutional research are often long-term, the absence of immediate results discourages governments from making adequate investments in research.—APP

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Yar Khan transmission line (Rs188.5bn), and another Electricity Distribution Efficiency Improvement project costing Rs11.7 billion. Major hydel and transmission-related projects also came under discussion, including the Dasu transmission lines, Ghazi-Barotha Hydropower Project, the upgradation and extension of NTDC's telecommunications and SCADA system at the National Power Control Centre, and evacuation of power from the 2,160MW Dasu Hydropower Project (Stage-I). The meeting mandated the Secretary Power Division to resolve existing fund utilization issues through closer coordination with the Secretaries of Finance and Planning. This disciplined approach aims to ensure that public investments are translated into operational assets and energy security without further cost escalations or delays.—APP

National Days and Armed Forces Days

DECEMBER

Dec 01/Romania National Day

Dec 02/United Arab Emirates National Day

Dec 02/Laos Republic National Day

Dec 05/Thailand National Day

Dec 06/Finland Independence Day

Dec 07/India Armed Forces Flag Day

Dec 09/Tanzania National Day

Dec 11/Oman Armed Forces Day

Dec 12/Kenya Independence Day

Dec12/Turkmenistan Neutrality Day

Dec 16/Bahrain National Day


Dec 16/Kazakhstan Independence Day

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Dec 23/Japan National Day



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Shifa International 4603666



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Met Office.....9250360-6

RDA.....5555864

TMA.....5770886

Cantonment Board 9270151-3




Islamabad Metropolitan

Corporation.....9209224

Potohar Town.....9209224

Rawal Town.....5773343



Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

NA body takes strong notice of delays in FGEHA projects

FGEHA, briefed the Committee on the status of ongoing projects, including Skyline, Kashmir Avenue Apartments, G-13 Apartments, Green Enclave-I, Green Enclave-II, G-14/1, G-15/3 and Sectors F-14 and F-15

ISLAMABAD: The Standing Committee of the National Assembly on Housing and Works on Monday expressed serious concern over the persistent delays in projects of the Federal Government Employees Housing Authority (FGEHA), warning that the situation is adding to the financial burden on both allottees and the relevant authorities. The committee, which met at the Parliament Lodges under the chairmanship of Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri, MNA, first confirmed the minutes of its previous meeting held on November 24, 2025, and reviewed the implementation status of its earlier recommendations, said a press release. During the meeting, the committee took strong notice of delays in all projects

of the Federal Government Employees Housing Authority (FGEHA). The Director General, FGEHA, briefed the Committee on the status of ongoing projects, including Skyline, Kashmir Avenue Apartments, G-13 Apartments, Green Enclave-I, Green Enclave-II, G-14/1, G-15/3 and Sectors F-14 and F-15, while the Chief Executive Officer, Pakistan Housing Authority (PHA) presented progress reports on development works in Sectors I-12/1 and I-16, covering infrastructure installation and completion status. The Committee directed the Director General of FGEHA to convene a meeting with the CDA, PHA, and MCI to ensure effective coordination, improved planning, clear delineation of responsibilities, ex-

change of services, and a strong institutional working relationship for seamless project execution, including cleanliness and sanitation. The Committee discussed the draft Accommodation Allocation Rules (AAR), 2002, and the related allotment SOPs and guidelines. Noting issues concerning employees previously allotted residences in Quetta, Karachi, and Peshawar and subsequently transferred to Islamabad, the Committee directed the Ministry to revisit the policy and consider allotment to eligible applicants, ensuring transparency, equity, and adherence to established practices. The Committee resolved to ensure the timely execution of housing schemes and restore public trust through effective oversight. Cit-

ing unresolved matters including pending land payments, compensation for built-up properties, balloting, project delays, and other issues related to FGEHA, the Committee constituted a Sub-Committee under the conensorship of Mr Ibrar Ahmad, MNA, with Mr. Anjum Aqeel Khan, MNA, and Dr. Darshan, MNA as members. The meeting was attended by the Honourable Members Mr Anjum Aqeel Khan, Mr Ibrar Ahmad, Mr Nasir Iqbal Bosal, Dr Darshan, Ms. Samina Khalid Ghurki (via Zoom), and Mr Hassan Sabir (via Zoom), along with senior officers, including the Additional Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Works, and officers of its attached departments.—DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate, Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani meeting with Ms. Shelley Saxen, U.S. Political Counselor, US embassy at Parliament House.

Pak-Afghan trade, transit disruptions fuel regional instability, warns expert

DNA
ISLAMABAD: Exclusionary economic measures cause prolonged disruptions in Pakistan-Afghanistan trade and transit, and generate wide-ranging economic and social consequences across the region. Uncertainty, rather than cost alone, has emerged as the most damaging factor, eroding livelihoods, weakening regional connectivity, and placing disproportionate strain on border communities between the two countries. These concerns were raised at the “Exploring Pathways to Pakistan-Afghanistan Trade and Economic Connectivity” dialogue, organised by the Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) as part of its Beyond Boundaries initiative. The dialogue convened policymakers, customs officials, business leaders, and economic experts from Pakistan and Afghanistan to reflect on the evolving trade dynamics and their broader regional implications. Khan Jan Alokozay, Co-President of the Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Cham-

ber of Commerce and Industry (PA-JCCI), emphasised that peace in the region is inseparable from economic stability, underscoring that robust and predictable trade forms the foundation of durable bilateral relations. Without continuity in trade, he cautioned, broader objectives of peace and regional integration would remain fragile. Fazal Moqeem Khan, former President of the Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, called for the establishment of cross-border economic zones to institutionalise trade and transit cooperation - with manufacturers on both sides collaborating and heightening joint stakes - and move beyond ad hoc arrangements. He warned that isolated or one-sided approaches to trade are not viable and ultimately weaken both economies. Highlighting the human cost of trade disruptions, Mujeeb Shinwari, President of the All Torkham Custom Clearing Agents Association, noted that border communities bear the brunt of repeated closures, as their economic lifelines depend directly on cross-border trade. He observed that

persistent disruptions have crippled local economies and undermined livelihoods in already vulnerable areas. Emphasising the political economy of trade, Nazeebullah Safi, Executive Director of PAJCCI’s Kabul Office, stressed that trade should shape politics rather than be subordinated to it. He noted that while elite groups retain mobility through air travel, lower-income and border populations have suffered disproportionately, warning that continued uncertainty risks permanently diverting Afghan markets away from Pakistan and vice versa. Concluding the discussion, Imtiaz Gul, Executive Director of CRSS, warned that prolonged deadlock in trade and economic connectivity carries consequences far beyond immediate commercial losses. He noted that sustained disruptions shrink employment opportunities, expand informal economies, and intensify social pressures, ultimately undermining long-term regional stability. Restoring trade continuity, he emphasised, is not only an economic necessity but a strategic imperative.

Baluchistan fishing communities see better future with Chinese investment

From Gwadar’s port to smaller fishing towns along the Makran coast, more structured and sustainable development may finally be within reach, provided the Fisheries & Aquaculture Policy 2025–2035 is implemented in true spirit and Chinese investors move ahead with onshore and offshore aquaculture projects.

ISLAMABAD: Optimism is slowly emerging among fishing families along Pakistan’s southwest coastline, as reforms, aquaculture investment and tighter regulation begin to shape expectations for a more stable future in Balochistan’s fisheries sector. Officials say the provincial government, the Balochistan Fisheries Department, the federal government and growing Chinese investment are together signaling renewed hope for coastal communities that have faced years of economic uncertainty. According to a Gwadar Pro’s report, that outlook was reflected during the 9th CPEC Media Forum in Islamabad on December 24, 2025, when Chinese Ambassador Jiang Zaidong stressed the importance of environmentally responsible growth in Gwadar’s fisheries sector. “The third I call it fishery in Gwadar Port, because I think it will be good if we could develop onshore aquaculture because this will bring more income for local fishing

people, because if we develop it on a large scale, then the environment may be undermined. However, if we develop the onshore aquaculture industry, then we’ll protect the environment and also will make more money. It is happy to see that there is one Chinese company, who tries to invest 15 million RMB to start such trying, and after the first phase of success in the onshore fishery, we will develop into the second phase which is offshore.” For Gwadar’s fishermen, onshore aquaculture is seen as a way to diversify income and reduce reliance on uncertain sea catches. The regulated aquaculture could help strengthen earnings while reducing pressure on marine resources. The Government of Balochistan has also said the welfare of fishing communities remains central to its development strategy. In a fisheries-focused video statement issued on December 22, 2024, the province highlighted shrimp farming initiatives, strengthened marine mon-

itoring and the expansion of fish farming in dams and reservoirs along the province’s 700-kilometer coastline. These efforts build on the Fisheries & Aquaculture Policy 2025–2035 introduced earlier this year, Pakistan’s first comprehensive fisheries policy, which recognizes fisheries and aquaculture as a formal industry and sets out long-term plans for sustainable resource management. At the federal level, the Ministry of Maritime Affairs has launched a transparent licensing program aimed at promoting sustainable fishing practices and protecting the livelihoods of coastal fishermen, particularly in Balochistan. From Gwadar’s port to smaller fishing towns along the Makran coast, more structured and sustainable development may finally be within reach, provided the Fisheries & Aquaculture Policy 2025–2035 is implemented in true spirit and Chinese investors move ahead with onshore and offshore aquaculture projects.—DNA

Police conduct grand search, combing operation in multiple areas

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police carried out a grand search and combing operation in the areas of Aabpara, Bani Gala, Tarnol and Shams Colony as part of ongoing efforts to curb crime and ensure public safety. An official told APP on Monday that the operation was conducted under the supervision of zonal SPs, with the participation of male and female police personnel. During the operation, police teams checked 380 individuals, 192 houses and five hotels, while 154 motorcycles and 49 vehicles were also inspected. The official said that, for further verification, 15 suspicious individuals, 17 motorcycles and one vehicle were shifted to police stations. During the operation, one suspect was arrested and illegal weapons along with ammunition were recovered. He said the purpose of the search and combing operation was to deter criminal elements, enhance surveillance and maintain law and order in the federal capital. According to the official, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi has directed district-wide grand search operations to eliminate crime and strengthen security.—DNA

AIOU hosts int’l Seerah seminar

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) on Monday organized an international Seerah seminar in connection with the presidential session of the annual event Khutbat-e-Madaris. The seminar brought together renowned scholars, researchers and intellectuals who deliberated in detail on various dimensions of the Seerah of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Prominent speakers at the seminar included Professor Dr Muhammad Tufail Hashmi, Professor Dr Ikram-ul-Haq Yasin, Professor Dr Muhammad Yousaf Farooqi, Professor Dr Syed Aziz-ur-Rahman, Professor Dr Shah Muhyuddin Hashmi, Dr Moen-ud-Din Hashmi, Dr Hafiz Muhammad Sajjad, and Mufti Muhammad Zahid. During the seminar, the speakers paid glowing tribute to the outstanding scholarly contributions of Syed Sulaiman Nadvi in the field of Seerah writing. They highlighted that through his celebrated work Khutbat-e-Madaris, Syed Sulaiman Nadvi presented the life and teachings of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) in a comprehensive, well-argued and intellectually balanced manner, keeping in view both classical sources and contemporary needs. The speakers observed that Khutbat-e-Madaris is not merely a book but a complete intellectual framework for understanding the Prophetic Seerah, as it harmoniously integrates history, reason, revelation and ethical values. They emphasized that the solutions to present-day social, moral and intellectual challenges lie in the guidance provided by the Seerah of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), and that the scholarly services of Syed Sulaiman Nadvi serve as a milestone in this regard. It was further noted that promoting the study of Seerah is essential for nurturing moral values, social harmony, and intellectual clarity in society. The participants stressed the need to introduce the younger generation to the Prophetic model as a source of guidance for addressing modern challenges. The seminar was organized by the Department of Seerah Studies, Faculty of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Allama Iqbal Open University, in collaboration with Darul Ma’arif.

Illegal massage centre busted in F-7; 10 women, 6 men in handcuffed

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police’s Kohsar Police team have busted an illegal massage centre operating in Islamabad’s upscale F-7 sector, detaining 10 women and six men during a raid and registering a case under relevant sections of the law. An official told media on Monday that the crackdown was carried out soon after Malik Asif assumed charge as Station House Officer (SHO) Kohsar, marking his first major action against unlawful activities in the area. He said the police raided a massage centre located on the second floor of Plaza No. 13 near a restaurant in Jinnah Super Market, F-7, following repeated public complaints and confirmed intelligence about immoral activities being conducted under the guise of a salon. During the raid, police found men and women inside the premises in objectionable conditions. They were given time to dress before being taken into custody. The detained individuals included 10 women and six men, whose particulars were recorded for legal proceedings. The official said a case (FIR No. 1227/25) was registered at Kohsar Police Station under Section 294 PPC, on the report of ASI Muhammad Nadir Khan, while evidence recovered from the premises – including items used in the illegal activity – was seized and sealed. He added that preliminary investigation suggested the possible involvement of a wider network, prompting coordination with other police stations to verify whether similar illegal centres were operating elsewhere in the city. Residents and social circles welcomed the decisive action, expressing confidence in the new SHO’s resolve to curb illegal activities and uphold the rule of law in the federal capital. Police officials reiterated that Islamabad Police will not tolerate illegal or immoral activities, and indiscriminate action will continue against all such elements to ensure public safety and social order.—DNA

FIA seizes Rs 1.99b, arrests 667 in nationwide crackdown

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has intensified its nationwide crackdown against hawala, hundi and illegal currency exchange, seizing currency worth over Rs1.99 billion and arresting 667 suspects during 2025 An official told APP on Monday that the action was taken on the directions of Director General FIA Rifat Mukhtar Raja, under a countrywide campaign against unlicensed currency dealers and financial crimes. During the year, FIA conducted 523 raids, registered 546 cases and completed investigations into 174 inquiries related to hawala, hundi and illegal currency exchange. The official said that raids resulted in the recovery of foreign and local currency worth Rs1.99 billion, including US\$777,868, other foreign currencies worth over Rs 320 million, and more than Rs 1.45 billion in Pakistani currency. He said arrests were made across different zones, including 199 in Peshawar, 120 in Balochistan, 101 in Karachi, 70 in Multan, 63 in Kohat, 58 in Lahore, 22 in Islamabad, 15 in Faisalabad and 14 in Hyderabad.—APP

Gas explosion leaves three burnt

ISLAMABAD: As many as three people, including women and children, sustained severe burn injuries in a powerful gas explosion that occurred on Peshawar Road in Rawalpindi early Monday morning. According to rescue sources, three individuals, including women and children were rushed to the hospital following the explosion, private news channel reported. Emergency teams arrived at the scene promptly and began providing medical aid to the victims, who sustained severe burn injuries from the gas leakage blast. The exact cause of the gas leak explosion has not yet been determined and authorities are investigating the incident.—APP

Rain, snowfall expected in hilly areas

ISLAMABAD: Director of the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD), Muhammad Irfan Virk on Monday predicted light to moderate rain and snowfall in hilly areas during December 30 to January 2, accompanied by short breaks in fog and called on travelers to stay alert. Speaking to a local news channel, the PMD Director said seasonal winter rains will start entering Balochistan from today, adding , within the next 24 to 48 hours, light rainfall is expected to reach parts of Sindh. The Director further predicted that by January 2, Islamabad and surrounding hilly areas will receive rainfall, while northern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) are likely to experience intermittent snowfall. Responding to a query, he said that following these rains, the temperature is expected to drop by 2 to 3 degrees. —APP

Violence in burial of blasphemy accused, SC rejects bail application

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Monday rejected the bail petition of accused Maulvi Ahmed in a case related to unrest and violence that erupted during the burial of a person accused of blasphemy. A two-member bench headed by Justice Jamal Mandokhail heard the matter. The court dismissed the bail application on the ground that it was withdrawn by the accused and directed the trial court to conclude the proceedings within three months. During the hearing, counsel for the accused argued that a clash occurred at the time of the burial of the blasphemy accused, but maintained that his client, Maulvi Ahmed, was not present at the scene. In contrast, the state prosecutor informed the court that the accused addressed people at the spot, which incited the crowd and led to unrest. The state counsel further submitted that statements of four witnesses had already been recorded in the case.—APP

Briefs

ITP issues rush-hour advisory for major roads

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) on Monday issued a traffic advisory, cautioning commuters about heavy traffic pressure on Srinagar Highway and the Islamabad Expressway during office and peak hours. An ITP spokesperson told APP that due to routine office movement, traffic congestion is expected on the two major arteries, which may affect the smooth flow of vehicles. He advised citizens to plan their journeys with extra time in hand and exercise patience while travelling during rush hours. The spokesperson said ITP officers will remain deployed on roads to ensure smooth traffic flow and facilitate commuters. For updates or assistance, citizens may contact the Traffic Helpline 1915 or emergency helpline Pucar-15.—APP

Motorway Police advise limited travel hours amid foggy conditions

ISLAMABAD: Motorway Police spokesperson on Monday warned motorists that foggy conditions can cause serious accidents if lane discipline is not maintained and advised drivers to limit their travel to between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. In a special statement with various media news channels, spokesperson of motorway police said that authorities are keeping a close watch on the situation and will reopen the affected routes as soon as visibility improves. They assured the public that safety remains the top priority. The spokesperson also urged motorists to exercise caution while driving, avoid unnecessary journeys, and adhere to traffic regulations to prevent accidents during the foggy conditions. National Highway & Motorway Police spokespersons explained that the closure of various motorways were necessary due to severely reduced visibility on the roads, which made driving extremely dangerous.—APP

Deadly crash in Shahkot as bus rams rickshaw, toll reaches three fatalities

ISLAMABAD: At least three people lost their lives and other three persons including women were sustained injured when a bus rammed into a rickshaw in Shahkot, Punjab on early Monday morning. According to details, rescue teams shifted the three injured individuals to a local hospital in Shahkot for treatment, private news channel reported. The accident occurred near the Shahkot Mirpur bus stop when a bus collided with a rickshaw.—APP

Sherry condemns India's Dulhasti stage-II hydropower project on Chenab River

Sherry Rehman reiterated that Pakistan would raise India's violations of the Indus Waters Treaty forcefully and effectively at all relevant international forums. Calling on India to abandon unilateral measures, she urged New Delhi to fully comply with its international obligations and honour the Indus Waters Treaty in letter and spirit

ISLAMABAD: Vice President Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Sherry Rehman has strongly condemned India's approval of the Dulhasti Stage-II hydropower project on the Chenab River, terming it a "clear and grave violation" of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT). In a statement issued on Monday, Senator Sherry Rehman said that India's move to construct a controversial hydropower project in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) directly undermines Pakistan's internationally recognised water rights. She stressed that any unilateral action on rivers allo-

NDMA issues weather advisory ahead of approaching westerly wave

Under the influence of this weather system, snowfall may lead to road closures and slippery conditions in Naran, Kaghan, Dir, Swat, Kohistan, Mansehra, Abbottabad, Shangla, Astore, Hunza, Skardu, Murree, Galiyat, Neelum Valley, Bagh, Poonch and Haveli from the night of 30th December till the morning of 2nd January

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has issued a weather advisory in view of an approaching westerly wave expected to affect various parts of the country over the next few days. According to forecasts, a westerly wave is likely to enter the western parts of the country from the night of 29th December 2025 and is expected to intensify from 30th December 2025. The system is projected to grip most upper and central parts of the country on 31st December

2025 and persist in the upper regions till the morning of 2nd January 2026. Under the influence of this weather system, snowfall may lead to road closures and slippery conditions in Naran, Kaghan, Dir, Swat, Kohistan, Mansehra, Abbottabad, Shangla, Astore, Hunza, Skardu, Murree, Galiyat, Neelum Valley, Bagh, Poonch and Haveli from the night of 30th December till the morning of 2nd January. There is also a likelihood of landslides and avalanches in hilly areas of upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu & Kashmir during the same period. Tourists are advised to

remain extra cautious and avoid unnecessary travel to vulnerable and high-altitude areas. Meanwhile, fog conditions are expected to subside in central and southern Punjab as well as upper Sindh during the wet spell. In view of the anticipated conditions, NDMA has advised all concerned Provincial Disaster Management Authorities (PDMAs), Gilgit-Baltistan Disaster Management Authority (GBDMA), State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA), ICT Administration, to ensure all necessary preparedness and response measures. Relevant authorities have been

urged to remain vigilant, ensure timely dissemination of information, keep emergency response teams on alert, and take proactive measures to minimize potential risks to life, property and critical infrastructure. NDMA is closely monitoring the evolving situation and coordinating with relevant stakeholders to ensure timely response and mitigation efforts. The general public is advised to stay informed about the latest weather updates and advisories by using the "Pak NDMA Disaster Alert" mobile application, particularly before planning travel to affected regions.



ISLAMABAD: Salem Mohammed Al Zaabi, the UAE Ambassador meets Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani, Chairman Senate of Pakistan, and discusses the cordial relations and cooperation between the two friendly countries. DNA

ICT admin imposes complete ban on kite flying, sale

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration has strictly banned kite flying and the sale of kites within city limits. The decision has been taken to prevent risks linked to kite strings and unregulated activity in residential and commercial areas. Authorities have made it clear that the ban applies to all sectors of Islamabad without exception. According to officials on Monday, any individual involved in kite flying, manufacturing, storage, transportation, or sale will be dealt with under the law. The administration has directed enforcement teams to ensure full compliance and to take immediate action against violators. Legal proceedings will be initiated against those who ignore the ban. Assistant Commissioners have started raids in various parts of the city to implement the orders. These operations include inspections of markets, shops, warehouses, and open spaces where kites or related material may be stored or sold. Officials said the raids will continue on a regular basis to discourage illegal activity and to ensure the ban remains effective. The administration has directed officers to coordinate with law enforcement agencies during these operations. Police support has been made available to assist Assistant Commissioners in maintaining order and carrying out inspections. Confiscated items will be taken into custody, and cases will be registered against those found involved. Residents have been urged to cooperate with the authorities and to refrain from any activity related to kite flying. Officials stressed that public cooperation is necessary for the successful enforcement of the ban. Citizens have also been asked to report any violations they observe in their neighborhoods so that prompt action can be taken.—DNA

Chinese tech firm pledges PKR 50m grant for Kohsar varsity

ISLAMABAD: Guangdong CAS Cogniser Information Technology Co., Ltd. of China has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Kohsar University Murree (KUM), pledging a PKR 50 million grant to establish a joint research and innovation laboratory, the university announced. The agreement was signed by Kohsar University Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Rafia Mumtaz and Dr. Wu Jun, founder of the Chinese technology firm, on Friday, according to an official statement from KUM. Gwadar Pro reported on Monday. As per the statement, the collaboration aims to expand applied research, strengthen academia-industry linkages, and support technology development for students and faculty. The partnership will also

include industrial exhibitions and hands-on training workshops to help graduates develop market-relevant skills. Dr. Wu reaffirmed the company's commitment to provide the PKR 50 million grant as part of the partnership. Dr. Mumtaz said the agreement reflects growing global opportunities for Pakistani students through international cooperation and will help position KUM as a center for innovation and research excellence. According to KUM, in May 2023, the university signed an MoU with Lanzhou University of China to cooperate in research and development, technology transfer, and cultural exchange under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).—APP

Gillani urges youth to uphold Jinnah's vision at his birth anniversary event

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate, Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani on Monday called upon the youth to embrace the ideals of unity, discipline, constitutionalism, and rule of law envisioned by Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, stating that the future strength of Pakistan rests with its younger generation. He was addressing the Quaid Aur Bachay ceremony held at Aiwan-e-Sadr in connection with the 149th birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation, where students from different schools paid tribute to Quaid-e-Azam through national songs, recitations, and lively performances. Addressing students as the chief guest, the chairman Senate said that the annual tradition of Quaid Aur Bachay reflects Pakistan's collective resolve to keep alive the vision, principles, and moral values of Quaid-e-Azam. He described Jinnah as a statesman whose leadership reshaped history through integrity, constitutional struggle, and unwavering commitment to justice. Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani highlighted that Quaid-e-Azam firmly believed in democratic and constitutional methods and transformed the All-India Muslim League into a mass political movement that culminated in the historic Lahore Resolution of 1940. He noted that Pakistan's creation was achieved not through agitation but through reasoned dialogue, legal acumen, and moral authority. Recalling Quaid's historic address of 11 August 1947, the chairman Senate said that Jinnah envisioned Pakistan as a modern democratic state based on equality, religious freedom, and rule of law, where all citizens enjoyed equal rights regardless of faith or creed. He stressed that Quaid's emphasis on eliminating corruption, nepotism, and injustice remains highly relevant today. The chairman Senate also paid tribute to Quaid-e-Azam's tireless efforts during Pakistan's formative years, stating that despite poor health, he worked relentlessly to establish national institutions, rehabilitate refugees, and secure Pakistan's place in the international community. He urged public office holders to place national interest above personal gains and institutions to function with transparency and integrity. Emphasizing the role of youth, Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani said that Pakistan's progress depends on young Pakistanis adopting Quaid's guiding principles of faith, discipline.—DNA

M-Tag deadline in 2 days: 1,379 vehicles registered in one day

ISLAMABAD: With only two days left before enforcement begins, Islamabad authorities have moved closer to blocking the entry of vehicles without M-Tags from July 1. Officials said that the public response has increased, with 1,379 vehicles fitted with M-Tags in the last 24 hours, pushing the total number of registered vehicles to over 98,000 across the capital. According to the district administration, the M-Tag system will become active at all main entry points of Islamabad after two days. Once the system is switched on, vehicles without M-Tags will not be allowed to enter the city. The move is part of efforts to regulate traffic flow and improve monitoring at city entrances. In this regard, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad, Irfan Nawaz Memon said M-Tag readers will be activated at all designated entry points on the set date. He confirmed that having an M-Tag on vehicles will be mandatory for entry into the federal capital. He added that preparations are complete and no extension is under consideration. Due to the growing number of people visiting M-Tag centers, the administration has deployed additional staff to manage the rush. Officials said extra counters and personnel have been assigned to speed up the process and reduce waiting time for citizens. The administration reported that the response from vehicle owners has increased steadily over the past few days. Data shows that more than 98,000 vehicles in Islamabad have already been fitted with M-Tags. Authorities expect this number to rise further as the deadline approaches. Deputy Commissioner Irfan Memon urged citizens to complete the process without delay. He said vehicle owners should get M-Tags installed immediately to avoid inconvenience once the system becomes active. He warned that vehicles without M-Tags will face restrictions at city entry points after the deadline. Officials also advised citizens to visit authorized M-Tag centers only and ensure their vehicle details are correctly registered. They said the process remains open and is being monitored to handle the increasing public turnout. The district administration has appealed to the public to cooperate with enforcement teams and follow the instructions issued for smooth implementation. Authorities believe early compliance will help prevent traffic congestion and delays at entry points once the M-Tag readers are fully operational.

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11# Block 18-A, Awan Plaza,
G-8 Markez, Islamabad-Pakistan
Ph: 051-2261960, 051-8488394

Time to get serious about AI risk

JAKE SULLIVAN

IN November 2024, US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping made their first substantive joint statement about the national security risks posed by artificial intelligence. Specifically, they noted that both the US and China believe in “the need to maintain human control over the decision to use nuclear weapons.” That may sound like diplomatic low-hanging fruit, since it would be hard to find a reasonable person willing to argue that we should hand control over nuclear weapons to AI. But in this situation, there is no such thing as low-hanging fruit, especially on weighty security matters. The Chinese are inherently skeptical of US risk-reduction proposals and Russia had opposed similar language in multilateral bodies. Because bilateral talks with the US on AI and nuclear security would open daylight between Russia and China, progress on this front was not a foregone conclusion. In the end, it took more than a year of negotiation to make that simple joint statement happen. Yet, simple as it seems, the result was significant because it demonstrated that the two AI superpowers can engage in constructive risk management even as they compete vigorously for AI leadership.

Moreover, diplomats and experts from our two countries had met earlier in 2024, in Geneva, for an extended session dedicated to AI risks. It was the first meeting of its kind and, though it did not produce any significant results, the very fact that it occurred was an important step and both sides did manage to identify critical areas of risk that required further work. Now, as the momentum behind AI development and deployment, both civil and military, gathers pace, the US and China need to build on this foundation by pursuing sustained, senior-level diplomacy on AI risks, even as each strives for the lead in the AI race. They must do so because the risks of AI are real and only growing. For example, as AI capabilities advance and diffuse, nonstate actors like terrorist organizations could leverage them to threaten both the US and China – as well as the rest of the world. Such threats could take many forms, including cyberattacks that paralyze critical infrastructure, novel bioweapons that evade detection or treatment, disinformation campaigns that destabilize governments and societies, and AI-enabled lethal drones that can strike anywhere with little or no notice.

Nor do the risks stop there. As the US and Chinese militaries increase their use of AI – shortening decision loops and altering deterrence frameworks in the process – the risk of AI-powered systems inadvertently triggering a conflict or catastrophic escalation will grow. As AI becomes increasingly central to the global banking system, AI-powered trading could cause a market crash in the absence of adequate firewalling. And looking further ahead, one can imagine a powerful, misaligned AI system (pursuing aims other than what their creators intended) threatening grievous harm to humanity. As the world’s only AI superpowers, the US and China need to engage one another directly to address these

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

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Email: dailyisbpost@gmail.com

Phone: 051-8488394 / 051-2261960

Off: Awan Plaza, Block 18-A, G-8 Markaz Islamabad



and other dangers. Engagement does not mean that China and the US will stop competing vigorously. This autumn, China showed how sharp that competition had become when it issued extreme new export controls on rare earths that are critical to the production of microchips and other components of AI systems. As national security adviser during the Biden administration, I worked hard to ensure that the US maintained its lead on AI so that the technology will work for us rather than against us. I saw that the race for leadership in military, intelligence and commercial applications, and for the adoption of American and Chinese AI models and applications by countries around the world, would only continue to heat up. But it is precisely because of this intense competition that diplomacy is essential, even in this period of heightened tensions. It would be deeply irresponsible for the US and China to race ahead without engaging each other on the risks or without talking about the immense opportunities that AI presents to address transnational challenges – from the climate crisis to public health.

There is no substitute for direct government-to-government engagement, even if it is quite modest at first. To be sure, leading thinkers in both countries have participated in “Track II” diplomatic efforts – talks outside of government, usually involving universities, business leaders and civil society groups. Such discussions are valuable and they should continue. Ultimately, though, there is no substitute for direct government-to-government engagement, even if it is quite modest at first. Nor can engagement wait, given the breathtaking speed of technological advancement and the foreseeable difficulties of reaching diplomatic breakthroughs that are equal to the moment. Managing AI risks is uncharted territory, so progress will be neither swift nor easy.

The US and China need to get started. Many commentators have drawn parallels to nuclear arms control as it developed over the decades and that analogy has some merit. Superpowers bear responsibility for managing the risks associated with powerful technologies and we have successfully discharged that responsibility in the past through arms control agreements – including at the very height of the Cold War. But AI also presents different challenges, requiring more innovative approaches than arms control. There are several reasons for this. First, verification is more vexing. Counting missiles and warheads, with their detectable signatures, is one thing; counting algorithms – let alone discerning all the capabilities and applications of a given algorithm – is quite another.

Second, the challenge of dual use presents itself differently in the case of AI. Yes, splitting the atom has both civilian and military uses, but there is a fairly straightforward line between peaceful nuclear power and nuclear weapons, and the International Atomic Energy Agency has a lot of experience policing it. By contrast, the same AI model that can help advance scientific research and generate economic growth can also help deliver terrifying lethal effects. This makes the competitive dynamics between the US and China much harder to manage and the line between opportunity and risk much harder to discern. Third, arms control discussions have focused chiefly on states threatening other states, whereas AI risk involves state-to-state threats but also nonstate threats and the risks associated with AI misalignment. This presents different challenges and opportunities for diplomacy. Fourth, at least in the US, AI development is driven not by the government but by the private sector – and not by one company but by many competing against each other. That means a wider range of actors must be involved in discussions aimed at mitigating the risks that the technology poses.

Israel’s Somaliland Gamble

Qamar Bashir



The Arab and Islamic world views the move with even deeper suspicion. For them, Israel’s record – from Gaza to Lebanon and Syria – suggests that Somaliland could become an outpost for surveillance, naval projection and long-term security schemes. Some even fear it may one day be linked to displacement or demographic engineering related to the Palestinian question. Whether those fears are justified or not, the political distrust they reflect is real – and volatile. The United States, meanwhile, has chosen public caution

ISRAEL is perhaps the only country on the planet that speaks a different language when it comes to words like independence, sovereignty, human rights, security, and good-neighbourly relations. It has stretched these terms so far that the mass killing of civilians in Gaza, the destruction of entire neighbourhoods, and the cutting-off of food, water and medicine are reframed as “self-defence.” The International Court of Justice has already found it plausible that Israel’s actions in Gaza amount to genocide and ordered it to allow humanitarian relief and prevent further atrocities. The International Criminal Court has gone further still, issuing arrest warrants for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and others for alleged war crimes, including the use of starvation as a weapon. Yet Israel continues with near-complete impunity, striking Syria and Lebanon at will, clashing with Iran and ignoring UN resolutions and global outrage. Into this already combustible environment, Israel has taken another extraordinary step. On 26 December 2025, it became the first country in the world to formally recognise Somaliland as an independent and sovereign state. For over three decades the world refused to cross this line. Israel not only crossed it, it celebrated the moment.

To appreciate the shockwaves this created, one must understand Somaliland’s story. The territory in north-western Somalia declared independence in 1991 after the collapse of the Somali state. Since then, it has built working institutions, its own army and currency, and a relatively stable political system. On the surface, this stability strengthens its moral case for independent statehood. But no country recognised it – because African and international diplomacy rests on the principle of maintaining inherited borders to prevent separatist domino effects. Somalia, the African Union and regional organisations have always insisted that Somaliland remains a part of Somalia’s sovereign territory. Israel’s move directly challenges this consensus. Somalia immediately condemned it as a “deliberate attack” on its sovereignty and vowed resistance through legal and diplomatic channels. The African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development backed Mogadishu, warning of severe destabilisation risks. The Arab League declared the recognition “illegal” and urged the UN Security Council to act. A broad coalition of Arab, Muslim and African states followed with their own condemnations. This is not simply solidarity with Somalia; it is a defence of the fragile rule-set that prevents Africa’s borders from unravelling. So why would Israel knowingly

walk into this storm?. The answer is written on the map. Somaliland sits on the Gulf of Aden, near the Bab el-Mandeb strait – one of the world’s most strategic maritime chokepoints. A substantial share of global trade and energy flows through this narrow corridor. The port of Berbera is effectively an observation post on the gateway to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal at a moment when Houthi attacks, piracy and great-power rivalry have turned the area into a contested arena.

Seen from this perspective, Israel’s recognition looks less like humanitarian sympathy and more like hard-nosed realpolitik. A friendly government in Somaliland offers intelligence, security and possibly – in time – military access opposite Yemen and on the maritime route that connects Asia, the Gulf and Europe. It gives Israel the opportunity to extend its rivalry with Iran and its allies into another theatre and deepen its maritime influence at a critical global artery. It also signals that international borders can be “re-interpreted” when they obstruct strategic goals – an irony not lost on those watching events in the occupied Palestinian territories. African states understand this clearly – which is why their reaction has been so firm. Many already face separatist pressures of their own. If territorial integrity becomes negotiable here, it becomes negotiable everywhere. And once unilateral recognition is normalised, powerful states will be tempted to redraw other borders for their own advantage.

The Arab and Islamic world views the move with even deeper suspicion. For them, Israel’s record – from Gaza to Lebanon and Syria – suggests that Somaliland could become an outpost for surveillance, naval projection and long-term security schemes. Some even fear it may one day be linked to displacement or demographic engineering related to the Palestinian question. Whether those fears are justified or not, the political distrust they reflect is real – and volatile. The United States, meanwhile, has chosen public caution. President Trump has said Washington is “not ready” to recognise Somaliland and reaffirmed support for Somalia’s unity. Yet, given the intimacy of U.S.–Israeli relations, few observers believe such a dramatic step was taken without at least a reading of American sentiment. It is entirely plausible that Israel is acting as a spearhead – testing reactions from African and Arab partners, many of whom hold trillions of dollars in U.S. assets – before Washington considers any shift toward de facto support.

If that interpretation holds, this is not merely an Israeli initiative but part of a broader divide-and-rule strategy in

the Horn of Africa – a region already strained by Ethiopian-Egyptian tensions, Red Sea militarisation, Somali instability and Gulf rivalries. Rather than integration and development, the region gains another sovereignty dispute and another justification for military build-ups and strategic manoeuvring.

All of this comes at a time when Israel is already more diplomatically isolated than at any point in decades. It faces genocide proceedings in The Hague, ICC warrants against its leaders, and growing distance even from traditional partners. Opening an additional front of confrontation with Somalia, the African Union, the Arab League and the wider Islamic world only deepens the perception of Israel as a state willing to discard international norms whenever they obstruct strategic ambition. Even if Israel secures tactical advantages in Somaliland, the long-term political costs may significantly widen its circle of hostility and mistrust. This development must therefore not be dismissed as a narrow legal gesture. It is a political shockwave at the heart of the Horn of Africa – detonated while Gaza still bleeds, Lebanon remains tense, Syria continues under intermittent bombardment, and Iran stands in permanent confrontation. If the world accepts the fragmentation of Somalia by unilateral recognition today, it should not be surprised when similar moves appear elsewhere tomorrow, cloaked in the language of “freedom” but dictated by power rather than law.

For Somalia and its partners, the response must be firm yet constructive. They should resist this precedent at the UN, AU, Arab League and OIC, while recognising that Somaliland’s grievances cannot simply be wished away. A credible federal settlement, fair resource-sharing and meaningful political inclusion remain the only sustainable alternatives to secession driven by external sponsorship. Israel’s recognition of Somaliland is therefore not merely a diplomatic handshake. It is a calculated strategic gamble – one that deepens mistrust in an already fractured region and risks turning the Horn of Africa into yet another arena of proxy competition. Whether that gamble ultimately benefits Israel, or becomes another catalyst for instability and backlash, will depend on how the international community – and above all Somalia itself – responds in the months ahead.

– Press Secretary to the President (Rtd)
Former Press Minister,
Embassy of Pakistan to France
Former Press Attaché to Malaysia
Former MD, SRBC
Macomb, Michigan, USA

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 broader narrative, therefore, is one of dangerous interconnection

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 stand-off 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

Pakistan
conflict
with India...

FROM PAGE 01
Beyond South Asia, the CFR identified Israeli violence in Gaza and the West Bank as one of the world's most dangerous conflicts, alongside the Russia-Ukraine war, the possibility of US military action in Venezuela, and rising political violence within the United States itself. The report warned that these conflicts collectively could pose serious threats to global peace and US national security in the coming year.

Imran
Khan,
Bushra...

FROM PAGE 01
arguing that the prosecution failed to establish its case. The petitions maintain that the trial court wrongly relied on the testimony of an approver, which, according to the appellants, could not legally form the basis of a conviction. They have also argued that an individual, Sohaib Abbasi, was unlawfully made an approver in the case. The appeals further contend that multiple punishments cannot be awarded for the same offence and that the special central court lacked jurisdiction to hear the case. The appellants have also claimed that the Bulgari set was retained in accordance with Toshakhana rules applicable to former rulers, and that the reference was filed without a proper investigation. Imran and Bushra have alleged in their appeals that the case is politically motivated and part of a broader campaign of victimisation. Imran's petition has been assigned diary number 24560 and Bushra's appeal registered as diary number 24561.

LHC judges
hears PTI
petition on
property

FROM PAGE 01
Their lawyer, Azhar Siddique, appeared before the court at the hearing where the judge asked him whether the petitioners had raised their concerns against the law in the Punjab Assembly. The judge further remarked that despite "extensive trolling", the court had taken up the matter. He expressed regret that the petitioners had not raised the matter in the assembly and opted to file a petition in the court instead, observing that the issue "should not be politicised" as it involves the property rights of poor citizens. Justice Khan asked the lawyer whether it was "necessary to politicise the matter". He further said that it would have been understandable had the petition been filed by an affected person and regretted that the petition was posted on Facebook before the hearing.

Pak urges
global...

FROM PAGE 01
He said "the list of such victims is sadly long" and urged the international community to "take note" and take "appropriate steps" to help protect "the fundamental rights of vulnerable communities in India." Last week, Christmas celebrations turned sour for the Christian community in India after a violent mob attacked and vandalised decorations in Chhattisgarh's capital city of Raipur. A mob armed with wooden sticks vandalised Christmas decorations and installations at a mall ahead of the festival, according to The Indian Express. The group, reportedly comprising 30 to 40 masked men, stormed the mall during a Chhattisgarh bandh called to protest alleged religious conversion-related violence in Kanker. Footage of the incident showed suspects moving through the mall and tearing down decorations that had been put up ahead of the Christian festival. In another such incident, the Vishva Hindu Parishad Bajrang Dal vandalised a school during the Christmas preparations in Assam's Nalbari district.

18th Korean Ambassador's National Taekwondo Championships concludes

President of PTF Women Wing Saba Shamim reaffirmed the federation's commitment to providing a platform for young athletes to showcase their talent. She thanked the Embassy of the Republic of Korea for its support in developing Taekwondo in Pakistan

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD, The 18th Korean Ambassador's National Junior & Cadet Kyorugi & Poomsae Taekwondo Championships came to a close on December 28 at the Shahbaz Sharif Sports Complex, Rawalpindi. The three-day event, co-hosted by the Pakistan Taekwondo Federation (PTF) and the Embassy of the Republic of Korea, saw participation from 530 athletes across the country. The championships featured Kyorugi (sparring) and Poomsae (forms) categories, with athletes competing in Cadet and Junior divisions. The event was supported by Kukkiwon (World Taekwondo Headquarters), Pakistan Army Sports Directorate, and District Sports Department Rawalpindi, with sponsorship from Kingdom Valley and Cheezious. In his address at the Opening Ceremony, Chargé d'affaires of the Republic of Korea Park Jaelark highlighted Taekwondo's values of self-control, respect, and discipline. He appreciated the PTF's efforts in promoting Taekwondo in Pakistan and expressed hope for continued cooperation between Korea and Pakistan. President of PTF Women Wing Saba Shamim reaffirmed the federation's commitment to providing a platform for young athletes to showcase their talent. She thanked the Embassy of the Republic of Korea for its support in developing Taekwondo in Pakistan. The championships concluded with athletes from various institutions and regions participating in the event, which aimed to promote sportsmanship and the true spirit of Taekwondo.

Sudanese trek through
mountains to escape
Kordofan fighting

PORT SUDAN: For eight days, Sudanese farmer Ibrahim Hussein led his family through treacherous terrain to flee the fighting in southern Kordofan – the latest and most volatile front in the country's 31-month-old conflict. "We left everything behind," said the 47-year-old, who escaped with his family of seven from Keikek, near the South Sudanese border. "Our animals and our unharvested crops – all of it." Hussein spoke to AFP from Kosti, an army-controlled city in White Nile state, around 300 kilometres (186 miles) south of Khartoum. The city has become a refuge for hundreds of families fleeing violence in oil-rich Kordofan, where the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) – locked in a brutal war since April 2023

– are vying for control. Emboldened by their October capture of the army's last stronghold in Darfur, the RSF and their allies have in recent weeks descended in full force on Kordofan, forcing nearly 53,000 people to flee, according to the United Nations. "For most of the war, we lived in peace and looked after our animals," Hussein said. "But when the RSF came close, we were afraid fighting would break out. So we left, most of the way on foot." He took his family through the rocky spine of the Nuba Mountains and the surrounding valley, passing through both paramilitary and army checkpoints. This month, the RSF consolidated its grip on West Kordofan – one of three regional states – and seized Heglig, which lies on Sudan's

largest oil field. With their local allies, they have also tightened their siege on the army-held cities of Kadugli and Dilling, where hundreds of thousands face mass starvation. In just two days this week, nearly 4,000 people arrived in Kosti, hungry and terrified, said Mohamed Refaat, Sudan chief of mission for the UN's International Organisation for Migration. "Most of those arriving are women and children. Very few adult men are with them," he told AFP, adding that many men stay behind "out of fear of being killed or abducted." The main roads are unsafe, so families are taking "long and uncertain journeys and sleeping wherever they can," according to Mercy Corps, one of the few aid agencies operating in Kordofan. – Agencies

Indonesia
nursing
home fire
kills 16:
official

JAKARTA: A fire at a nursing home on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi killed more than a dozen people, with three others injured, a local official said Monday. Firefighters received the report of the blaze at 8:31 pm Sunday at a nursing home in the North Sulawesi provincial capital Manado, said the city's fire and rescue agency chief Jimmy Rotinsulu. "There were 16 deaths; three (people) had burn injuries," he told AFP. Many bodies of the victims were found inside their rooms, Jimmy said, adding that many of the elderly residents were likely resting in their rooms in the evening when the fire broke out. Authorities managed to evacuate 12 people – all unhurt – and transfer them to a local hospital, he said. – APP

Kazakh capital's
population
surpasses 1.6 mln

ASTANA: An extended meeting was held at the Astana city administration under the chairmanship of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Culture and Information Aida Balaeva, with the participation of city officials and members of the Public Council, Qazinform News Agency reports citing primeminister.kz. The social sector and the implementation of the President's instructions aimed at improving the quality of life in the capital were on the agenda. Astana Mayor Zhenis Kassymbek noted that the city's steady population growth creates new demands for urban infrastructure and requires proactive planning. As of November 1, 2025, Astana's population reached 1,622,245 people, 93,542 residents up since the beginning of the year. Of this growth, 17,265 came from natural increase and 76,277 from migration. Annual growth stands at 6.12%, with migration inflows of around 100,000 people per year, intensifying the burden on healthcare, education, employment, and social support systems. Special attention was paid to the healthcare development. Astana has 277 medical organizations so far. Building wear is at 14.7%, and equipment availability at 82.4%. Staff shortages remain a challenge. As stated there, births have increased by 45% over the past decade, requiring more maternity and perinatal facilities. According to the Enlightenment Minister Zhuldyz Suleimenova, more than 300,000 students are studying at around 200 schools. In 2025, 272 billion tenge was allocated to private schools, raising issues of transparency and quality. – Agencies

Indian
lawmaker to
stay in jail

FROM PAGE 01
including from the survivor and her mother. The crime against the 17-year-old in Uttar Pradesh state's Unnao district was one of the most horrific in India in recent years. The survivor, who can't be named under Indian laws, alleged that she had approached Sengar for a job in June 2017 and was kidnapped and raped for more than a week by him and others. Her ordeal first came to national attention in 2018 – a year after the assault – when she tried to set herself on fire, alleging police inaction. At the time, Sengar was an influential politician from the BJP, which was in power in the state as well as at the national level. The party later expelled him. Months before Sengar's conviction in December 2019, the woman survived a suspicious car crash that killed two of her aunts and seriously injured her lawyer.

Pakistan
Army major
martyred

FROM PAGE 01
the front, having fought gallantly, rendered the ultimate sacrifice and embraced shahadat," it added. The ISPR said that weapons and ammunition were recovered from the killed terrorists, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities against the security forces and law enforcement agencies, as well as the killing of innocent civilians. Following the IBO, security forces conducted sanitisation operations to eliminate any other Indian sponsored terrorists found in the area. The military's media wing vowed that the counterterrorism campaign under the "Azam e Istehkam" vision will "continue at full pace to wipe out the menace of foreign sponsored and supported terrorism" from Pakistan.

Rohingya refugees
hope new leaders can
pave a path home

COX'S BAZAR, Bangladesh, Dec 29 (AFP/APP): Rohingya refugees living in squalid camps in Bangladesh have elected a leadership council, hoping it can improve conditions and revive efforts to secure their return home to Myanmar. Spread over 8,000 acres in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, the camps are home to 1.7 million members of the stateless group, many of whom fled a 2017 military crackdown that is now subject to a genocide probe at the UN court. In July, the refugees held their first elections since their influx began eight years ago, resulting in the formation of the United Council of Rohang (UCR). "They are working to take us home," said Khairul Islam, 37, who back home had a thriving timber business. The new council has brought him a glimmer of hope amid an uncertain future. "We can hardly breathe in these cramped camp rooms... all our family members live in a single room," he said. "It's unbearably hot inside. Back in Myanmar, we didn't even need a ceiling fan. In summer, we used to sit under tall trees," Islam said, his eyes welling up. More than 3,000 voters from across 33 refugee camps cast their ballots to elect an executive committee and five rotating presidents to focus on human rights, education and health. Addressing a gathering at one of the camps, UCR president Mohammad Sayed Ullah urged refugees not to forget the violence that forced the mostly Muslim group to flee Myanmar's Rakhine state. Never forget that we left our parents' graves behind. – Agencies

Bondi shooting families demand national
probe into Australia's 'rise in antisemitism'

SYDNEY: Families of victims killed in the Bondi Beach mass shooting called Monday for an independent national inquiry into antisemitism in Australia and alleged failures in policing, intelligence and policy they say enabled the attack. Father and son Sajid and Naveed Akram are accused of targeting a Hanukkah event on Sydney's Bondi Beach on December 14, killing 15 people and wounding dozens in what authorities have described as an antisemitic terrorist attack. Seventeen families, in an open letter to Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, urged him to "immediately establish a Commonwealth Royal Commission into the rapid rise of antisemitism in Australia" and examine "law enforcement, intelligence, and policy failures that led to the Bondi Beach massacre". "We demand answers and solutions," the families wrote. "We need to know why clear warning signs were ignored, how antisemitic hatred and Islamic extremism were allowed to dangerously grow unchecked, and what changes must be made to protect all Australians going forward." Albanese has resisted calls for a federal inquiry, citing a need for urgent action rather than waiting "years for answers". "We need to get on with any changes that are required," he told reporters Monday. "I have nothing except sympathy for those families. My job, as prime minister, is to look at how we build unity, how we build social cohesion, how we do what the nation needs at what is a very difficult time." Albanese said last week that a New South Wales-led royal commission – where the shooting

occurred – would suffice and promised full support. Canberra has flagged a suite of reforms to gun ownership and hate speech laws, as well as an inquiry into police and intelligence services. Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke warned Monday that a national royal commission could give "some of the worst statements and worst voices" a platform to relive "the worst examples of antisemitism over the last two years", which he said was not in the interest of unity or national security. But the families of those killed at Bondi Beach said the federal government's response is "not nearly enough". "We have lost parents, spouses, children, and grandparents. Our loved ones were celebrating Chanukah at Bondi Beach, a festival of light and joy, in an iconic public space that should have been safe," the letter said. "You owe us answers. You owe us accountability. And you owe Australians the truth." The families said the rise of antisemitism was a "national crisis", adding the "threat was not going away". "We need strong action now. We need leadership now. You cannot bring back our loved ones. But with a well-led Commonwealth Royal Commission and strong action, you may be able to save many more." One of the gunmen, Sajid Akram, 50, was shot and killed by police during the attack. An Indian national, he entered Australia on a visa in 1998. His 24-year-old son Naveed, an Australian-born citizen, remains in custody facing multiple charges, including terrorism and 15 murders, as well as committing a "terrorist act" and planting a bomb with intent to harm. – Agencies

Ronaldo's double helps Al-Nassr to 10th
straight Saudi Pro League victory

Cristiano Ronaldo scored twice as Al-Nassr defeated Al-Okhdood 3-0, securing their 10th straight Saudi Pro League victory and moving four points clear at the top

RIYADH: Cristiano Ronaldo scored twice to help Al-Nassr to a 3-0 victory over relegation-threatened Al-Okhdood at Al-Awwal Park to seal the club's 10th consecutive Saudi Pro League win. The brace took Ronaldo's career tally to 956 goals as Jorge Jesus' side recorded the best start to an SPL season in history. Ronaldo, who was chasing his first hat-trick of the calendar year, looked to have extended that particular run to 16 consecutive years after netting in the 65th minute, but the goal was ruled out for offside following a VAR review. But Al-Nassr nevertheless continued their outstanding start under former Al-Hilal coach Jesus, who has transformed the team this season. The title-hungry side, who are seeking their first league crown since the 2018/19 season, moved four points clear of rivals Al-Hilal following the victory, just a few weeks ahead of the sides' highly anticipated clash at Kingdom Arena on Jan. 12. With Joao Felix drifting across the front to link up with wingers Wesley and Kingsley Coman, and Marcelo Brozovic controlling the midfield, Al-Nassr's attacking rhythm was built around crosses to the far post and combinations in the half spaces. Al-Okhdood did threaten on occasion, as Khaled Naray tested the Al-Nassr backline with runs in behind, but goalkeeper Nawaf Al-Aqidi ensured the hosts



maintained a clean sheet. Despite their early dominance, Al-Nassr had to wait until the 31st minute to find the breakthrough. A Joao Felix corner was met by defender Abdullelah Al-Amri, who headed the ball across goal for Ronaldo to apply the finishing touch. Ronaldo struck again in the closing moments of the first half, after Brozovic and Angelo combined neatly on the left. The Croatian delivered yet another cross toward Ronaldo, who converted with an exquisite backheel. The Al-Nassr attack maintained the pressure in the second half with Joao Felix finding Coman on the left, only for his effort to clip the crossbar. The league leaders created a succession of chances but were unable to find a third until Joao Felix was found in the box to slide the ball past Samuel in the fourth minute of stoppage time. Al-Nassr now sit comfortably at the top of the Saudi Pro League table with 30 points, having scored 33 goals and conceded just five, underlining their dominance at both ends of the pitch. Elsewhere, Al-Qadsiah were held to a 1-1 draw by Damac as they looked to break into the top four following Al-Ahli's defeat to Al-Fateh. A compact Damac side frustrated the hosts, who needed a first-half equalizer from Mateo Retegui to salvage a point. – Agencies

Over 3,000
migrants
died while
trying to...

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While there has been a "significant" decrease in migrant arrivals in the Canaries, "a new, more distant and more dangerous" route to the archipelago has emerged with departures from Guinea, it said. The group compiles its figures from families of migrants and official statistics of those rescued. It included 437 children and 192 women among the dead. Caminando Fronteras also noted there had been a rise in the number of boats leaving from Algeria, mainly to the holiday islands of Ibiza and Formentera in the Mediterranean. Traditionally used by Algerians, the route is seeing a surge of migrants from Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan in 2025, the group said. The number of deaths on this route had doubled this year to 1,037 when compared to 2024, it added.

Briefs

**SMEs,
comprehensive
business plan on
the cards**

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister, Haroon Akhtar Khan, chaired a high-level meeting with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) and international consultancy firm A.T. Kearney to review the comprehensive business plan for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Members of the SMEDA Board also participated in the meeting, where a detailed overview of the SME business plan was presented and discussed, said a release issued here on Monday.

Speaking on the occasion, Haroon Akhtar Khan stated that the SME business plan was developed after extensive consultations with all relevant stakeholders, resulting in a complete and inclusive policy package. He emphasized that Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif's vision of empowering SMEs was now translating into reality. The Special Assistant highlighted that the business plan will ensure the formalization of SMEs, enhance their productivity, and unlock the immense potential of Pakistan's SME sector. He noted that longstanding challenges such as limited access to credit, climate change impacts and low productivity will be addressed on a priority basis through this plan.—APP

**PSX gains
1,495 points
to close at
173,896
points**

ISLAMABAD: The benchmark KSE-100 Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) on Monday closed bullish, gaining 1,495.61 points, a positive change of 0.87 percent, to settle at 173,896.34 points compared to 172,400.73 points on the previous trading day, according to PSX data. During the session, the ready market witnessed a trading volume of 858,054 million shares with a traded value of Rs 42.867 billion, against 797,999 million shares valuing Rs 38.062 billion in the previous session. Market capitalization increased to Rs 19.590 trillion from Rs 19.464 trillion a day earlier. Out of 485 active companies in the ready market, 177 advanced, 272 declined, while 36 remained unchanged.—APP

**Rupee gains 01
paise against US
Dollar**

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Monday appreciated by 01 paise against the US Dollar in interbank trading and closed at Rs 280.16 compared to the previous day's closing at Rs 280.17. According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs 281 and Rs 283, respectively. The price of the Euro increased by Rs0.14 to close at Rs 329.84 from the previous day's close of Rs 329.70, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese Yen remained unchanged and closed at Rs 1.79, whereas the exchange rate of the British Pound witnessed an increase of 11 paise and closed at Rs 377.71 compared to the previous day's Rs 377.60. The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham came down 01 paise to close at Rs 76.27 and the Saudi Riyal remained stagnant at Rs 74.69.

**Gold price
declines by Rs
5,500 per tola**

ISLAMABAD: The price of 24-karat gold decreased by Rs 5,500 per tola and was sold at Rs 470,162 on Monday as compared to Rs 475,662 on the previous trading day. All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association reported the price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also dropped by Rs4,715 to Rs403,088 from Rs4,730 to Rs4,735. The price of 22 karat gold declined by Rs4,323 to Rs369,510 from Rs 373,833. In the international market, the price of gold fell by \$55 to \$4,478 from \$4,533 per ounce. Likewise, the price of silver per tola decreased by Rs332 to Rs8,075, while 10 grams of silver went down by Rs284 to Rs6,923. International silver prices also dropped by \$3.32 to \$76.00 per ounce.—APP



MALAKAND: Federal Minister for Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan Affairs and SAFRON Engineer Amir Muqam distributing laptops among the students of University of Malakand under the Prime Minister's Youth Laptop Scheme Phase-IV.

Top diplomats of China, Cambodia and Thailand meet

“Allowing the flames of war to be reignited is absolutely not what the people of the two countries want and not what China, as your friend, wants to see. Therefore, we should resolutely look ahead and move forward,” Wang said

DNA

HONG KONG: Foreign ministers from Cambodia and Thailand convened with their Chinese counterpart on Monday as the Beijing government, building on its expanding presence in global diplomacy, sought to play a stronger mediating role in the violent border dispute between the two Southeast Asian countries. The trilateral meeting, held in a southwestern Chinese province north of the contested border, came two days after Thailand and Cambodia signed a fresh ceasefire agreement to end weeks of fighting that killed more than 100 people and forced the evacuation of hundreds of thousands on both sides of the border. “We haven't resolved everything, but I think we are making progress in the right direction and we have to keep up the momentum,” Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow told reporters after the meeting in Yunnan province. He said chief priorities

are to ensure a sustained ceasefire and continue rebuilding trust. It was noteworthy that the meeting was held in Yunnan, nearer to the dispute and to Southeast Asia, rather than in Beijing, the Chinese capital and seat of government about 2,500 kilometers (1,300 miles) northeast. The meetings represented China's latest efforts to strengthen its role as an international mediator and, in particular, its influence in Asian regional crises. As China grows into an economic and political force globally, Beijing has spent the past decade and more working in various ways to increase its voice as a third party in diplomatic matters. During the meeting Monday, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi called for joint efforts to promote regional peace, stability and development — language typical for China in such situations. “Allowing the flames of war to be reignited is absolutely not what the people of the two countries want and not what China, as your friend, wants to see. Therefore, we should resolutely look ahead and move forward,” Wang said. Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn said

he believed the latest ceasefire would last and would create an environment for both nations to resume previously agreed-upon ways to settle differences, according to a Chinese interpreter. Sihasak also expressed hopes for peace with neighboring countries. After the meeting, Chinese official news agency Xinhua quoted Wang as saying the three nations reached a consensus to move forward with the ceasefire without reversal, maintain dialogue and restore ties between the two Southeast Asian countries step by step. A statement released by Xinhua, the Cambodian state news agency Agence Kampuchea Presse and the Thai Foreign Ministry said the three sides had in-depth exchanges on maintaining the ceasefire. The next key step was to work toward resuming normal exchanges, it said. China said it was ready to provide immediate humanitarian assistance for displaced residents, the statement said. The countries also agreed to take more robust measures to combat transnational crimes, including telecom and online scams, the statement

said. Sihasak and Prak Sokhonn had also held separate meetings with Wang on Sunday, the first day of the two-day gathering. The two Southeast Asian countries originally reached a ceasefire in July. It was brokered by Malaysia and pushed through under pressure from US President Donald Trump, who threatened to withhold trade privileges unless Thailand and Cambodia agreed. The preliminary pact was followed by a more detailed October agreement. But Thailand and Cambodia carried on a bitter propaganda war, with minor, cross-border violence continuing. The tensions erupted into heavy fighting in early December. The Saturday agreement calls for Thailand, after the ceasefire has held for 72 hours, to repatriate 18 Cambodian soldiers who have been held prisoner since the earlier fighting in July. Their release has been a major demand of the Cambodian side. The agreement also calls on both sides to adhere to international agreements against deploying land mines, a major concern of Thailand.

UAE advances space ambitions with major milestones

ABU DHABI : The United Arab Emirates solidified its position as a global hub for advanced technology and space sciences in 2025, completing a series of strategic milestones aimed at transitioning toward an innovation-driven knowledge economy. Throughout the year, the country expanded its orbital infrastructure and international partnerships, significantly accelerating its lunar and Earth observation capabilities. The UAE's orbital expansion was marked by the deployment of several key assets, including the Thuraya-4, MBZ-SAT, Al Ain Sat-1, HCT-SAT1, and the Foresight Constellation. The launch of Etihad-SAT established the nation's first domestic radar satellite capability, while the PHI-1 mission marked the first modular satellite platform developed under the Payload Hosting Initiative with the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs. In February, the Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC) partnered with Thales Alenia Space to develop the Lunar Gateway's Crew and Science Airlock. This 15-year commitment secures a permanent UAE presence on the lunar station and paves the way for the first Emirati astronaut to reach the moon. Additionally, the MBRSC and Firefly Aerospace signed an agreement to provide the lander for the Rashid 2 Rover's mission to the lunar far side. MBRSC also expanded cooperation with the French National Centre for Space Studies to supply Rashid 2 with CASPEX cameras and advanced systems. Rashid 2 successfully passed environmental and mechanical testing within the UAE and has been cleared for shipment to the United States ahead of its scheduled 2026 launch. In a separate milestone, Space42 managed the integration and testing of three Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) satellites—Foresight-3, 4, and 5—within the UAE for the first time.—DNA

CCP conducts competition assessment in key sectors

ISLAMABAD : The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) significantly stepped up its market research in 2025 by releasing competition assessment studies across critical sectors, including insurance, power, gold, pesticides, steel, LNG, road infrastructure, sugar and fertilizer. To strengthen evidence-based policy-making, the CCP has recently established a Centre of Excellence in Competition Law (CECL) to conduct in-depth research across key sectors and support legal and regulatory reforms, said a release issued here on Monday. The CECL is currently undertaking studies on the automobile industry, civil aviation market, solar energy market, cement sector, and the impact of mergers in the telecom sector, which are nearing completion. A comprehensive CCP report on the State of Competition in Pakistan's Insurance Industry highlighted key issues, including low insurance penetration, limited outreach, a fragmented legal and regulatory framework and barriers to entry. The report noted that Pakistan's insurance penetration stood at 0.87 percent, compared to a global average of 6.7 percent, and emphasized the need for reforms to promote competition and consumer welfare.

The Commission's maiden Competition Assessment Study of the Gold Market in Pakistan provided the first evidence-based analysis of a sector dominated by informality and pricing opacity. The study highlighted that over 90 percent of gold trading occurs outside formal channels and underscored the potential impact of the Reko Diq copper-gold project on domestic supply chains. The CCP recommended setting up Gemstone and Gold Regulatory Authority to streamline the gold market. In addition, the CCP issued studies on the pesticide, steel, and LNG sectors, identifying structural, regulatory, and enforcement gaps affecting market efficiency. The pesticide report highlighted Pakistan's heavy reliance on imported agricultural chemicals, the prevalence of counterfeit and substandard products, regulatory bottlenecks, and weak enforcement impacting farmers and crop yields. The LNG study identified monopolistic dominance of state-owned enterprises, restricted private sector participation, infrastructure access constraints, and the impact of circular debt exceeding PKR 2.8 trillion on market competition. The steel sector report outlined competition challenges and policy reforms needed to improve efficiency and market outcomes. The Commission also issued a Competition Assessment Study of the Fertilizer Industry, identifying barriers to competition across production, distribution, and retail segments in a sector critical to agricultural productivity. To enhance inter-agency cooperation, the CCP inked several MoUs in 2025 to improve coordination, data sharing, and enforcement. The Commission signed an MoU with the Federal Antimonopoly Service of the Russian Federation to strengthen cooperation in cartel enforcement, merger control, and competition policy research. At the national level, CCP entered into MoUs with the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) and the Punjab Food Authority (PFA) to curb deceptive marketing, strengthen monitoring of product claims, and enhance consumer protection. The Commission also signed an addendum to its MoU with the Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) to strengthen detection of collusive practices and bid rigging through the e-PADS public procurement platform. Through evidence-based market studies and strengthened institutional collaboration, the CCP aims to bring reforms in the legal and regulatory frameworks across key sectors of the economy.—DNA

Palestine action hunger strike prisoner loses ability to speak

“I am very clear. I don't treat any prisoners differently to others. That is why we will not be meeting any prisoners or their representatives. “We have a justice system that is based on the separation of powers, and the independent judiciary is the cornerstone of our system

LONDON: A prisoner on hunger strike in the UK, detained for activities in support of the banned group Palestine Action, has lost the ability to speak, The Independent reported. Heba Muraisi said in a statement that she can no longer “form sentences, and (is) struggling to maintain conversation.” She added via the Prisoners for Palestine group that she feels “weaker as each day passes.” Campaigners say another prisoner on hunger strike now cannot stand up. Eight activists initially went on strike awaiting trial for a range of alleged offenses relating to Palestine Action, including violence and criminal damage. Earlier this month two of the activists, Qesser Zuhrah and Amu Gib, paused their strikes after 48 days and were admitted to hospital. As well as Muraisi, three others remain on hunger strike: Teuta Hoxha, Kamran Ahmed and Lewie Chiaramello. Hoxha, according to Prisoners for Palestine, is “no longer able to stand without blacking out,” experiences “increasing

levels of brain fog” and is “virtually bedridden.” The hunger strikers are demanding immediate bail and to be allowed to “send and receive communications without restriction, surveillance, or interference from the prison administration.” The eight have been charged over two incidents, a break-in at a Royal Air Force base in June that saw two military aircraft damaged, and a break-in at a facility owned by Israeli-linked defense company Elbit Systems UK on Nov. 19, 2024. A spokesperson for Prisoners for Palestine said: “Unlike the prison guards, who lock up the prisoners early to go home to their Christmas dinner, the hunger strikers don't get a Christmas break. “Just like the Christians in Gaza, who continue to suffer in the freezing cold at the hands of the settler-colonial entity. “The hunger strikers say to us, don't forget the people of Palestine over Christmas, and continue to demand a meeting with the British government on their behalf.” Lawyers acting for the eight

have said they risk death if their strike continues and the government does not intervene. Earlier this month, protests took place led by MP Zarah Sultana over claims that Zuhrah had been refused an ambulance, and the hunger strikers' legal teams have begun action against the government over what they say are breaches of its own prison safety policy framework. Prisons Minister James Timpson said: “We are very experienced at dealing with hunger strikes. Unfortunately, over the last five years we have averaged over 200 hunger strike incidents every year and the processes that we have are well-established and they work very well — with prisons working alongside our NHS (National Health Service) partners every day, making sure our systems are robust and working — and they are. “I am very clear. I don't treat any prisoners differently to others. That is why we will not be meeting any prisoners or their representatives. “We have a justice system that is based on the separation of powers, and the independent judiciary is the cornerstone of our system.—Agencies

WB to continue financing new energy projects in Türkiye

ISTANBUL :The World Bank will continue supporting Türkiye's clean energy transition with new projects, following the signing of a recent \$750 million loan to strengthen the country's electricity transmission network, the bank's Country Director Humberto Lopez said. Lopez told Anadolu on the sidelines of the 11th Energy Efficiency Forum and Exhibition in Istanbul that they will hold a meeting with the Turkish Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources in the coming weeks to discuss potential projects. His remarks came after the World Bank and the Turkish Electricity Transmission Corporation (TEIAS) signed a \$750 million loan agreement to modernize and strengthen the country's electricity transmission network. Asked whether more deals could follow, Lopez hinted at fresh cooperation ahead. “On energy, I'm pretty sure there will be something coming,” he said. “We'll be meeting with the Ministry of Energy over the coming weeks to decide what are the next operations on which we will be focusing.” “We are talking about a number of possibilities at this point,” he added. Lopez said Türkiye's clean-energy ambitions hinge on strong transmission infrastructure. “Türkiye has one of the most ambitious plans for renewables, and this transition requires transmission,” he said.—APP

Over 3,000 migrants died in 2025 trying to reach Spain

MADRID: More than 3,000 migrants died while trying to reach Spain this year, a report released by a Spanish migration rights group said on Monday, a sharp decline from 2024 as the number of attempted crossings fell. Caminando Fronteras (Walking Borders) said most of the 3,090 deaths recorded until December 15 took place on the Atlantic migration route from Africa to Spain's Canary Islands, considered one of the world's most dangerous. While there has been a “significant” decrease in migrant arrivals in the Canaries, “a new, more distant and more dangerous” route to the archipelago has emerged with departures from Guinea, it said. The group compiles its figures from families of migrants and official statistics of those rescued. It included 437 children and 192 women among the dead Caminando Fronteras also noted there had been a rise in the number of boats leaving from Algeria, mainly to the holiday islands of Ibiza and Formentera in the Mediterranean. Traditionally used by Algerians, the route is seeing a surge of migrants from Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan in 2025, the group said.—APP

Indonesia nursing home fire kills 16

JAKARTA: A fire at a nursing home on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi killed more than a dozen people, with three others injured, a local official said Monday. Firefighters received the report of the blaze at 8:31 p.m. Sunday at a nursing home in the North Sulawesi provincial capital Manado, said the city's fire and rescue agency chief Jimmy Rotinsulu. “There were 16 deaths; three (people) had burn injuries,” he told AFP. Many bodies of the victims were found inside their rooms, Jimmy said, adding that many of the elderly residents were likely resting in their rooms in the evening when the fire broke out. Authorities managed to evacuate 12 people — all unhurt — and transfer them to a local hospital, he said. Footage aired by local broadcaster Metro TV showed the fire engulfing the nursing home, while locals helped to evacuate an elderly person. Deadly fires are not uncommon in Indonesia, a Southeast Asian archipelago of more than 17,000 islands.—APP

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: The Lahore deputy commissioner (DC) on Monday formally notified the terms and conditions for celebrating Basant, which will only be celebrated in Lahore district from Feb 6 to 8. The notification, a copy of which is available with Dawn, did not specify any particular area for flying kites, implying that the government had allowed festivities across the district. The deputy commissioners of their respective districts will also be required to issue similar notifications and ensure the implementation of the conditions and restrictions identified by the Punjab government under the Punjab Regulation of Kite Flying Rules 2025, a comprehensive legal framework to regulate kite flying. Notifying the manufacturing, trade and sale of "permissible kite flying material", the Lahore DC said that the manufacturing and trade of permissible kite flying material will be allowed from Dec 30 to Feb 8, 2026, subject to valid digital registration under Rule 3 of the Punjab Regulation of Kite Flying Rules 2025 and the regulations thereunder.

NEWS DESK

KARACHI: YouTuber Rajab Butt was physically assaulted at a sessions court in Karachi on Monday during the hearing of a case registered against him for allegedly hurting religious sentiments. Butt appeared before the sessions court (Central) upon the expiry of his interim bail, which was granted to him on December 20. The hearing, however, was marred by violence and chaos as Butt was attacked. Butt's counsel, Mian Ali Ashfaq, alleged in a post on social media platform X that his client had been attacked by "some lawyers" at Karachi City Courts' premises during the hearing of a case. He said the attack was carried out in his presence, in which Butt was injured. "[They] continued to beat him despite being repeatedly asked to stop," Ashfaq said, terming "such conduct by the lawyers unprofessional". He added, "Taking the law into their hands is weakening the reputation of lawyers in the country." Ashfaq further stated that if "lawyers will become a party [in cases] every other day and continue to attack private litigants on court premises, their respect will suffer an immense and continuous decline".

DNA

BANGKOK: Thailand's army has accused Cambodia of breaching a newly-signed ceasefire deal reached after weeks of deadly clashes that forced nearly one million people from their homes. In a statement, the Thai army said that more than 250 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) were detected flying from the Cambodian side on Sunday night. The ceasefire took effect at noon local time (05:00 GMT) on Saturday. Both sides agreed to freeze the front lines where they are now, ban reinforcements and allow civilians living in border areas to return as soon as possible. It had been seen as a breakthrough, which came after days of talks between both countries, with diplomatic encouragement from China and the US. In a statement on Monday, the Royal Thai Army said Cambodia's actions "constitute provocation and a violation of measures aimed at reducing tensions", adding that they were "inconsistent" with the terms of the ceasefire.

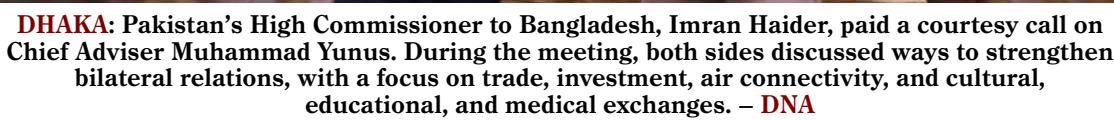
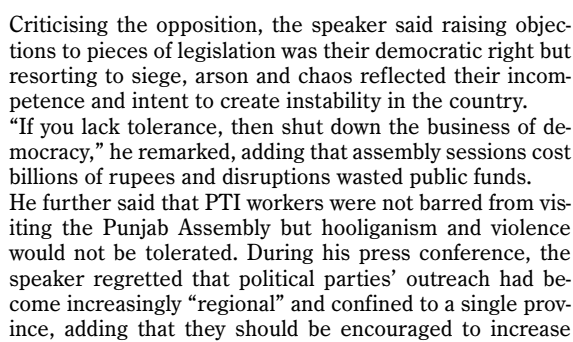
BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: Punjab Assembly Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan on Monday announced that an inquiry conducted into the chaos that marred the arrival of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi to the provincial legislature's building over the weekend would be sent to the law enforcement agencies. During his three day visit to Lahore over the weekend, the KP chief minister had given an address at the Punjab Assembly to opposition MPs on Friday. However, the visit was marred by altercations between members of his entourage and security officials, while heated exchanges between PTI leaders and journalists were also witnessed.

Addressing the incident at a press conference in Lahore today, Khan said that the report on the unrest was being sent to the law enforcement agencies, which would conduct an independent investigation into the incident.

He said that he had informed the KP chief minister that a special permit was required to enter the assembly premises, and that in the absence of any other documentation, "at least" an ID card number would be necessary verification for anyone wishing to enter. "This is a Red Zone with an extensive security parameter," he said. "You cannot ignore it under any circumstances." He added that Afridi had agreed and provided a list of those accompanying him from the National and KP Assemblies, which had been facilitated. However, the protocols had not been followed, he regretted.

He also accused Afridi of bringing unidentified individuals into the Assembly premises. "Unauthorised entry is not permissible ... work progresses according to the rules. Every little thing ... Every individual has to be permitted to be allowed to enter the [assembly] premises", he stressed.



KSE-100 Index climbs to
intraday high of 174,411.72,
gaining 2,010.99 points, or 1.17%

KARACHI: The equity market rose on Monday as optimism over a prospective United Arab Emirates (UAE) investment in Fauji Foundation, with a \$1 billion rollover liability settlement, buoyed risk appetite and drove the bourse to a new all-time intraday high. The Pakistan Stock Exchange's (PSX) benchmark KSE-100 Index climbed to an intraday high of 17,411.72, gaining 2,010.99 points, or 1.17%, and recorded a

low of 173,200.41, reflecting a gain of 799.68 points, or 0.46%. "Bullish activity witnessed as investors eye UAE \$1 billion rollout over liability set to end, acquiring shareholding in Fauji Foundation," said Ahsan Mehanti, Managing Director and CEO of Arif Habib Commodities. "Government deliberation on privatisation of ailing SOEs [state-owned enterprises], rupee stability and surging global crude oil prices played a catalyst role in bullish activity at PSX," he added. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar said on Saturday that the UAE is set to acquire shares in the Fauji Foundation as part of ongoing economic cooperation, adding that the transaction is expected to help settle a \$1 billion liability while a further \$2 billion loan could be rolled over. He said the understanding followed the UAE president's visit and expressed hope the share acquisition would be completed by March 31, 2026; Islamabad is also seeking to persuade the UAE to reinvest \$2 billion due in January. "The recent comment by Ishaq Dar on the potential acquisition of Fauji Group shares by the UAE has sparked a rally in Fauji Group companies, driving the market upwards predominantly today," said independent investment and economic analyst AAH Soomro. He further added: "Overall bullishness continues." Commenting on the record high, Advisor to the Finance Minister Khurram Shehzad said in a post on X that the KSE-100 Index crossing 174,400 points marked "yet another record high." — DNA

US president says it would become clear within weeks whether it was possible to end Russia-Ukraine war



FLORIDA: US President Donald Trump said Sunday that a deal was closer than ever to end Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but reported no apparent breakthrough on the flashpoint issue of territory after new talks with the warring countries' leaders. Trump, who had promised a

peace deal on day one of his nearly year-old presidency, said it would become clear within weeks whether it was possible to end the war that has killed tens of thousands of people since February 2022.

In a pre-New Year's diplomatic sprint, Trump brought Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to Florida, where the two met with top aides over lunch, a day after Russia unleashed major new attacks on residential areas of the capital Kyiv. Much like when Zelensky last met Trump in October, Russian President Vladimir Putin also spoke shortly beforehand by telephone with the US leader, who immediately insisted that Moscow was "serious" about peace despite the assault.

"I really believe we're, Mr. President, probably closer than – far closer than – ever before with both parties," Trump said with Zelensky at his side in the tea room of his Mar-a-Lago estate. "Everybody wants it ended," Trump said.

After their talks, Zelensky and Trump spoke jointly by telephone with key European leaders, who have been particularly alarmed about any decisions that would embolden Russia. Zelensky said that he and European leaders could return jointly for talks with Trump in Washington in January. The Ukrainian president stayed studiously polite throughout his visit, mindful of his disastrous White House meeting on February 28 where Trump and Vice President JD Vance publicly berated him for not being sufficiently grateful.

their national outreach. "Political parties strengthen the federation," he said. "If their outreach is national ... then the federation becomes strong."

The speaker said that he had constituted a "high-powered" inquiry committee to investigate the incident, which was tasked to investigate the CCTV footage of Afridi's arrival. The Speaker said that the footage depicted a breach of protocol at the gates, firstly because there was a greater-than-expected number of people accompanying the chief minister. Multiple members of the entourage were not on the assembly's list and were also unable to display proof of identity as requested, violating the security standard operating procedures, he said. According to Khan, the situation then escalated as security staff were "manhandled" after the unidentified individuals were stopped.

According to the committee's findings, he said, the unauthorised persons were those convicted in the past, including some under the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA).

"These people who are charged and convicted with having burned government buildings – instead of putting them in jail, you'll bring them into the Punjab Assembly?" he said. "This cannot be allowed under any circumstances."

Khan stressed that even the speaker of the assembly, who was thought of as all-important, was bound "by every word written in the procedure". He recalled that the PTI had violated even the sanctity of the most sacred places for Muslims in Saudi Arabia for their political agenda.

"Those who do not respect the sanctity of holy limits cannot respect democratic institutions," he said, vowing action against all responsible individuals as per the investigation report. Khan reiterated that violations had occurred not only inside the Punjab Assembly but beyond it as well, and urged all institutions to conduct thorough investigations to ensure accountability and uphold democratic norms.

NEWS DESK

BEIJING: The Chinese Communist Party has expelled nine top generals in one of its largest public crackdowns on the military in decades. Nine men were suspected of serious financial crimes, a statement released by China's defence ministry said. Most of them were three-star generals and part of the party's decision-making Central Committee. They have also been expelled from the military. While the statement cast the expulsion as part of an anti-corruption drive, analysts say it could also be seen as a political purge. It comes on the eve of the party's plenum where the Central Committee will discuss the country's economic development plan and vote in new members.

The nine officials are:

- He Weidong - Vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC)
- Miao Hua - director of the CMC's political work department
- He Hongjun - executive deputy director of the CMC's political work department
- Wang Xiubin - executive deputy director of the CMC's joint operations command centre
- Lin Xiangyang - Eastern Theatre commander
- Qin Shutong - the Army's political commissar
- Yuan Huazhi - the Navy's political commissar
- Wang Houbin - Rocket Forces commander
- Wang Chunning - Armed Police Force commander

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