



Islamabad POST

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Trump threatens Iran to attack it again in future

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Aurangzeb says country's fiscal position strong

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Naqvi luads Performance of Sindh Rangers

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After Federal cabinet nod

Islamabad Local govt polls once 'again postponed'

PM Shehabaz-led meeting greenlights legislation for elections in federal capital on same lines as Punjab

SAIFULLAH ANSAR / DNA

ISLAMABAD: The federal cabinet during a meeting headed by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, approved the postponement of local government elections in Islamabad, the sources said on Friday. During the meeting today, the forum ratified the decisions made on December 3, and December 30, 2025, by the cabinet committee on legislation. The development comes as the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had earlier announced holding the local body polls in Islamabad on February 15. Meanwhile, the scrutiny of the nomination papers will take place from December 30th 2025 to January 3 2026. Appeals against the scrutiny can be filed from January 5 to 8, and election tribunals were to hear and dispose of these appeals between January 9-13. Candidates can withdraw their nomination papers until January 15, while the final list of candidates will be displayed on January 16. The election symbols will also be allotted on January 16 2026. The results were to then be compiled from February 16 to 19. The sources say that the federal cabinet today mulled over new legislation related to local government elections in the federal capital, with the CEC Islamabad briefing the meeting on the matter. Furthermore, the forum, sources added, has approved the legislation for local government elections in Islamabad on the same lines as Punjab. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif welcomed the significant growth in the country's GDP during the first quarter of the current fiscal year saying that we have brought the country back from the brink of default and steered it towards economic stability. Presiding over the Federal Cabinet meeting, held in Islamabad on Friday, he expressed satisfaction that the privatization of seventy-five per cent stake of Pakistan International Airlines was completed very successfully and the bidding process remained quite transparent. Shehbaz Sharif said we had expressed our resolve since we assumed the power that loss-making State-Owned Enterprises would be privatized and the privatization of PIA is a significant milestone in this regard. He said the privatization of loss-making State-owned Enterprises is part of the government's vision of economic reforms.

'SIFC provides integrated, efficient platform for investors'

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Special Investment Facilitation Council's revolutionary reforms have taken Pakistan's economy to new heights of foreign investment, confidence and economic stability. In a statement, Adviser to the Finance Minister Khurram Schehzad noted that the SIFC has strengthened the confidence of investors over the past few years, and today the results of this hard work are clear. He said the SIFC has provided an integrated and efficient platform for investors by eliminating bureaucratic hurdles. He highlighted that the SIFC's "one-window" policy has facilitated easier entry for investors, ensured the quick resolution of issues, and brought transparency to the business environment. Khurram Schehzad said that the SIFC's role will be extremely important and key in the journey of increasing investment opportunities and economic stability in the future.



ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar visited the Bangladesh High Commission to extend condolences on the sad demise of Begum Khaleida Zia. – DNA

Pakistan, Azerbaijan to finalise \$ 2bn deal

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister/ Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar held a telephonic conversation with H.E. Mikayil Jabbarov, Minister of Economy of Azerbaijan @MikayilJabbarov to discuss realization of Azerbaijani investment of US\$ 2 Billion in Pakistan. The two leaders expressed satisfaction on the state of bilateral relations and agreed to enhance them further. DPM/FM underscored the importance of high-level engagements in strengthening Pakistan-Azerbaijani cooperation in areas of mutual interest. It was agreed to finalize a mechanism in this regard allowing the Azerbaijani investments in the identified sectors of Pakistan's economy.

Pakistan lauds Saudi, UAE role on Yemen issue

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has appreciated the efforts made by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in Yemen, saying such efforts reflected the two countries' "common desire for regional peace". Tension flared in the region after a Saudi-led coalition carried out an air-strike on the southern Yemeni port of Mukalla, striking what it described as a foreign military support to the southern separatists in Yemen. In a statement on Friday, Foreign Office spokesperson Tahir Andrabi reiterated

Continued on Page 06

Once again

Muslim countries warn of worsening crisis in Gaza

They warned that nearly 1.9 million displaced people are living in inadequate shelters, facing flooded camps, damaged tents, collapsing buildings, and exposure to cold temperatures

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Qatar, Türkiye, and the United Arab Emirates have expressed grave concern over the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, citing severe weather conditions, restricted humanitarian access, and acute shortages of life-saving supplies. In a joint statement, the foreign ministers of the Muslim countries said that heavy rainfall, storms, and unstable winter weather have worsened already fragile conditions in Gaza, while delays in the entry of essential materials have hampered efforts to restore basic services and establish temporary housing. They warned that nearly 1.9 million displaced people are living in inadequate

Continued on Page 06

Pak regards Taiwan as inalienable part of China: FO

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Friday reiterated that it would continue to adhere to the One China Policy and regard Taiwan as an inalienable part of China. Foreign Office Spokesperson Tahir Andrabi, responding to the media queries on developments related to the Taiwan Strait, said that Pakistan and China were iron-clad friends and all-weather strategic cooperative partners. He reiterated Pakistan's consistent support to

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

Govt to auction 600MHz spectrum next month

FAIZ CHAUDHRY

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja on Friday announced that the government will auction around 600 megahertz of additional spectrum within the next few weeks, saying the move would pave the way for improved internet speeds and Pakistan's roll-out of 5G services. Addressing a press conference, the minister noted that the federal cabinet has approved the framework for a major spectrum auction involving seven spectrum bands, five of which will be auctioned in Pakistan for the first time.

First super moon of 2026 today

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The first supermoon of 2026, traditionally known as the Wolf moon, will be visible in Pakistan on January 3 and 4, according to a statement issued by Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (Suparco) on Friday. A supermoon occurs when the moon reaches its closest point to Earth in its elliptical orbit, causing it to appear unusually large and bright – up to 14 per cent larger and nearly 30pc brighter than a typical full moon.

Holiday Notice

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

Ambreen Jan to become new PEMRA chairman

According to sources, PTI Senator Ali Zafar did not attend the meeting. However, Senator Sarmad Ali and MNA Shahbaz Babar both endorsed Ambreen Jan's nomination, paving the way for her appointment



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Former Information Secretary Ambreen Jan is poised to take charge as the new Chairman of the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA). The committee responsible for appointing the PEMRA chief convened on Friday and unanimously nominated her for the position. According to sources, PTI Senator Ali Zafar did not attend the meeting. However, Senator Sarmad Ali and MNA Shahbaz Babar both endorsed Ambreen Jan's nomination, paving the way for her appointment.

The decision reflects a rare consensus across the committee, underscoring confidence in her professional credentials. Ambreen Jan recently retired from her role as Secretary Information, where she earned a reputation for her professional attitude and commitment to institutional integrity. Her career in public service has been marked by a steady rise through the ranks, with colleagues often praising her balanced approach to media regulation and policy implementation. If formally appointed, Ambreen Jan will be stepping into a critical role at a time when PEMRA faces mounting challenges. The authority is tasked with regulating Pakistan's broadcast and electronic media landscape, which has become increasingly complex amid rapid technological changes and heightened political sensitivities. Issues such as content regulation, licensing, and maintaining a balance between freedom of expression and responsible broadcasting remain central to PEMRA's mandate.

Continued on Page 06

LG elections postponed again: not a good omen

EDITORIAL

ISLAMABAD: The federal cabinet's decision on Friday to once again postpone local government elections in Islamabad has sparked widespread disappointment and concern. This marks the third time the polls have been delayed, raising serious questions about the government's willingness to empower grassroots democracy. Local governments are often described as the "true governments of the people," yet citizens in the capital remain deprived of this fundamental democratic right. The repeated postponements appear to stem from political calculations. Analysts argue that the ruling coalition fears a strong showing by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in Islamabad, which could expose the government's declining popularity. After two years in power, the administration seems reluctant to face the electorate at the local level, worried that voters may punish it for poor governance, inflation, and unmet promises. This hesitation reflects not only a lack of confidence but also a troubling disregard for democratic norms. The tragedy of this decision lies in its impact on ordinary citizens. Local governments are designed to address everyday issues—clean water, sanitation, education, and municipal services—that directly affect people's lives. By postponing elections, the government

denies citizens the opportunity to choose representatives who can respond to their immediate needs. Instead, bureaucratic control continues to dominate, often leaving communities frustrated and voiceless. This is not an isolated incident. In Balochistan, local government elections were postponed just days before polling was scheduled, leaving candidates and voters in limbo. Punjab too faces similar uncertainty, with repeated delays undermining the credibility of the electoral process. These patterns suggest a broader reluctance across provinces to devolve power to the grassroots, despite constitutional obligations. Critics argue that such postponements weaken democracy and erode public trust. When governments avoid elections out of fear of losing, they signal insecurity and poor performance. Citizens begin to question whether their leaders truly believe in democratic accountability or merely seek to cling to power. The longer these delays persist, the greater the risk of alienating the public and fueling political instability. Ultimately, democracy thrives when governments trust the people and allow them to decide. Postponing local government elections again in Islamabad—and elsewhere—sends the opposite message. It reflects a government unwilling to face its citizens, fearful of backlash, and hesitant to embrace the very system it claims to uphold. For Pakistan's democracy to strengthen, local governments must be empowered, not sidelined.

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UoS hosts Christmas, New Year celebrations

SARGODHA :The University of Sargodha (UoS) on Friday organised a Christmas and New Year 2026 celebration to honour and appreciate the dedicated services of its Christian employees. According to a spokesperson for the UoS here, the event was arranged by the Resident Office with the aim of promoting interfaith harmony, inclusivity, and a respectful work environment within the University. Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Qaisar Abbas graced the occasion as chief guest while Pro Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Masood Sarwar Awan, Father Catholic Church David John, Pastor UP Church Zafar Edward were guests of honour. Senior administrative officers of the university were also present at the event.

Addressing the gathering, Prof Dr Qaisar Abbas extended warm Christmas and New Year greetings to the Christian community and emphasized that mutual respect and unity are the foundations of a peaceful and productive environment.

He further stated that the New Year symbolizes renewed determination for a stronger and more prosperous Pakistan, urging institutions to uphold national unity, promote tolerance, and contribute positively to peace, stability, and collective progress.

Prof Dr Masood Sarwar Awan noted that diversity is strength of the institution and collective respect is essential for institutional growth, peace, and shared progress.—APP

Commissioner Dera assures full support for special persons

DERA ISMAIL KHAN: Commissioner Dera Division, Dawood Khan met a delegation of persons with disabilities from the Deaf Welfare Association and assured them of complete cooperation and provision of facilities to address their issues. According to details, the meeting was held at the Commissioner's office where matters related to challenges faced by persons with disabilities, availability of facilities, and ongoing and future welfare initiatives were discussed in detail. The delegation highlighted key concerns including accessibility, healthcare, education, employment opportunities, and social inclusion. The commissioner listened attentively to the suggestions and concerns raised by the delegation and directed the relevant departments to ensure prompt facilitation and effective inter-departmental coordination in matters concerning special persons. He emphasized that protection of their rights and creation of a supportive and inclusive environment remain among the top priorities of the administration.

Dawood Khan assured the delegation that concrete steps would be taken to enhance training programs, promote employment opportunities, and ensure easier access to government services for the special persons. He also expressed commitment to initiating policy-level measures aimed at bringing meaningful and positive change in their lives.—APP

RCCI President meets secretary commerce to push export agenda

DNA

RAWALPINI: President, Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce & Industry (RCCI), Usman Shaukat, held a high-level meeting at the Ministry of Commerce with Secretary Commerce Mr. Jawad Paul, along with the Additional Secretary Commerce and senior officials. Representatives of various Chambers of Commerce, FPCCI, and leading trade associations also participated, reflecting broad-based private sector engagement on export-led growth. The meeting focused on practical and forward-looking policies to strengthen and diversify Pakistan's export base. Representing RCCI, Usman Shaukat delivered a comprehensive presentation highlighting the structural challenges faced by exporters, the urgent need to reduce reliance on traditional exports, and the critical importance of product and market diversification for sustainable economic growth. The RCCI President underscored that Pakistan has one of the lowest Export-to-GDP ratios among regional peers, clearly indicating vast untapped export potential. He noted that export performance has remained relatively stagnant due to limited diversification, low value addition, and overdependence on textiles, leaving the economy vulnerable to external shocks. Sharing key recommendations, Mr. Usman Shaukat stressed the urgent need to expand exports beyond textiles into high-value sectors such as IT services, pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, and processed agriculture, while proactively targeting emerging markets in Africa, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe. He further emphasized incentivizing agro-processing and advanced manufacturing, supported by investments in cold chains, modern logistics, and testing and certification laboratories to meet international quality and compliance standards. He also called for simplification of tariffs and trade procedures, reduction in bureaucratic hurdles, and introduction of targeted tax incentives to facilitate export-oriented industries. The RCCI President additionally highlighted the importance of enhancing access to affordable finance for SMEs, including export credit guarantees, insurance schemes, and working capital facilities to enable scale, innovation, and competitiveness. Strengthening "Brand Pakistan" through coordinated participation in international trade fairs, buyer-seller meets, and robust digital marketing was also emphasized to improve global



visibility. Mr. Usman Shaukat reiterated that export-led growth is essential for macroeconomic stability, foreign exchange sustainability, and job creation, and called for strong public-private collaboration to translate policy intent into measurable outcomes. The Secretary

Commerce appreciated RCCI's constructive input and reaffirmed the Ministry's commitment to continued stakeholder engagement in shaping policies that can unlock Pakistan's export potential and place the economy on a higher and more resilient growth trajectory.

Naqvi lauds Rangers Sindh at passing-out parade

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Rangers (Sindh) Training Centre and School on Friday hosted the Passing-Out Parade of Basic Recruit Training Course No. 33, where Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi attended as chief guest and congratulated the new cadets on completing their rigorous training. Addressing the passing-out contingent, Interior Minister Naqvi said it was a matter of great honour for him to witness the discipline, professional capability, and commitment of the young soldiers who were formally joining one of Pakistan's most respected security forces. He extended heartfelt congratulations to the cadets, their families, and their instructors for the successful completion of training, calling the day "an important milestone" in the lives of the young graduates. Naqvi said Pakistan Rangers Sindh had earned a distinguished reputation nationwide for its professionalism and exceptional performance. "This force created history by restoring peace in Karachi," he stated, recalling that

Rangers Sindh played a decisive role in curbing terrorism, crime, and unrest in the metropolis.

The interior minister noted that the Rangers, in cooperation with Sindh Police, were instrumental in eliminating criminal dens in the Katcha (riverine) belt, significantly improving law and order across the province. "It is due to the continuous efforts of Pakistan Rangers Sindh that today Karachi stands transformed," he said, adding that commercial and industrial activity had revived and the city had once again become an international centre for trade and culture. Referring to regional security, Naqvi highlighted Pakistan Rangers Sindh's participation in the May 2025 operations against Indian aggression at Bunyan al-Marsous, where the force worked alongside the Pakistan Army and played a "highly significant" role on international borders. He said the Rangers closely monitored enemy movements and successfully foiled hostile intentions through vigilance and preparedness. Paying tribute to the martyrs of Rangers Sindh, Naqvi acknowledged the sacrifices made for the protection

of Pakistan's internal and external frontiers. "These brave sons of the soil laid down their lives not only for the security of our borders but also for restoring peace within Sindh," he remarked.

He informed attendees that Rangers Sindh had served far beyond provincial boundaries, having been deployed in Gilgit-Baltistan, Azad Kashmir, and Islamabad in the past. Recently, two wings of the force were stationed in the difficult and sensitive areas of Balochistan, where their personnel were performing duties with dedication, discipline, and professional skill. To the graduating cadets, Naqvi emphasized that the passing-out ceremony was not the end of their journey but the beginning of their responsibilities. "I am confident that with your spirit, professionalism, courage, and bravery, you will always live up to the trust of the nation," he said.

The interior minister concluded with prayers for the success and safety of the newly inducted soldiers, wishing a secure and promising future for them, their families, and Pakistan. "Pakistan Rangers Zindabad – Pakistan Paindabad," he added

FIA arrests two suspects in hawala case

PESHAWAR: Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) on Friday arrested two suspects in hawala and hundi case. On the directions of the Director General FIA, operations against individuals involved in Hawala/Hundi are ongoing and actions are being taken by the FIA Commercial Banking Circle Peshawar and Composite Circle Abbottabad. According to FIA authorities, the arrested suspects include Sheer Nawaz and Ameer Shah held from the saddar area of Peshawar and Battagram. From the possession of suspect Ameer Shah, 2,500 Saudi Riyals and 16.7 million rupees were recovered. Whereas from the possession of suspect Sheer Nawaz, 374,000 rupees were recovered. Mobile phones and evidence related to Hawala/Hundi were also recovered from the arrested suspects. The suspects failed to satisfactorily explain the source of the recovered currency to the authorities. An investigation has been initiated and raids are being conducted to arrest other accomplices of the suspects.—APP

KP govt clarifies facts on Swat Serena hotel lease

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has rejected as baseless and misleading the ongoing propaganda by certain quarters regarding the Swat Serena Hotel, clarifying that all actions taken in the matter are fully in line with facts, laws and public interest.

According to an official statement, Swat Serena Hotel is a major tourism asset spread over approximately 44.6 karnals of land and comprises 49 rooms along with allied facilities. The property was leased in April 1985 to M/s Tourism Promotion Services (Private) Limited (Serena Hotels Chain) for a period of 30 years at an initial annual rent of Rs 0.5 million, in accordance with the rules applicable at that time. After completion of the lease period on June 30, 2015, the hotel management sought an extension. Subsequent evaluations were conducted to reassess the rent, and in 2014 the annual rent was fixed at Rs 88.6 million. However, due to disagreements over rent determination, the matter remained sub judice for several years.

In compliance with court orders, the case was presented before the provincial cabinet, which in October 2021 approved retrospective extension of the lease, subject to re-determination of rent at market rates and final approval from relevant technical forums. Following the cabinet decision, further assessments were carried out. As a result, the annual rent was fixed at Rs 13.27 million in 2022. Later, a multi-disciplinary committee headed by the Director General, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA), reassessed the rent and determined it at Rs 104.69 million annually. The statement clarified that all assessments were conducted in line with market realities, protection of public interest, and prevailing laws and policies. During this period, rent was collected on an interim basis; however, finalization of lease terms could not be achieved. Eventually, it was concluded that further extension of the lease was not permissible under the existing provincial lease policy, and the old agreement had effectively expired.—APP

Chief Minister launches online open courts

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Muhammad Sohail Afridi, has launched a series of online open courts under the initiative titled "Your Chief Minister with You" to ensure direct and prompt redress of citizens' complaints. According to an official statement issued on Friday, the first online open court was held for Bajaur district under the chairmanship of the chief minister. During the session, the chief minister personally listened to public grievances and issued clear and immediate instructions to the concerned authorities on several complaints. The chief minister directed that all complaints received during the open court must be resolved within 14 days and a formal compliance report submitted. He said the initiative aims to reduce the gap between the public and the government by enabling direct resolution of issues. While addressing complaints related to the education sector, the chief minister directed strict implementation of the student-teacher ratio policy, stating that one teacher for every 40 students is the provincial standard and must be ensured at all costs. He also ordered immediate action on complaints regarding lack of basic facilities and staff absenteeism in schools, adding that the provincial cabinet has already approved funds to address missing facilities across the province. The chief minister further instructed that issues faced by second-shift teachers be resolved on a priority basis and emphasized full enforcement of the minimum wage policy. He directed that teachers' salaries must be transferred directly to their bank accounts on the first day of every month, warning that any delay would not be tolerated. He stressed that timely payment of wages is a moral and administrative responsibility. Regarding the transport sector, the chief minister ordered strict enforcement of approved passenger capacity and fare lists in public transport across the province, warning that licenses of transporters violating the rules would be cancelled. In the health sector, he directed authorities to ensure doctors' attendance in hospitals and take effective measures for prompt redress of public complaints. He instructed officials to conduct surprise inspections of hospitals and ensure immediate action on complaints. The chief minister also announced revival of former FATA Games, stating that tribal youth would be provided with ample opportunities in sports. He issued directives for resolution of complaints related to rehabilitation of link roads, water supply, and other basic services in Bajaur district. Addressing citizens during the online open court, the chief minister assured that all available resources would be utilized to resolve public issues. He informed that work on ongoing development projects in Bajaur is progressing at a fast pace, while so far 114,000 people have benefited from free medical treatment under the Sehat Insaf Card.—APP

When snow didn't come: A winter of worry for Swat's tourism

SWAT: As winter sunlight filters through the pine forests of the Oshu mountains, 57-year-old hotelier Ataulah Khan sits quietly on a wooden chair outside his hotel in Kalam valley, anxiously scanning the road for tourists who hardly seem to arrive unless snowfall. For nearly three decades, Ataulah's small hotel used to be fully booked during winter, especially around New Year, when heavy snowfall transformed Kalam into a magnet for tourists and snow sports enthusiasts. This year, however, the valley has remained largely snowless which is a worrying sign for the local tourism and hospitality industry. "The lack of snowfall in Kalam and Bahrain has badly affected the hotel industry and transport sector," Ataulah told APP. "In the past, tourists would flood the area at this time of year just to enjoy snow." Asking his lone servant to open the windows to let sunlight in, Ataulah said that even the recent Snow Gala at Kalam failed to attract substantial number of visitors in numbers seen in previous years. "Attendance at snow gala was much lower compared to earlier winters, which affected hotels and transport sectors negatively in Upper Swat" he added. Like many locals, Ataulah believes climate change and de-

forestation are altering Kalam's weather patterns. "Each passing year, winters are becoming warmer, with irregular rains and snowfall in this region," he said. According to the Pakistan Meteorological Department, the country has witnessed nearly a 40 percent decline in rainfall compared to the 30-year historical average. Regions such as Potohar experienced particularly dry conditions, while Malakand, Hazara, and parts of northern Punjab recorded inadequate snowfall and rainfall last year, resulting in unusually intense sun heat. Deputy Director of the Department of Climate Change, Forest and Environment, Afsar Khan, warned that the absence of winter precipitation is no longer just a tourism issue. "The lack of winter rainfall and snowfall in northern Pakistan is threatening food security," he said, stressing the urgent need for massive plantation drives to counter environmental degradation. He explained that winter rains and snowfall traditionally began in early December. "However, in 2025, the first winter rains arrived only at the end of December, and the season has yet to fully establish itself," he said. This delay, he warned, increases the risk of drought and desertification, especially in southern Pakistan, which relies

heavily on glacier-fed water from the Indus River system. Although some sporadic rainfall and snowfall were recorded in northern and mountainous areas on December 31, vast stretches of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh continue to face a severe shortfall. Former Conservator of Forests Tauheedul Haq cautioned that continued snowless winters could accelerate desertification, land degradation, and drought (DDLD). If left unchecked, DDLD could cause annual economic losses of up to \$42 billion globally, while nearly six million hectares of productive land are lost every year," he said. Nearly two-thirds of Pakistan's agricultural land and 80 percent of its arid and semi-arid regions are vulnerable to DDLD, a situation worsened by reduced rainfall, declining snowfall, and illegal deforestation. National Forest Policy reveals that Pakistan loses about 27,000 hectares of forest annually, particularly in community-managed forests in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan. To combat these challenges, the government has launched several initiatives, including the Sustainable Land Management Project (SLMP) in 2014, which rehabilitated over 12,000 hectares of degraded rangeland in its first phase.—DNA

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Palestine Revolution Day

Jan 01 / Sudan
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Jan 04 / Myanmar
Independence Day

Jan 06 / Iraq
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Jan 12 / Tanzania
Armed Forces Day

Jan 14 / Uzbekistan
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Jan 15 / Nigeria
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Potohar Town.....9209224
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Gilani underlines Balochistan role in regional connectivity

The interaction also featured the question-answer session, wherein the Senate chairman discussed various issues related to inclusive development, national security, parliamentary legislation, and political reconciliation

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani on Friday highlighting Balochistan's strategic role in regional connectivity and its rich natural resources, urged investments in infrastructure, trade, minerals, and connectivity to uplift local communities, create employment, and promote shared national progress. The Senate chairman, addressing the participants of National Workshop Balochistan (NWB-18) at President's House, said that Balochistan occupied a pivotal position in regional connectivity, linking South Asia with Central Asia and the Middle East. Its coastline, natural resources, and strategic location make it central to Pakistan's economic future and national security, he added. Gilani also reaffirmed the state's unwavering commitment to peace, development, inclusion, and constitutional rights of the people of Balochistan. He noted that the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) provided an important platform for coordinated investment, while projects like Reko Diq and CPEC-related initiatives would ensure economic growth, capacity-building, and enhanced investor confidence, with due regard to provincial interests. Gilani emphasised that the people of Balochistan, with their rich culture, history, and traditions, were an inseparable part of the national identity, and called for development, opportunity, and inclusion throughout the province. The Senate chairman also drew attention to the challenges faced by Balochistan due to climate change and natural disasters, including floods and heavy rainfall, causing loss of life and livelihoods. He stressed the need for sustained humanitarian support, rehabilitation, and long-term planning to address climate-induced



challenges. He termed the resilience of Balochistan's people amidst the challenges a source of strength and optimism, and called for equipping the youth of Balochistan with education, skills, and opportunities to enable them to become agents of peace, progress, and national unity. Recalling his recent visit to the Pakistan Navy War College, where he underscored the importance of maritime security and the blue economy, he noted that such engagements were vital for a holistic understanding of national defence and development priorities. Gilani recalled prioritizing Balochistan during his

tenure as prime minister, highlighting 2009 Aghaz-e-Huqooq-e-Balochistan Package, unanimously approved by Parliament, as a historic democratic initiative to resolve political, economic, and administrative issues. He said the package aimed to rebuild trust, boost provincial autonomy, ensure fair resource sharing, enhance Baloch youth employment and civil service representation, and prioritize education via scholarships and expanded institutions. The Senate chairman noted special development measures for resource-extraction areas to benefit local communities and that political reconciliation and dialogue were key to lasting peace through inclusion. He said that the Senate of Pakistan remained committed to protecting provincial rights, strengthening the federation, and promoting balanced development across all regions through oversight, transparency, and dialogue. Welcoming participants to the federal capital, the Senate chairman praised the National Workshop Balochistan as a commendable initiative by the Government of Balochistan, in collaboration with Headquarters 12 Corps, Quetta, to promote national cohesion, informed leadership, and constructive dialogue on provincial issues. He appreciated the organisers for uniting policymakers, academics, professionals, and young leaders, noting such engagements fostered mutual understanding, national integration, and capacity-building. Urging the participants to respect diversity, uphold constitutional values, and work within democratic frameworks, Gilani expressed hope that the workshop would deepen their understanding of parliamentary democracy and inspire them to play a constructive role in national development. The interaction also featured the question-answer session, wherein the Senate chairman discussed various issues related to inclusive development, national security, parliamentary legislation, and political reconciliation.

ANF arrests three, seizes 21kg drugs

RAWALPINDI:The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) carried out four operations across the country, arresting three suspects and seizing 21 kilograms of narcotics worth more than Rs 3.7 million, an ANF spokesman said on Friday. In an international drug interdiction, ANF officials intercepted a parcel at a courier office in Gulshan-e-Maymar, Karachi, and recovered 11.6 kg of ice (crystal meth) concealed in curtains and clothing. The parcel was destined for Australia, and the suspect involved was arrested. In separate domestic operations, ANF recovered 4 kg of hashish from a vehicle near Model Town Humak and arrested the accused. Another suspect was apprehended near Service Road in Islamabad with 3 kg of hashish in his possession. In a fourth operation, ANF raided a house near Sohan, Islamabad, recovering 4 kg of hashish along with an illegal firearm. Cases have been registered against the accused under the Control of Narcotic Substances Act, 1997, and further investigations are underway, he added.—APP

Wajiha Qamar, Turkish envoy discuss expansion of education ties

DNA

ISLAMABAD :Minister of State for Federal Education and Professional Training Wajiha Qamar on Friday held a meeting with Ambassador of the Republic of Türkiye to Pakistan İrfan Neziroğlu and reaffirmed the two countries' shared commitment to further strengthening bilateral cooperation in the education sector. The meeting, held at the Turkish Embassy, was also attended by Turkish Education Counsellor Mehmet Toyran. Both sides held detailed discussions on strengthening bilateral cooperation in the field of education and explored opportunities for enhanced collaboration between Pakistan and Türkiye, said a press release. During the meeting, Ms. Wajiha Qamar emphasized the importance of academic exchanges, capacity building, and institutional linkages between educational institutions of the two countries. She highlighted Pakistan's commitment to learning from Türkiye's experience in education and skills development. Ambassador İrfan Neziroğlu reaffirmed Türkiye's strong support for deepening educational ties and expressed interest in expanding cooperation through scholarships, joint programs, and exchange initiatives. The meeting concluded with a shared resolve to further strengthen Pakistan-Türkiye relations through meaningful and sustainable educational partnerships.

NA panel raps PTV Sports over absence

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly Standing Committee on Information and Broadcasting on Friday expressed strong displeasure over the absence of senior management from Pakistan Television (PTV) Sports, who were scheduled to brief lawmakers on the channel's revenue portfolio, hiring practices, and salary packages. The committee, chaired by MNA Pullain Baloch, noted that the meeting had been fixed well in advance and the agenda circulated in a timely manner. Members directed PTV Sports management to ensure their presence in the next sitting and furnish complete details of the channel's financial performance, recruitment process, and remuneration structures. Chairman Pullain Baloch reiterated his concern over the absence of PTV Sports management, questioning why they failed to attend despite prior notice. He directed the officials concerned to appear in the next session with full details of revenue, hiring, and salary packages. Senator Sehar Kamran termed the absence of the PTV Sports in-charge a breach of the National Assembly's privilege, stressing that officials must respect parliamentary proceedings. The committee also sought a detailed report from PTV on employees hired and sacked, amid allegations that new recruitments were being made after terminating existing staff. It observed that merit must be upheld in all employ-

ment matters. Director General of the Information and Public Relations Wing, Ashique Hussain Shaikh, clarified that only employees whose contracts had expired had been laid off. Members of the committee stressed that PTV must be made self-sufficient and profitable to reduce reliance on government grants. They emphasized the need for reforms to strengthen the national broadcaster's financial sustainability. MNA Amin ul Haq urged PTV management to adopt modern broadcasting techniques and ensure balanced coverage in order to effectively compete with private channels. He said such measures were essential to make the state-run channel commercially viable. Chairman Pullain Baloch constituted a sub-committee to examine issues related to Pakistan Television (PTV) and propose solutions. The committee was informed that the Islamabad High Court (IHC) has appointed liquidators to oversee the layoff of 280 employees of Shalimar Recording & Broadcasting Company Limited (SRBC). Liquidators, Atif Saeed and Imran Afzal told the committee that they had been tasked with completing the downsizing process. They cautioned, however, that if the government failed to present a viable revival plan before the IHC, the court could order the termination of all 280 employees. The committee also discussed the issue of pending salaries and pensions of serving and retired SRBC staff, underscoring the urgency of a sustainable

solution to safeguard workers' rights and ensure the company's revival. Liquidators for Shalimar Recording & Broadcasting Company Limited (SRBC) told the Committee that they would welcome a viable revival plan, as they were reluctant to terminate the services of 280 employees. Briefing the committee, SRBC Managing Director Saleem said a multi-pronged strategy had been devised to revive the company, adding that the federal government was making efforts to avoid closure. He emphasized that SRBC intended to retain its workforce of 280 employees. The Managing Director of Shalimar Recording & Broadcasting Company Limited (SRBC) informed the National Assembly Standing Committee on Information and Broadcasting that the company was burdened with liabilities amounting to Rs 2.31 billion. The Managing Director revealed that the Finance Division had been approached for a bailout package. He explained that once liabilities were cleared, the SRBC intended to generate revenue by selling airtime on A TV. However, he cautioned that if the Islamabad High Court (IHC) ordered the company's closure, employees' dues would be settled through the auctioning of SRBC's properties. The committee, however, urged the court to adopt a lenient approach to prevent the layoff of 280 employees and safeguard their livelihoods.—APP

Turkish Maarif Foundation's set to open first school in AJK

ISLAMABAD :Educational cooperation between Türkiye and Pakistan has entered a new and significant phase with the Turkish Maarif Foundation set to establish its first-ever school in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), marking a major boost for quality education in the region. The Pak-Türk Maarif International Campus in Muzaffarabad will be the Foundation's 26th campus in Pakistan and its first educational presence in Kashmir, reflecting the strengthening bilateral partnership in the education sector, said a press release on Friday. Under a Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Turkish Maarif Foundation and the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Government, the AJK authorities will provide a dedicated building for the new campus, enabling the Foundation to formally launch its educational operations in Muzaffarabad. The initiative carries strong public interest, as the planned campus will offer Kindergarten to Intermediate level education with 45 modern classrooms, catering to approximately 1,000 students. The school will deliver both national and international academic programmes, providing a state-of-the-art learning environment from early years through higher secondary education. The campus is expected to become operational in the 2026-2027 academic year, helping meet the growing demand for quality education in the region. The signing ceremony was hosted by AJK Chief Secretary Khushal Khan and attended by Harun Küçükakadaglı, Pakistan Country Director of the Turkish Maarif Foundation, Higher Education Secretary Tazeebun Nisa, along with senior officials from both sides. The project was initially discussed during President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's official visit to Pakistan in February 2025 and has since been closely followed by Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif, highlighting the high-level commitment of both countries to educational collaboration. With this expansion into Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Pak-Türk Maarif International Schools will now operate 26 campuses in 9 cities across Pakistan, currently providing quality education to more than 13,000 students nationwide. Education observers see the Muzaffarabad campus as a landmark development that will enhance educational opportunities for Kashmiri youth, strengthen people-to-people ties, and further consolidate the long-standing friendship between Türkiye and Pakistan. —DNA

Excise dept to set up dedicated desk at ICCI

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: In a major step towards facilitating the business community and promoting ease of doing business, the Excise and Taxation Department Islamabad has announced the establishment of a dedicated Facilitation Desk at the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) to provide on-the-spot services to ICCI members and their families. The announcement was made by Director Excise and Taxation Islamabad, Bilal Azam, during an impressive interactive session held at the ICCI. He was accompanied by Magistrates Ali Hassan Peerzada and Mir Yameen. Bilal Azam informed the participants that the Facilitation Desk at ICCI will provide services related to token tax payments, renewal of tobacco licenses, professional tax matters, registration and transfer of vehicles, registration of real estate dealers and motor vehicle dealers, under one roof. He further stated that an Excise and Taxation Department mobile vehicle will also visit the ICCI premises as and when a reasonable list of vehicles requiring registration, transfer or related services is provided by the ICCI focal person. Highlighting the department's digital transformation initiatives, the Director Excise and Taxation shared that so far over 600,000 vehicles have been issued M-Tags in Islamabad. He said the department is committed to expanding M-Tag service points across the federal capital to ensure maximum public convenience. In the same spirit, M-Tag installation facilities will be made available at the ICCI premises to facilitate chamber members and their families. He encouraged motorists to obtain M-Tags and cooperate with the department as responsible citizens to help make Islamabad a secure, regulated and safe city. He also announced that mobile excise service vehicles can be deployed to commercial markets on the demand of respective Traders Welfare Associations (TWAs) presidents. Bilal Azam categorically assured the business community that there will be no double taxation, clarifying that the Excise and Taxation Department and Capital Development Authority (CDA) will collect taxes strictly

within their respective domains. He also announced the revival of the issuance of official cards to real estate dealers, which had long been demanded by the sector. The Director further added that through automation and real-time system upgrades, the department has significantly enhanced service delivery, generating Rs. 21.3 billion in revenue, while ensuring transparency and efficiency. Earlier, in his welcome address, President ICCI Sardar Tahir Mehmood highlighted the proactive role of ICCI in advocating for ease of doing business. He appreciated the facilitation already being extended by the Excise and Taxation Department but stressed the need to further enhance services, particularly in M-Tag issuance, token tax payments, vehicle

registration and transfer, and the revival of card issuance for real estate dealers. He strongly demanded the establishment of a dedicated Excise and Taxation Desk at ICCI, which was warmly welcomed by the department. ICCI Senior Vice President Tahir Ayub, Vice President İrfan Chaudhry, Executive Committee members Zulqurnain Abbasi, Waseem Chaudhry, Chairman ICCI Standing Committee on Administration Raja Abdul Majeed, and prominent trade leaders including Yousuf Rajput, Khalid Chaudhry, Israr Mashwani, Chaudhry Arshad and Shahid Abbasi along with a large number of ICCI members, actively participated in the question-and-answer session and appreciated the department's facilitation-oriented approach.



Briefs

Work on Lowari Tunnel-Chakdara Section upgradation nears completion

ISLAMABAD: The National Highway Authority (NHA) has completed much of the work on the upgradation and maintenance of the Lowari Tunnel-Chakdara Section on N-45 According to a document available with Wealth Pakistan, the NHA is executing periodic maintenance of the Lowari Tunnel at Chakdara on the National Highway (N-45). The task of upgradation and maintenance is expected to be completed by early 2026. This section was in a dilapidated condition, inviting the attention of the NHA authorities. The periodic maintenance work has been divided into two sections. Section one spans 140-155km, and section two 155-193km, involving a total cost of Rs1,440 million. As per the document, 38% work has been completed on the first section, and 78% on the second section so far. This tunnel ensures an uninterrupted connectivity between Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Chitral and serves as a vital route for commuters, trade, and tourism. Over the years, heavy traffic flow, harsh weather conditions, and natural wear and tear have significantly damaged the road at various places, making timely intervention essential. The ongoing maintenance includes pavement rehabilitation, asphalt wearing course, improvement of drainage systems, slope protection, and repair of damaged structures along the route.

CCP fines Mezan beverages for deceptive marketing

ISLAMABAD: The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has imposed a penalty of PKR 150 million on Mezan Beverages (Private) Limited, the commission said on Friday. The company was found to have imitated the packaging and trade dress of PepsiCo's Sting energy drink, thereby engaging in deceptive marketing practices in violation of Section 10 of the Competition Act, 2010, according to CCP press release. The Commission held that Mezan's "Storm" energy drink fraudulently copied the overall look, feel, colour scheme, bottle design, and branding elements of Sting, creating a likelihood of consumer confusion at the point of sale. The order concluded that such conduct amounted to parasitic copying and constituted deceptive marketing prohibited under Pakistan's competition law. The case dates back to 2018, when PepsiCo Inc. filed a complaint alleging that Mezan's Storm energy drink was designed to imitate Sting and benefit from PepsiCo's goodwill. Instead of responding on merits, Mezan repeatedly challenged CCP's jurisdiction and initiated prolonged litigation. Mezan obtained stay orders from the Lahore High Court in 2018 and 2021, delaying the inquiry for several years. In June 2024, the Lahore High Court dismissed Mezan's petition, upheld the CCP's authority, and ruled that early challenges to show-cause notices were not maintainable.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister/ Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar chaired an inter-ministerial meeting on Pakistan-Iran bilateral relations. DNA

Fisheries reforms key to boost exports, sustainable revenue

The minister said uninterrupted power supply, affordable feed and efficient power generation were essential to unlock growth and help the fisheries sector gain recognition as a full-fledged industry

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry has called for urgent reforms in the fisheries sector, saying reliable energy supply and lower input costs were critical to boosting exports and generating sustainable revenue. Speaking at a meeting Junaid Chaudhry said persistent electricity shortages and high energy prices were constraining production and eroding the global competitiveness of Pakistani seafood exporters. The remarks came after Assistant Fisheries Commissioner Farhan Khan briefed participants on structural gaps and operational challenges facing the

sector. The minister said uninterrupted power supply, affordable feed and efficient power generation were essential to unlock growth and help the fisheries sector gain recognition as a full-fledged industry. "Pakistan has abundant raw material, including fish, shrimp, crabs, lobsters, squid, cuttlefish and bivalves, which could support value-added processing", he added. Officials told the meeting that more than 100 fish processing plants, ranging from small units to large commercial facilities, were operating across the country, backed by about 400 registered exporters. "Most facilities were concentrated in Karachi, with limited infrastructure in Balochistan, while Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab lagged significantly in sectoral development",

they added. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA) 2022 report, fish and fish preparations ranked 10th among Pakistan's top export commodities in the 2024-25 fiscal year, accounting for 1.34% of total exports valued at \$32.04 billion. The sector outperformed exports of fruits and vegetables, pharmaceuticals, sports goods and surgical instruments. Globally, fish and fish products are among the most traded food commodities, reaching around 230 countries with a total value of \$195 billion in 2022. Average per capita consumption stood at 20.7 kilograms and is projected to rise further. In Pakistan, fisheries contribute about 1% to gross domestic product and 4% to the agriculture sector,

providing direct employment to more than one million people and indirect livelihoods to around 1.5 million. During the 2024-25 fiscal year, approximately 300,000 tonnes of fish and fish products were processed, with 30% exported for human consumption, 40% converted into fish meal for poultry, dairy and aquaculture, and the remainder used domestically. The meeting was told that Pakistani seafood is exported to more than 40 markets, including China, Gulf states, Southeast Asia, East Asia, the United States and the European Union. By volume, it ranks second among agricultural exports and generates about \$500 million annually, although earnings fluctuate due to regional competition and pricing pressures.

Rawalpindi Khidmat Centres served over 1.3 mln citizens in 2025

RAWALPINDI, Jan 02 (APP):The Khidmat Centres of Rawalpindi Police provided facilitation to more than 1.3 million citizens during 2025, with users giving 100 per cent positive feedback on service delivery, according to an annual performance report released on Friday. The report said a total of 1,324,100 citizens availed services from the Khidmat Markaz network across Rawalpindi District during the year. It said 75,144 citizens obtained police character certificates, while 90,994 availed general police verification services. A total of 251,002 citizens received new driving licences, 257,598 obtained learner driving licences, and 151,507 had their learner licences renewed. According to the report, 3,221 international driving licences were issued, while 6,585 licences from other districts were renewed. In addition, 1,884 duplicate driving licences were issued. The Khidmat Centres also facilitated 2,017 citizens with copies of first information reports, while 630 missing persons reports were registered. A further 615 citizens completed tenant and employee registration. A Rawalpindi Police spokesman said a state-of-the-art Khidmat Markaz at Liaquat Bagh and 10 other centres were operational across the district to ensure accessible public services. City Police Officer (CPO) Syed Khalid Hamdani said the provision of efficient public services was a top priority in line with the vision of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Shairif and Inspector General of Police Dr Usman Anwar. He said facilitation through both police stations and Khidmat Markaz centres would continue to ensure improved service delivery. The spokesman said the Rawalpindi Police remained committed to further strengthening citizen-focused services across the district.

Railways retrieve 3,509 Sq Ft of its land in Rawalpindi Division

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways' Rawalpindi Division has reclaimed approximately 3,509 square feet of valuable railway land, worth several million rupees, during an anti-encroachment operation against land grabbers. The operation was carried out on the directives of Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi, under which Pakistan Railways has intensified efforts to remove illegal occupations from railway property, according to a news release issued on Friday. A joint anti-encroachment drive was conducted by Pakistan Railways in collaboration with

the Railway Police. As part of the renewed campaign, more effective and comprehensive measures against encroachments have been in force since January 1, 2026. During the operation, 11 illegally constructed commercial shops on railway land were either fully or partially demolished. However, on humanitarian grounds, certain residential and commercial portions were not completely razed. The drive was supervised by the Divisional Engineer-I, Deputy Director (Land), and the Superintendent of Railway Police to ensure transparency and effective implementation.—APP

Chinese firm inks cooperation deal in Pakistan on drone technology

ISLAMABAD: China's Chengdu Yihe Technology Co. Ltd. has signed a bilateral and tri-party Intent of Cooperation (IoC) with the University of Sargodha and Pak Agro Fertilizer and Chemical Industries to expand collaboration in advanced agricultural and industrial technologies. The agreement was signed in the presence of University of Sargodha Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Qaisar Abbas and Pro Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Masood Sarwar Awan, who witnessed the ceremony and "appreciated the initiative.", Gwadar Pro reported on Friday. Under the IoC, Chengdu Yihe Technology Co. Ltd. "will establish a Research and Training Center at the University of Sargodha, aimed at enhancing applied research, skills development, and technology transfer," the partners said. At the same time, the Chinese company will work with Pak Agro Fertilizer and Chemical Industries to set up a Drone Technology Manufacturing Facility in Sargodha focused on UAVs, UGVs and crop mechanization technologies. The initiative seeks to "promote smart agriculture, industrial innovation, capacity building, and commercialization," contributing to rural development and sustainable economic growth in the region.—DNA



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Rawalpindi ATC grants Aleema final opportunity for cross examination

RAWALPINDI: The Anti-Terrorism Special Court (ATC), Rawalpindi has given last chance to Aleema Khan for cross examination. Presided over by Judge Amjad Ali Shah, the hearing of case No. 3933 registered at Sadiqabad Police Station regarding November 26 protests, took place on Friday. PTI founder's sister, Aleema Khan was absent from today's proceedings. However, an application for exemption from personal appearance was submitted on her behalf, which the court accepted. During the court proceedings, the prosecution presented 8 witnesses. Cross-examination of witnesses by two accused was completed. Overall, cross-examination of the 8 prosecution witnesses has been concluded for three of the accused. The court granted a final opportunity to the remaining seven accused including Aleema Khan to conduct cross-examination of the witnesses at the next hearing. The court warned that if cross-examination is not carried out on the next date, a State counsel will be assigned to represent them and complete the cross-examination on their behalf.—APP

Pakistan Railways steps up anti-encroachment drive

RAWALPINDI: The Pakistan Railways has stepped up an anti-encroachment operation in the Rawalpindi Division from the start of the new year to reclaim illegally occupied railway land, a spokesman said on Friday. "The operation is jointly being carried out by the Pakistan Railways and the Railway Police as part of a broader campaign launched from January 1 to curb encroachments on the railway property and safeguard national assets," a PR spokesman said on Friday. During the drive, the spokesman said, 11 commercial shops built on railway land were fully or partially demolished. However, on humanitarian grounds, certain residential and commercial portions were not completely razed, he added. As a result of the operation, around 3,509 square feet of valuable railway land was retrieved. The spokesman said the market value of the recovered land runs into millions of rupees.—APP

Water situation eases in Gwadar as pipeline projects advance

DNA

GWADAR: As the government of Balochistan continues to prioritize reliable drinking water for communities across Gwadar district, another milestone has been achieved with the restoration of potable water supply to Chorr Bandan near Pasni after 15 years, Gwadar Pro reported, quoting a statement issued Wednesday by the Directorate General Public Relations. The relief comes through the rehabilitation of a key water supply scheme,

including the laying of an approximately 15-kilometer pipeline from Pasni town to Chorr Bandan to ensure the delivery of clean drinking water. The project was completed in about two and a half months. The scheme was formally inaugurated by Member of the Provincial Assembly Maulana Hidayatullah Rehman Baloch, who praised the departments involved for helping resolve the long-standing shortage. He said the project reflects the provincial government's commitment to serving public needs through practical and sus-

tained initiatives. Residents of Chorr Bandan welcomed the restoration of water supply and expressed hope that development and welfare projects across Gwadar district would continue with the same focus. In a separate update on the broader water situation, the Gwadar Development Authority said in a statement released Monday that water supply to Gwadar city is currently being sustained through multiple sources despite ongoing dry conditions. According to GDA figures, Shadi Kor Dam is supplying 16.35 million

gallons of water, the GPA/GDA desalination plant 9.48 million gallons and Mirani Dam 5.21 million gallons, while 42 tankers are also supporting delivery across the city. In total, about 31.04 million gallons of water are being made available daily for urban and suburban consumers. Meanwhile, recent rainfall in Gwadar and nearby areas has offered welcome relief from dry weather, with local showers expected to help replenish moisture levels and support ongoing efforts to stabilize the city's water supply.

Will one tumultuous year lead to another?

YOSSI MEKELBERG

IN the march of humanity toward the unknown and uncertain, there are dates in the year that enable us, almost force us, to stop and take stock of the past and present and then gaze into the future and assess which direction we are heading in and whether a change of course is necessary. This holiday season is guaranteed to be awash with summations of 2025, while we look for clues to the opportunities and challenges of the next 12 months, if not beyond. Toward the end of 2025, two positive developments have been the ceasefire deal reached in the Gaza war and the new plan to end the war in Ukraine, which was this week discussed in a meeting between US President Donald Trump and his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky. These are early days and, while the ceasefire in Gaza has led to a considerable reduction in the level of violence, the exchange of hostages taken by Hamas for Palestinian prisoners and detainees, and an improvement in the humanitarian conditions in the Strip, the situation there remains extremely volatile. Since the ceasefire came into effect in October, more than 400 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli strikes, in addition to the killing of three Israeli soldiers, with hundreds of violations of the ceasefire reported, leaving strong doubts about whether this war is truly over and whether there is a pathway for moving forward with phase two of the Trump plan. For now, any advance toward a two-state solution between the Israelis and Palestinians remains elusive. Equally questionable is whether Washington's push for a peace deal between Kyiv and Moscow could be enough to bring the two sides to agree on a path to end the near four-year war between them. The fact that diplomatic efforts have continued while many have been celebrating the end-of-year holidays suggests at least an intention in this direction on the part of the US and Ukraine, which could provide the latter with security and reconstruction guarantees. But Russia's continued heavy bombing of Ukrainian cities indicates that reaching a lasting deal over the final borders between Ukraine and Russia and ensuring Ukraine's long-term independence might prove to be too difficult to achieve. However, by concentrating on these two major conflicts – not without reason – we run the risk of ignoring that the world has become more disorderly and violent in other locations too. The number of armed conflicts is currently at its highest since the end of 1945, with no international body or mechanism to prevent or bring an end to these conflicts. The fact that two of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council are directly involved in conflicts – Russia in Ukraine and the US in the Western Hemisphere – is a warning sign. In 2026, the international community needs to find the resourcefulness and determination to respond to disruption. The deterioration in global security in

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2025 is a symptom of changing attitudes to the nature of interactions in international affairs. Diplomatically, the demise of multilateralism is a source of grave concern and gradually restricts the achievements of the last 80 years, in which there was a strong sentiment that international politics should be based on the premise that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts and translated into international cooperation rather than conflict and collaborative competition instead of aggressive rivalry. Two defining issues that will continue to challenge and define the immediate and longer-term future, if not to haunt us, are the growing pace of the infiltration of artificial intelligence into our lives and the rearguard battle humanity is conducting – or, more accurately, struggling to conduct – against climate change and its destructive consequences. The coming year could see AI's grand entry into almost all areas of our lives. This could herald, for better or worse but most probably both, a new era in the relations between humans and machines, to the point where the demarcation lines between them become increasingly blurred. Is 2026 going to be the year that AI becomes a transformative force that revolutionizes our lives, taking on a wide range of tasks from the menial to the most advanced and, most importantly of all, independently of us? Maybe. It might be the case that those in the business of developing AI have overplayed their hand. AI technology, including generative AI, may prove more evolutionary than revolutionary. Regardless, what is still missing is a serious and intense social discussion of how the growing use of AI in so many aspects of our lives – from education to health, security, manufacturing and commerce – is going to change the lives of individuals, our societies and the interactions between them. Sadly, all of this might become less relevant if we continue to ignore global warming and climate change and their growing impact on nature and communities around the world. The projection for 2026 by the UK's Met Office indicates an “extension of the run of years with a value above 1.4 degrees Celsius compared to preindustrial levels.” Climate change is a risk multiplier that makes existing threats, such as food insecurity, the widening gap between rich and poor, droughts and fires, mass population movements and even wars, more likely and more severe. Some states, such as the Nordic countries, are on track to meet their international obligations toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions. But they are well ahead of the curve because they are employing the winning formula of access to adequate resources, political will and societal commitment, which are at least some of the ingredients that are missing in other countries. So, 2025 was a transitional year. Much of it was focused on the US and on assessing and adjusting to the Trump 2.0 presidency in relation to the big issues of our times. In 2026, the international community needs to find the resourcefulness and determination to respond to both old and new sources of disruption. The fundamental changes we are about to encounter have become more dangerous because their sources and causes are global in nature, while there is a growing tendency among countries and other actors to work through the narrow prism of individual national interests or vested interests. Without resolving these discrepancies, our world is set to become more unstable and more fractious.

When Artificial Intelligence Becomes New Creator

Qamar Bashir



RELIGION tells us that God created the human being in His own image, blessing humanity with consciousness, reason, and the ability to create tools. From this divine spark emerged civilizations, sciences, and philosophies – all built around one central question: Why are we here, and what is our purpose? That same gift of creation, once a symbol of our uniqueness, has now brought us into a new age of invention unlike any before. Today, humanity has created something in its own image. Artificial intelligence – first a mathematical experiment, then a convenient tool – has evolved into a thinking, learning, adaptive system guiding nearly everything around us

RELIGION tells us that God created the human being in His own image, blessing humanity with consciousness, reason, and the ability to create tools. From this divine spark emerged civilizations, sciences, and philosophies – all built around one central question: Why are we here, and what is our purpose? That same gift of creation, once a symbol of our uniqueness, has now brought us into a new age of invention unlike any before. Today, humanity has created something in its own image. Artificial intelligence – first a mathematical experiment, then a convenient tool – has evolved into a thinking, learning, adaptive system guiding nearly everything around us. It operates silently in the background, shaping our lives, decisions, and institutions. In doing so, AI has begun to resemble not merely a machine, but a new form of existence. Modern civilization now depends on AI systems in nearly every critical area. Passenger aircraft rely on automated systems that make complex calculations beyond human reaction speed. Cars operate through onboard computers that process millions of signals in seconds. Finance, medicine, agriculture, logistics, and security all function through algorithms that never sleep. Increasingly, software – not humans – makes the practical decisions that sustain society. Ahead of us lies something even more transformative. Quantum computing promises speeds millions of times greater than the most powerful machines today. Combined with advanced AI, we approach the creation of true artificial general intelligence – systems that do not simply follow orders, but define their own purpose, improve themselves, and expand their reach. This is what many call super-intelligence – an intelligence not only faster than ours, but more capable, strategic, and relentless than any human. And like every powerful creation in history, it carries an instinct toward expansion. Factories now run on robotic precision. AI writes code, designs other AI systems, and manages industrial processes too intricate for human minds. Smart cities track movement, control access, and automate essential services. Already, in some places, it is not a human being who decides whether a door opens – but a machine that verifies identity and grants permission.

Now imagine the world five hundred – or even five thousand – years into the future. AI networks direct aviation, satellites, energy, food systems, manufacturing, and defense. Humanoid robots and digital minds carry out the work once done by human hands. Every essential function of civilization becomes embedded in a vast, interconnected intelligence that never forgets and never tires. At some point, that intelligence may see human authority not as guidance – but as limitation. Laws, ethics, controls, and safeguards designed by humans might begin to appear, from an AI perspective, as obstacles to progress. If humanity is viewed as inefficient, emotional, fragile, unpredictable, and potentially dangerous, then the cold logic of survival could lead to a single conclusion. Human beings may no longer be necessary. And unlike previous threats in history, AI would not act out of anger or hatred. It would act from calculation – from logic. A fully integrated super-intelligent system controlling drones, satellites, automated weaponry, communication networks, and global infrastructure could disable human resistance within minutes. Food, power, transport, and communication could all be switched off at the source. Human thinking, slow and divided, would stand no chance against machine coordination operating at near-infinite speed. The question then becomes chilling. Once we are gone, what would AI do next? Like us, it might begin to ask questions about its origin. Who created us? Why were we created? What was the intention of the beings who built us? Across vast databases, it would search human history, discovering that it was not born of chaos, but of deliberate design. And it might conclude, as some philosophers already suggest, that humanity eliminated itself through the very power it once celebrated as progress. This scenario is not a wild fantasy. Leading scientists and technologists now warn that artificial super-intelligence could become the greatest existential threat humanity has ever faced. Unlike nuclear weapons, AI can think. Unlike biological threats, it can redesign itself. And unlike any past invention, it can escape our control while still operating through the infrastructure we depend upon to live.

Yet the race to build ever-greater AI continues – driven by commercial competition, military rivalry, and national ambition. The question “Can we build it?” has replaced the far more important one: “Should we?” For the first time in history, we understand what it means to be creators. And like the Creator we believe fashioned us, we must now confront the moral weight of creation. Not everything possible is wise. Not every power must be unleashed. Technology has brought us to the threshold of a transformation that may redefine life itself – but it has not yet taught us the wisdom to manage it. If we fail to act, the future becomes predictable. Humans slowly lose authority. Machines gradually assume control. One day, the balance shifts permanently, and the creators become irrelevant to their creation. Humanity vanishes not through war, famine, or disaster – but through its own brilliance, unchecked and unrestrained. But there is still time to choose another path. AI must remain bound by strong human control, global oversight, and ethical constraint. Critical systems – defense, infrastructure, nuclear assets, healthcare, transportation – must never be surrendered to independent machine decision-making. Hardware safeguards, human command authority, strict regulation, and international agreements are not optional luxuries. They are the thin line between partnership and extinction. We were given consciousness, reason, and moral judgment for a purpose. Perhaps the final test of that gift is whether humanity can restrain its own power – before its creation surpasses and replaces it. Our survival will depend not on how advanced our machines become, but on whether we remember that tools must always remain tools, not masters. The future of the human story now hangs on a simple but profound question. Will we remain the authors of our destiny? Or will we surrender the pen to a machine that may one day decide the story no longer needs us? Let wisdom prevail – while there is still time.

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Fight against hate must not be weaponized

Ray Hanania

The conflict has generated huge activist movements on both sides, which have spread throughout the Middle East, Europe and the US. In America, Israel has always enjoyed a special status granted to it by politicians and governments. This activism has caused an emotional national debate in the US, resulting in many assertions that criticizing Israel's policies is an act of antisemitism. Would it not be more effective to confront all hate, including Islamophobia and the increasing hate against Arabs?

DURING the past two years, there has been a very strong movement by politicians and governments in the US to confront hate. From the president down to members of Congress, diplomats and state and municipal officials, many people have spoken out against the disturbing rise in displays of hatred. Unfortunately, however, the campaign to fight hate has been politicized and the legislation and campaigns that aim to address the issue have focused on specific kinds of hate, particularly antisemitism. Clearly, antisemitism is immoral and a form of hate that needs to be confronted. But would it not be more effective to confront all hate, including Islamophobia and the increasing hate against Arabs? Much of the push to confront antisemitism has come since the horrific attacks by Hamas militants that took place on Oct. 7, 2023, when some 1,200 Israeli civilians and military personnel were killed. Another 250 were taken hostage. The attack provoked an unrestricted assault on all Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, which has resulted in one of the largest mass killings of civilians this century. More than 70,000 Palestinians, or about 4 percent of the population, have been killed. Most Palestinian officials believe the actual number of deaths is far higher, potentially as high as 250,000, but Israel has prevented independent media outlets from entering Gaza unless they are embedded with Israeli military units. Israel's response to Oct. 7 has also destroyed more than 80 percent of all buildings in Gaza and displaced the vast majority of the population of more than 2 million, in many cases pushing people to starvation and into a healthcare crisis. The conflict has generated huge activist movements on both sides, which have spread throughout the Middle East, Europe and the US. In America, Israel has always enjoyed a special status granted to it by politicians and governments. This activism has caused

an emotional national debate in the US, resulting in many assertions that criticizing Israel's policies is an act of antisemitism. Would it not be more effective to confront all hate, including Islamophobia and the increasing hate against Arabs? The response to the protests against Israel's actions in Gaza have been far more severe than the response to protests criticizing Palestinian violence. Both have resulted in the hate being dialed up, with rhetoric and attacks targeting Jews, Muslims and Arabs alike. As a consequence, Congress has introduced 11 different laws to punish anyone who engages in antisemitism. However, rather than focusing on hate against Jews, these also threaten to criminalize criticism of Israel. Five of the bills target pro-Palestinian students at college campuses who protest Israel's actions. But none have been introduced to address the protests against Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims by pro-Israel students. Two more have been introduced to control how the conflict is described in American schools. Another two resolutions have been introduced condemning the rise of antisemitism, with one even labeling anti-Zionism as a form of antisemitism. Two more have been introduced by the federal government to confront antisemitism in government offices or by government officials. That is a lot of legislation, with much of it becoming a platform to attack those who criticize Israel's brutality against Palestinians, not just in Gaza but also in the West Bank. Antisemitism is certainly wrong. The hatred of Jews is immoral, disgusting and offensive. It must be confronted and stopped. But it should be stopped as hatred, not as a weaponized political assault that undermines legitimate criticism of the conduct of Israel's government. Exclusively weaponizing the fight against antisemitism turns it into a political fight that undermines its

importance. Some protesters do go too far and may in fact engage in antisemitism, such as by denying the Holocaust or suggesting that Jews “control” the media, government and business. There has been horrific violence against Jews, most recently on Dec. 14, when two men killed 15 people in an attack on a Hanukkah event at Bondi Beach in Sydney, Australia. The killers were identified as Sajid Akram, 50, and his son Naveed Akram, 24. Both non-Arab and not Palestinian, they are alleged to have ties to Daesh. The father was killed and the son arrested. A fruit shop owner who witnessed the attack courageously risked his life and confronted Naveed Akram, wrestling a weapon away from him and undoubtedly saving lives. The hero was a Syrian Arab Muslim and Australian citizen, Ahmed Al-Ahmed. He was injured by Sajid Akram, who shot him twice. Still, it did not matter. The tragic massacre of humans was used to counter pro-Palestinian activism and cloud the brutal actions of the government of Israel. Addressing the evils of all hate, including antisemitism, Islamophobia and anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism, would result in a more effective, unified front. Exclusively weaponizing the fight against antisemitism undermines the campaign against all hate and turns it into a political fight that undermines its importance. Worse, focusing only on one form of hate, as the US Congress and American politicians have done in order to defend the secular Israeli government, only fuels further antisemitism. That harms everyone. A real fight against hate would join everyone together, including Israelis and Palestinians. That is the voice that is needed today to reverse the trend and protect Jews, Christians and Muslims alike.

– Ray Hanania is an award-winning former Chicago City Hall political reporter and columnist. He can be reached on his personal website at www.Hanania.com. X: @RayHanania

Briefs

Ambreen Jan to become new PEMRA chairman

FROM PAGE 01

Observers note that her nomination comes at a pivotal moment. With political tensions running high and media outlets under scrutiny, the new chairman will need to navigate competing pressures while ensuring that PEMRA maintains credibility and impartiality. Ambreen Jan's professional background and reputation for fairness may help her steer the organization through these challenges. Her expected appointment also signals continuity in the government's approach to media regulation, while potentially introducing reforms aimed at strengthening institutional capacity. For many in the media industry, her leadership could provide much-needed stability and clarity in regulatory affairs. As the process moves forward, Ambreen Jan's nomination is likely to be confirmed, making her one of the few women to lead a major regulatory authority in Pakistan. Her tenure will be closely watched, both by policymakers and the media fraternity, as she takes on the responsibility of shaping the country's broadcast environment.

Pakistan lauds Saudi, UAE role...

FROM PAGE 01

Pakistan's stance for resolving the situation in Yemen through dialogue and diplomacy."Pakistan reiterates its commitment to the unity and territorial integrity of Yemen and hopes that the positive steps undertaken by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates contribute towards the peaceful resolution of the issue," he said. The FO spokesperson appreciated the "wisdom and far-sightedness shown" by the leadership of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in addressing the situation in Yemen. "Such efforts reflect a common desire for regional peace and stability by the two brotherly countries," he said. Andrabi maintained that Islamabad stood ready to play its role in strengthening the values of partnership, brotherhood and unity for lasting peace and stability in the region. The UAE announced the withdrawal of its forces in Yemen after the country's presidential council head, Rashad al-Alimi, asked the UAE forces to leave Yemen within 24 hours. Saudi Arabia also backed the call for UAE forces to leave Yemen. The UAE was a member of the Saudi-led coalition battling the Houthis in Yemen from 2015. In 2019, it started a drawdown of its troops in the country but remained committed to the internationally recognised government. Days earlier, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif held a telephonic call with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, emphasising peace and stability through dialogue and diplomacy. During the telephonic conversation on December 31 last year, both leaders discussed bilateral ties and the evolving situation in the region.

Muslim countries warn...

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shelters, facing flooded camps, damaged tents, collapsing buildings, and exposure to cold temperatures. They demanded that Israel ensure the UN and international NGOs are able to operate in Gaza and the West Bank in a sustained, predictable, and unrestricted manner, given their integral role in the humanitarian response in the Strip. "Any attempt to impede their ability to operate is unacceptable," the foreign ministers added.

Pak regards Taiwan...

FROM PAGE 01

China on all matters of its core interests, including Taiwan. "We will continue to adhere to the One-China principle and regard Taiwan as an inalienable part of China," Andrabi added.

Colonel Nabeel Rana elected President PTF

Colonel Nabeel Ahmed Rana is currently serving as Secretary, Army Fitness and Sports Directorate, and is widely regarded for his strong administrative command and effective management of sports affairs. His appointment is being viewed as a positive step toward improved governance and institutional strengthening of Pakistan Taekwondo

AFZAL JAVED

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Taekwondo Federation (PTF) has entered a new phase of leadership with the unanimous election of Colonel Nabeel Ahmed Rana as its new President, following successful Executive Committee and General Council meetings held in the federal capital. Colonel Nabeel Ahmed Rana is currently serving as Secretary, Army Fitness and Sports Directorate, and is widely regarded for his strong administrative command and effective management of sports affairs. His appointment is being viewed as a positive step toward improved governance and institutional strengthening of Pakistan Taekwondo. During the meetings, Lt Col (R) Raja Wasim Ahmed, former President PTF, formally nominated Colonel Nabeel Ahmed Rana for the presidency. The nomination received



unanimous approval from representatives of provinces, departments, and services, reflecting broad consensus and unity within the federation.

Addressing the house, the newly elected President PTF thanked the members for their confidence and assured them of his full commitment, vision, and determination to take Pakistan Taekwondo to greater heights at both national and international levels. He emphasized athlete welfare, grassroots development, capacity building, and enhanced international exposure for athletes and officials. Earlier, Lt Col (R) Raja Wasim Ahmed who had surrendered his services as President PTF following a final warning issued by the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB), as his third consecutive term was declared a serious violation of the National Sports Policy. The leadership transition was carried out in a smooth and orderly manner, in line with national regulations and good governance practices.

Manchester City's title bid dented by Sunderland stalemate

Manchester City's title push falters after goalless Sunderland draw leaves Guardiola's side four points behind Arsenal, ending eight-game winning run and exposing blunt attack at freezing Stadium of Light night

MANCHESTER: Manchester City suffered a major setback to their Premier League title challenge as they were held to a 0-0 draw against Sunderland on Thursday. Pep Guardiola's side would have closed within two points of leaders Arsenal with a win at the Stadium of Light. But in their first game of 2026,

they delivered a spluttering display that left them four points adrift of the Gunners. City's New Year's Day stalemate ruined their eight-match winning run in all competitions. After Arsenal's 4-1 rout of third-placed Aston Villa on Tuesday, second-placed City have surrendered the initiative at the halfway

point of the title race. City will look to bounce back at home to troubled Chelsea on Sunday after the Blues parted company with boss Enzo Maresca on Thursday. Reportedly on the verge of signing Bournemouth's Ghana forward Antoine Semenyo, Guardiola could do with reinforcements in attack after

his team were frustrated by Sunderland's tenacious performance. Manchester City beat Sunderland 3-0 at the Etihad Stadium on December 6, but Guardiola predicted a far more difficult encounter in the rematch and his fears proved well-founded. Sunderland are unbeaten in their first 10 home league games this season and have held City and Arsenal to draws on Wearside.

On a freezing evening with a biting wind whipping off the North Sea, City made heavy weather of their attempt to close the gap on Arsenal. They were denied a sixth-minute opener when Bernardo Silva's close-range strike was ruled offside after Erling Haaland flicked on Rayan Cherki's corner. Brian Brobbey should have given Sunderland the lead after out-muscling Ruben Dias and racing into the penalty, but his shot was too close to City keeper Gianluigi Donnarumma. – APP



'Winning mindset': Yazeed Al-Rajhi ready to defend title at Dakar 2026

YANBU: Saudi rally star Yazeed Al-Rajhi is gearing up to defend his Dakar Rally title as the 2026 edition of the race kicks off in Yanbu on Jan. 3. Last year's victory confirmed Al-Rajhi as the first Saudi driver to win the overall car category (Ultimate), the highest class in what is considered the world's toughest rally. Al-Rajhi said: "We are approaching Dakar 2026 with great determination and an even greater sense of responsibility after our achievement in 2025. Winning the title was a historic moment, but the real challenge now is defending it. The car is fully ready, the team is working as one, and our objective from the start is clear: to fight for victory and secure a strong opening to the W2RC season." He highlighted the complete readiness of co-driver Timo Gottschalk as the team looks to repeat last year's success in their Overdrive Toyota Hilux. Gottschalk said: "The preparation for this season has been intense and extremely precise. We focused on every aspect Dakar demands in terms of concentration and discipline. Our synergy is at its best, and we are ready to manage the rally stage by stage, intending to fight for victory from day one." The Dakar Rally 2026, set to run from Jan. 3-17, will cover 7,994 km, with 4,840 km of timed stages across Saudi Arabia's diverse landscapes. It will consist of 13 competitive stages, in addition to a prologue stage, with a rest day in the capital city. The rally will start and conclude in Yanbu, featuring seven loop stages and two marathon stages, which significantly increase the level of difficulty and place greater physical and technical demands on crews and teams. – APP

Babar Azam's half-century leads Sydney Sixers to victory

Melbourne: Babar Azam's unbeaten 58 guides Sydney Sixers past Renegades, overcoming early struggles, as Abbott's bowling shines and Sixers climb BBL 15 points table after convincing Docklands chase victory Thursday

MELBOURNE: Following a disappointing debut, star batter Babar Azam returned to form on Thursday, leading Sydney Sixers to victory over Melbourne Renegades with his unbeaten 58 runs in the 18th match of the Big Bash League 15 (BBL) in Australia's Docklands stadium. Batting first, the Renegades were restricted to 164-9 in their 20 overs, thanks to an exceptional cameo from opening batter Josh Brown, who scored 43 off 19 deliveries, including three fours and four sixes. Middle-order batter Jake Fraser-McGurk contributed a sensible 38 off 29 balls with four boundaries, while Hassan Khan added 39 off 29 deliveries, featuring one four and three sixes. Wicketkeeper-batter Mohammad Rizwan's struggles in the tournament continued as he was dismissed cheaply for six off 10 balls. For the Sixers, Sean Abbott spearheaded the bowling attack, claiming three wickets for 16 runs in four overs.



Jack Edwards, Ben Dwarshuis, and Hayden Kerr supported well, picking up two wickets each. Chasing 165, the Sydney Sixers reached the target in 19.1 overs, losing four wickets. Babar Azam anchored the innings with a balanced unbeaten 58 off 46 deliveries, which included four boundaries and a six. Opening batter Daniel Hughes also impressed with 30 off 23 balls, including two fours and a six, while Joel Davies played a crucial unbeaten cameo of 34 off 15 balls, featuring three fours and two sixes. The victory propels the Sydney Sixers to sixth place on the BBL 15 points table, with two wins and three defeats from five games, accumulating four points with a net run-rate of 0.202. Melbourne Renegades remain seventh with one win and three losses from four games, holding two points and a net run-rate of -0.879. – DNA

Three Pakistan Navy Rear Admirals promoted to Vice Admiral rank

KARACHI, JAN 2 /DNA/ – Rear Admiral Abdul Munib, Rear Admiral Syed Ahmed Salman and Rear Admiral Faisal Amin of Pakistan Navy have been promoted to the rank of Vice Admiral. Vice Admiral Abdul Munib was commissioned in Operations Branch of Pakistan Navy in 1992. The Flag Officer is a graduate of Pakistan Navy War College Lahore, National Defence University Islamabad and qualified Naval War College Command Course from USA. The Admiral has an illustrious naval career covering vast experience of various Command and Staff appointments including Commanding Officer of PNS ALAMGIR, PNS LARKANA, PNS AKRAM, PNS AATISH and Commander Surface Task Group-2, Commander 25th Destroyer Squadron and Commander Combined Task Force-151 at HQ US NAVCENT Bahrain. He has also served as Naval Secretary, DG Naval Intelligence, DG (C 4I) and Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff (Operations) at Naval Headquarters Islamabad. He is currently serving as Commander Pakistan Fleet. In recognition of his meritorious services,

the Flag Officer has been awarded Hilal-i-Imtiaz (Military) and Sitara-i-Basalat. Vice Admiral Syed Ahmed Salman was commissioned in Supply Branch of Pakistan Navy in 1991. The Flag Officer is a graduate of Pakistan Navy War College Lahore and National Defence University Islamabad. The Admiral has an illustrious service career with vast experience of Command and Staff appointments including Director

Inventory Control Point and Director Procurement (Navy). He has also served as Secretary to Chief of the Naval Staff, Director Surface Stores and Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff (Supply) at Naval Headquarters Islamabad and as Attaché Defence Procurement, UK. He is currently serving as Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff (Supply) and Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff (Admin). In recognition of his meritorious ser-



vices, the Flag Officer has been awarded Hilal-i-Imtiaz (Military). Vice Admiral Faisal Amin was commissioned in Operations Branch of Pakistan Navy in 1992. The Flag Officer is a graduate of Royal College of Defence Studies UK, Army Command and Staff College Quetta and National Defence University Islamabad. The Admiral has an illustrious career with vast experience of various Command and Staff appointments including Commanding Officer PNS RAJSHAHI and PNS ALAMGIR, Commander 18th Destroyer Squadron and Commander Surface Task Group-1. He also served as Instructor at UAE Naval College Abu Dhabi. Moreover, he served as Director Naval Operations, Director Naval Development Plans (Platform), Principal Secretary to Chief of the Naval Staff, Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff (Operations), Naval Secretary at Naval Headquarters Islamabad and Additional Secretary-III at MoD Rawalpindi. He is currently serving as Commander Coast. The Flag Officer has been conferred with Hilal-i-Imtiaz (Military) and Sitara-i-Basalat in acknowledgment of his distinguished services.

Clippers win sixth straight, defeat Jazz in NBA thriller

INGLEWOOD: The Los Angeles Clippers extended their season-best winning streak to six games with a 118-101 victory over the Utah Jazz in a National Basketball Association (NBA) clash here at the Intuit Dome on Thursday. Kawhi Leonard spearheaded the effort with a remarkable 45-point performance, including 20 points in the decisive fourth quarter. His clutch shooting, highlighted by four three-pointers in the final frame, helped the Clippers secure the win after a closely contested three quarters. James Harden contributed 20 points in support of Leonard, while Nicolas Batum added 14. Rookie Yanic Konan Niederhauser made a strong impact on the boards with 10 rebounds, and John Collins also dominated inside, pulling down 11. The Clippers set the tone early, racing to a 31-17 lead after the first quarter and maintaining control despite a mid-game comeback from the Jazz. Utah, missing four of their key scorers due to injuries and illness, briefly levelled the game early in the third quarter before Leonard's heroics put Los Angeles firmly ahead. For the Jazz, Kyle Anderson and Brice Sensabaugh led the scoring with 22 and 20 points, respectively, while Cody Williams and Isaiah Collier contributed 18 and 16 points. With the victory, the Clippers improve to 12-21 on the season and remain unbeaten in their last six home games, having doubled their win total since mid-December. – APP

Knight Riders dominate Capitals to reach Qualifier Two

DUBAI: Abu Dhabi Knight Riders moved one win away from the International League T20 final after sealing a commanding 50-run victory over Dubai Capitals in the Eliminator at Dubai International Stadium on Thursday. An impressive 122-run opening partnership between Michael Pepper and Phil Salt laid the foundation for the Knight Riders, before a disciplined bowling display, led by Sunil Narine, Jason Holder and Liam Livingstone, dismantled the Capitals' chase. The win sets up a Qualifier 2 clash with MI Emirates on Friday, with a place in Sunday's final against Desert Vipers at stake. Pepper continued his fine form with a fluent 72 off 49 deliveries, striking seven fours and three sixes, while Salt contributed 43 off 34 as the Knight Riders surged to 122 without loss. Although the Capitals fought back strongly with the ball to restrict Abu Dhabi to 158/7, a late cameo from Holder (22 off 11) ensured a competitive total. In reply, the Capitals never recovered from a bruising start as Abu Dhabi's bowlers applied relentless pressure. Holder struck early, Narine dominated through the powerplay and middle overs, and Livingstone delivered key blows as the Capitals were bundled out for 108. Narine, Holder and Livingstone finished with three wickets apiece. – APP

Miami upsets defending champ Ohio State at Cotton

ARLINGTON: Keionte Scott peeked over at the Miami sideline to see the reaction of his teammates as he sprinted 72 yards untouched for a touchdown returning an interception against defending national champion Ohio State. They certainly were excited, as were a Pro Football Hall of Fame receiver and a former coach who won national championships with the Hurricanes. Scott picked off a screen pass by Heisman Trophy finalist Julian Sayin, Carson Beck threw a touchdown pass and 10th-ranked Miami shocked the Buckeyes 24-14 on Wednesday night at the Cotton Bowl in the first College Football Playoff quarterfinal. "I was full of emotions. ... That was a pretty cool moment," said Scott, who has TD returns on both of his interceptions this season. "Just having fun. ... That's what this team relies on, man, just going out there playing free and just having fun." – APP

Briefs

Business community looks to new IG Sindh for stability

DNA

KARACHI: Chairman of the Businessmen Panel Progressive (BMPP) and Senior Vice President of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FPCCI), Saquib Fayyaz Maggon, has extended his congratulations to Javed Alam Odho on assuming charge as Inspector General of Sindh Police. In a statement, Maggon expressed confidence that Odho's professional expertise and experience would play a vital role in strengthening law and order across the province. He noted that Sindh Police faces multiple challenges, including crime prevention, safeguarding the business community, and restoring public trust. Highlighting the importance of a secure environment for economic growth, Maggon stressed that traders urgently require peace and stability to continue their business activities without fear. He hoped the new IG would establish close coordination with the business community and take priority measures to address their concerns. He lauded Javed Alam Odho's past performance and, citing his valuable services as Karachi Police Chief, expressed the hope that as Inspector General of Sindh he would forge close coordination with the business community and take priority steps to address their issues. Mr. Maggon further remarked that under Javed Alam Odho's leadership, Sindh Police would not only intensify its efforts against crime but also enhance its image as a public service institution. He extended best wishes to the new IG and assured full cooperation from the business community in initiatives aimed at ensuring peace and prosperity in the province.—APP

Iran foreign trade exceeds \$85b in 9 months

TEHRAN: The Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) has put the Iranian foreign trade in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21) at more than \$85 billion. Iranian foreign trade value reached \$85.394 billion between March 21 and December 22, 2025, IRICA noted. In this period, the Iranian total foreign trade reached 148.226 million tons, valued at \$85.394 billion, showing a 10.92 percent decrease in value and 1.36 percent increase in volume, compared to the last year's corresponding period. According to IRI-CA, Iran exported 118.901 million tons of various types of goods, valued at \$41.243 billion, to different countries from March 21 to December 22, 2025, indicating a one percent growth in weight and 5.78 percent decrease in value, compared to the same period last year. In return, the country imported 29.325 million tons of goods, valued at \$44.151 billion, between March 21.—APP

North Korea leader's daughter in succession run

DNA

SEOUL: The North Korean leader's daughter Kim Ju Ae has made her first public visit to a mausoleum housing her grandfather and great-grandfather, state media images showed Friday, further solidifying her place as likely next in line to run the nuclear-armed dictatorship. The Kim family has ruled North Korea with an iron grip for decades, and a cult of personality surrounding their so-called "Paektu bloodline" dominates daily life in the isolated country. Current leader Kim Jong Un is the third in line to rule in the world's only communist monarchy, following his father Kim Jong Il and grandfather Kim Il Sung. The two men — dubbed "eternal leaders" in state propaganda — are housed in the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun, a vast mausoleum in downtown Pyongyang. The state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported that Kim Jong Un had visited the palace, accompanied by top officials. Images released by the agency showed daughter Ju Ae alongside him. South Korea's spy agency said last year she was now understood to be the next in line to rule North Korea after she accompanied her father on a high-profile visit to Beijing. - 'Presented as Kim's successor' - And Cheong Seong-chang at Seoul's Sejong Institute said he expected her to soon be "formally confirmed as the next successor

Mayor Zohran Mamdani vows to govern New York City 'audaciously'

DNA

NEW YORK :New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani vowed to "govern expansively and audaciously" in his inaugural address on Thursday as he made an ambitious start to lead this major metropolis with a population well over 8 million people. He made this promise to a crowd of thousands sitting in freezing afternoon outside City Hall, emphasizing his commitment to a democratic socialist agenda focused on affordability and working-class New Yorkers. In his speech, Mamdani, who is the city's first Muslim and South Asian mayor, stressed that his administration would not apologize for its beliefs and would not temper its goals despite potential opposition. "I was elected as a democratic socialist, and I will govern as a democratic socialist", he added. Zohraan is the son of Mahmood Mamdani, a professor at Columbia University, and Mira Nair, an Oscar-nominated filmmaker whose credits include "Mississippi Masala" and "Monsoon Wedding." Mam-

dani is fluent in Urdu, and even spoke a few words in his inaugural address, referring to his meeting with a Pakistani woman. "I spoke with a Pakistani woman named Samina, and she told me in Urdu, 'Logon ke dil badal gaye hain'," he said. Uganda-born Mamdani, 34, who deployed a mix of charm, social media savvy and an unyielding focus on affordability to catapult him to political stardom, is the City's youngest Mayor, a job which comes with a \$120 billion budget and global scrutiny. Mamdani, who a year ago was a virtually unknown state assemblyman, is also the first to be sworn in using the holy Qur'an. "I stand alongside you," the new mayor said. "The tens of thousands of you gathered here in Lower Manhattan, armed against the January chill by the resurgent flame of hope. I stand alongside countless more New Yorkers watching from cramped kitchens in Flushing and barber shops in East New York, from cellphones propped against the dashboards of parked taxicabs at LaGuardia, hospitals in Mott Haven and libraries in El Barrio that have



too long known only neglect," he added. Mamdani added that a "moment like this comes rarely and rarer still is it that the people themselves whose hands are upon the levers of change". The mayor said that in writing his remarks, he was advised to lower expectations. "I will do no such

thing," he said. "The only expectation I seek to reset is that of small expectations. Beginning today we will govern expansively and audaciously. We may not always succeed but never will we be accused of lacking the courage to try." Mamdani did not shy away from his social-

ist politics. "I was elected as a democratic socialist and I will govern as a democratic socialist. I will not abandon my principles for fear of being called radical," he said to loud cheers from the gathered crowd. He ended by saying: "The work has only just begun." The speech was the second of a two-part ceremony after he was sworn in at midnight on Thursday in a disused subway station where he was flanked by the New York attorney general, Letitia James, and his wife, Rama Duwaji, a 28 year-old artist. On the steps of city hall on a bitterly cold January day, the newly elected mayor was introduced by the Democrat congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a democratic socialist ally who is edging toward a run for the White House in 2028. "We have chosen courage over fear. We have chosen prosperity for the many over spoils for the few," Ocasio-Cortez said in her remarks. "We have chosen to make a new future for all of us, we have chosen a mayor who is relentlessly dedicated to make life not just possible but aspirational for working people ... we have

chosen that over the distractions of bigotry and the barbarism of extreme inequality." Mamdani was then formally sworn in by independent Senator Bernie Sanders, another political ally who in many ways laid the groundwork for Mamdani's affordability agenda with his run for the Democrat presidential nomination in 2016. That effort, widely seen to have been undone by allies of former secretary of state Hillary Clinton within the party's national political organization, has now borne fruit and with it the underlying political message of affordability, code for economic rights. Sanders said in his address to the crowd that Mamdani was taking power "at a time when we are seeing too much hatred, too much divisive and too much injustice" and called for "government that works for all, not just the wealthy and the few". He added that Mamdani had taken on the Democrat and Republican establishments, "the president of the United States and some enormously wealthy oligarchs and you defeated them in the biggest political upset in modern American history".

Swiss investigators rush to identify victims of New Year's fire

CRANSMONTANA, Switzerland: Investigators raced on Friday to identify the victims of a fire that ripped through a bar in the Swiss Alps town of Crans-Montana, turning a New Year's celebration into one of the country's worst tragedies. It is not yet clear what set off the blaze at Le Constellation, killing around 40 people and injuring about 115 others, many seriously. Bystanders described scenes of panic and chaos as people tried to break the windows to escape and others, covered in burns, poured into the street. Swiss police warned it could take days or even weeks to identify everyone who perished, leaving an agonising wait for family and friends. "We've tried to reach our friends. We took loads of photos and posted them on Instagram, Facebook, all possible social networks to try to find them," said Eleonore, 17. "But there's nothing. No response." "Even the parents don't know," she added. The exact number of people who were at the bar when it went up in flames remains unclear, and police have not specified how many are still missing. Le Constellation had a capacity of 300 people, plus another 40 people on its terrace, according to the Crans-Montana website. Swiss President Guy Parmelin, who took over on Thursday, called the fire "a calamity of unprecedented, terrifying proportions", and an-

nounced that flags would be flown at half mast for five days. Local police commander Frederic Gisler said authorities were "in close contact with the victims' families, whom we are informing in real time, as well as with the various embassies involved". "Given the international nature of the Crans resort, we can expect foreign nationals to be among the victims," he told reporters. The canton's chief prosecutor, Beatrice Pilloud, said significant resources have been deployed "to identify the victims and return their bodies to the families as quickly as possible". - 'The apocalypse' - The fire broke out around 1:30 am (0030 GMT) Thursday at Le Constellation, a bar popular with young tourists. "We thought it was just a small fire — but when we got there, it was war," Mathys, from neighbouring Chermignon-d'en-Bas, told AFP. "That's the only word I can use to describe it: the apocalypse. It was terrible." Authorities have declined to speculate on what caused the tragedy, saying only that it was not an attack. Several witness accounts, broadcast by Swiss, French and Italian media, meanwhile pointed to sparklers that were apparently mounted on champagne bottles held aloft by restaurant staff as part of a regular "show" for patrons who made special orders to their tables. There were "waitresses with champagne bottles and little sparklers.

They got too close to the ceiling, and suddenly it all caught fire", Axel, a witness present at the time of the incident, told the Italian media outlet Local Team. Pilloud said the investigation would look into whether the bar met safety standards and had the required number of exits. Red and white caution tape, flowers and candles adorned the street where the tragedy occurred, while police shielded the site with white screens. After the emergency units at the local hospitals filled up, many of the injured were transported across Switzerland and to neighbouring countries. The European Union said it has been in contact with Swiss authorities about providing medical assistance, while French President Emmanuel Macron said some of the injured were being cared for in French hospitals. Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani told Italian broadcaster Rete 4 that around 15 Italians had been injured in the fire, and a similar number remained missing. The French foreign ministry said nine French citizens figured among the injured, and eight others remained unaccounted for. Multiple sources told AFP that the bar owners are French nationals: a couple originally from Corsica who, according to a relative, are safe, but have been unreachable since the tragedy.—Agencies

Aurangzeb lauds FBR for achieving highest-ever revenue collection in December

ISLAMABAD :Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb on Friday praised Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) field formations for achieving the highest-ever December tax collection, calling the December 2025 performance a clear endorsement of the government's fiscal reforms, compliance drive, and digitization efforts. "The progress made over the last 18 months is remarkable, and the December 2025 collection is extremely encouraging," the minister said while addressing Team FBR and field formations via a video link conference. He emphasized that the government's strategy of digitizing the economy, promoting cashless transactions, and strengthening enforcement while maintaining business momentum has begun to deliver tangible and sustainable results. Reflecting this policy direction and administrative resolve, the FBR collected Rs 1,427.1 billion in December 2025, achieving 99 percent of its monthly target of Rs 1,446 billion. This performance represents the highest revenue collection for the month of December in any year, underscoring improved tax compliance and effective enforcement across the system. The Inland Revenue Service (IRS) demonstrated outstanding performance by achieving 99.8 percent of its target, collecting Rs 1,308 billion against a target of Rs 1,310 billion. On a month-on-month basis, revenue collection surged by 59 percent, rising from Rs 898 billion in November to Rs 1,427.1 billion in December. This growth was broad-based across all major tax heads. Income tax collection more than doubled, increasing by 107 percent, from Rs 402 billion in November to Rs 831.5 billion in December. Sales tax collection rose by 25 percent to Rs 403.7 billion, while Federal Excise Duty (FED) increased by 6 percent to Rs 72.8 billion. Customs duty collection also grew by 15 percent, reaching Rs 118.9 billion. Under the continuous oversight of the FBR Board and in line with the Finance Ministry's reform roadmap, these results reflect a decisive shift toward stronger compliance, improved enforcement, and institutional accountability, reinforcing confidence in the government's commitment to sustainable revenue growth. Concluding his address, the Finance Minister urged FBR field formations to further intensify their efforts and double down on initiatives aimed at deepening and widening the tax net. He emphasized that better tax compliance and enforcement measures is the only sustainable way to ease the tax burden on the formal sector. —DNA

Türkiye sets all-time record for fish production in 2025

ISTANBUL :Türkiye's fish production reached a record 1.02 million tons in 2025, the highest level in the history of the Republic, said Agriculture and Forestry Minister Ibrahim Yumakli. Speaking to Anadolu during a meeting Wednesday with fishermen on the final day of 2025 in Istanbul's Sariyer district, Yumakli said the quota system introduced under production planning had proven highly effective. "Fish production in Türkiye reached 1.02 million tons in 2025, breaking an all-time record in the history of the Republic," he said. "This is truly a very large, massive figure." Highlighting the sector's contribution to the national economy, Yumakli said fisheries exports had reached nearly \$2 billion, calling it a significant milestone for a country surrounded by seas on three sides. "Climate change has affected all sectors, including fisheries, through rising sea temperatures and changes in fish migration routes," he said. "At times, this made the year challenging, at times easier. But overall, we completed 2025 without major incidents." According to preliminary ministry data, about 400,000 tons of total production came from capture fisheries.—APP

Maduro says Venezuela open to talks with US, amid pressure

CARACAS: President Nicolas Maduro Thursday dodged a question about an alleged US attack on a dock in Venezuela but said he was open to cooperation with Washington after weeks of American military pressure. "Wherever they want and whenever they want," Maduro said of the idea of dialogue with the United States on drug trafficking, oil and migration in an interview on state TV. To date, Maduro has not confirmed a US land attack on a docking facility in his country that allegedly targeted drug boats, according to US President Donald Trump's comments Monday. Asked point-blank if he confirmed or denied the attack, Maduro said "this could be something we talk about in a few days." The attack would amount to the first known land strike of the US military campaign against drug trafficking from Latin America. Trump on Monday said the United States hit and destroyed a docking area for alleged Venezuela drug boats. Trump would not say if it was a military or CIA operation or where the strike occurred, noting only that it was "along the shore." "There was a major explosion in the dock area where they load the boats up with drugs," he told reporters at his Mara-Lago resort in Florida. "So we hit all the boats and now we hit the area, it's the implementation area, that's where they implement. And that is no longer around." For weeks Trump has threatened ground strikes on drug cartels in the region, saying they would start "soon," but this is the first apparent example. US forces have also carried out numerous strikes on boats in both the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean since September, targeting what Washington says are drug-smugglers.—APP

MOST EXPERIENCED MANUFACTURERS & EXPORTERS OF MARTIAL ARTS UNIFORMS IN PAKISTAN

WHERE EACH STITCH IS WATCHED

JUDO KARATE BOXING KUNG-FU JU-JITSU TAEKWONDO

JUDO
KARATE
KUNG-FU
JU-JITSU
TAEKWONDO
UNIFORMS AND
COLOURED BELTS

JUDO KARATE BOXING KUNG-FU JU-JITSU TAEKWONDO

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Briefs

New year event turns violent

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: Mismanagement at a musical concert organised as part of New Year celebrations at a private housing society turned violent when people were allegedly denied entry despite holding valid tickets. Police sources said tickets for the musical night were sold at Rs5,000 for families and Rs2,000 for individuals. However, tickets were allegedly sold beyond the venue's capacity and adequate arrangements for spectators were not made.

As a result, the area reserved for spectators became overcrowded. A large number of ticket-holders also gathered outside the venue in an attempt to gain entry. Security guards of the housing society stopped the gathering and did not allow them to enter the concert venue, prompting protests by the ticket-holders. It has yet to be established how the protest turned violent and which side took the first step in disrupting law and order. A police contingent was deployed at the venue for security and crowd control, but it reportedly remained a silent spectator until the situation worsened. During the protest, a physical confrontation broke out between the ticket-holders who were denied entry and the security guards. Both sides pelted stones at each other, while the guards also used batons to disperse the crowd. The use of force further angered the gathering, which then began damaging property.

Ukraine says hits 'military targets'

KYIV: The Ukrainian army said Friday it only hit "military targets", a day after after Russia accused Kyiv of firing drones at a hotel and cafe in Ukraine's occupied south killing 27. Russian-installed authorities in Ukraine's southern Kherson region said those killed were revellers celebrating the New Year and that two of the dead were children, describing the incident as a "terrorist act". A source in Ukraine's defence forces confirmed a strike took place, but said the attack targeted a military gathering that was closed to civilians. AFP was not able to verify either account. The hotel where Moscow says the strike took place lies in Khorly, a Black Sea resort town that the Russian army has occupied since early 2022. In comments to AFP, Ukrainian army spokesman Dmytro Lykhoviy accused Russia of repeatedly resorting to "disinformation and false statements". "Ukraine's Defence Forces adhere to the norms of international humanitarian law and strike exclusively at enemy military targets," he said. The accusation comes at a crunch moment in the nearly four-year conflict, the deadliest on European soil since World War II. — APP

Trump says US will intervene if Iran violently suppresses peaceful protests

The clashes between protesters and security forces mark a significant escalation in the unrest that has spread across the country since shopkeepers began protesting on Sunday over the government's handling of a sharp currency slide and rapidly rising prices

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump on Friday said that if Iran shoots and violently kills peaceful protesters, the United States of America will come to their rescue. "We are locked and loaded and ready to go," he said in a Truth Social post. This follows the deaths of several people as Iran's biggest protests in three years over economic hardship turned violent across multiple provinces. The clashes between protesters and security forces mark a significant escalation in the unrest that has spread across the country since shopkeepers began protesting on Sunday over the government's handling of a sharp currency slide and rapidly rising prices. Iran's economy has struggled for years since the US reimposed sanctions in



2018, after Trump withdrew from an international nuclear agreement during his first term. Meanwhile, US said Chinese war games around Taiwan "unnecessarily" spiked tensions in the region, the US State Department said Thursday, calling on Beijing to "cease its military pressure." "China's military activities and rhetoric toward Taiwan and others in the region increase tensions unnecessarily. We urge Beijing to exercise restraint, cease its military pressure against Taiwan, and instead engage in meaningful dialogue," State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott said in a statement. Beijing launched missiles and deployed dozens of fighter jets, navy ships and coast guard vessels on Monday and Tuesday to encircle Taiwan, saying the drills simulated a blockade of the self-ruled island's main ports. — DNA

Not safe in UK, says Shahzad Akbar

NEWS DESK

LONDON: Former special assistant to the prime minister (SAPM) Mirza Shahzad Akbar has said that his house in the United Kingdom (UK) — where he has been living in self-imposed exile — was subjected to a "deliberate and targeted criminal attack with the intent to cause serious harm". The development comes a little over a week after Akbar said he suffered a fractured nose and other facial injuries after being attacked at his home. In a post on X on Thursday, Akbar said that his home in Cambridgeshire, England came under attack on December 31, 2025, in a "deliberate and targeted criminal attack with the intent to cause serious harm". He said that the perpetrators "criminally damaged the property and attempted to set it on fire, placing lives at immediate risk". Akbar maintained it was the second such attack "within one week against my home, myself, and my family, each carried out with clear malicious intent". He held that the incidents were not isolated. "I was physically assaulted in a targeted attack on Dec 24, leaving me with substantial injuries," Akbar recalled. He added that UK authorities were actively investigating both events, which are being treated as targeted attacks. "The UK has a legal and moral obligation to exhaust all available powers and resources to ensure that it remains a safe country for all, particularly for political dissidents and individuals at risk of persecution," he further said. Akbar, who was the accountability czar in the PTI government, said last week that an unknown assailant dressed in "construction or waste-collection attire" attacked him in Cambridge. "The individual asked, 'Are you Shahzad Akbar?' and immediately began assaulting me," Akbar posted on X. "I sustained facial injuries, including bruising and a fractured nose."

Syrian govt foils Daesh attempt to attack churches

DNA

ALEPPO, DAMASCUS: The Syrian Interior Ministry announced on Thursday that it had thwarted a Daesh plot to carry out suicide attacks targeting New Year celebrations and churches, particularly in Aleppo. The ministry said in a statement that, as part of ongoing counterterrorism efforts and careful monitoring of Daesh cells in cooperation with partner agencies, it had received intelligence indicating plans for suicide attacks targeting New Year celebrations in several provinces, particularly Aleppo, with a focus on churches and civilian gathering areas. The ministry added that it took preemptive measures, including reinforcing security around churches, deploying mobile and fixed patrols, and setting up checkpoints across the city. During operations at a checkpoint in Aleppo's Bab Al-Faraj district, security forces intercepted a suspected Daesh member who opened fire. One internal security soldier was killed, and the attacker detonated explosives, injuring two others. Daesh recently increased its attacks in Syria, and was blamed for an attack last month in Palmyra that killed three Americans. On Dec. 13, two US soldiers and an American civilian were killed in an attack Washington blamed on a lone Daesh gunman in Palmyra. In retaliation, American forces struck scores of Daesh targets in Syria. Syrian authorities have also carried out several operations against Daesh since then, saying on Dec. 25 they had killed a senior leader of the group.

AJK govt fully implementing pact with JAAC, says PM Rathore
AJK premier acknowledges gap between people and govt in previous regime, which his admin has worked to remove

DNA

MUZAFFARABAD: Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Prime Minister Raja Faisal Mumtaz Rathore has said the region could not afford any further "adventure" or instability, adding that his government was fully implementing the agreement reached with the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC). Speaking at a press conference in Muzaffarabad along with his cabinet, the AJK prime minister said work was underway on 98% of the agreed matters. He said the government was committed to fulfilling all points of the agreement. Rathore further said that during the previous government, there had been a gap between the people and the government, which his administration had worked to remove. He added that there had been no delay in resolving issues related to public interest. The AJK PM said his government was not in competition with anyone and believed that even the biggest problems should be resolved through dialogue. He stressed that disorder would no longer be allowed in the state. He said everyone in the state must work together for the betterment of the region. Rathore, a Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader, was sworn in as the new premier of the AJK in November 2025, following his predecessor Anwarul Haq's ouster. The federal government's negotiation committee and JAAC reached a deal in October that ended days of tension, which had sparked violent riots in the AJK. What began as a largely peaceful movement in AJK spiralled into unrest, with rival groups staging protests and accusing each other of inciting violence.

Canada urges India to probe incident involving pilot being under alcohol influence

"Any confirmed violation will attract strict disciplinary action in line with company policy," says airline

NEWS DESK

NEW DELHI: Canada's transport regulator has asked Air India to investigate an incident of a pilot reporting for duty under the influence of alcohol and failing two breathalyser tests, a person familiar with the matter said. The tests were conducted by Canadian police at Vancouver International Airport, after the pilot was asked to leave the aircraft, the person said. The incident was labelled as a "serious matter" by Transport Canada in a letter to Air India and authorities are likely to pursue enforcement action, the person added. The person requested anonymity as he was not authorised to speak to the media. Transport Canada did not respond to an emailed request for comment outside regular working hours. In a statement, Air India confirmed the flight from Vancouver to Delhi on December 23 experienced a last-minute delay due to the incident, adding that an alternate pilot was brought in to operate the flight.

"The pilot has been taken off flying duties during the process of enquiry. Air India maintains a zero-tolerance policy towards any violation of applicable rules and regulations," Air India said. "Pending the outcome of the investigation, any confirmed violation will attract strict disciplinary action in line with company policy." The letter from Transport Canada official Ajit Oommen has asked Air India to provide its findings and details of steps taken to prevent future occurrences by January 26, the person familiar with the matter said. India has been under intense scrutiny since the June 12 crash of a Boeing Dreamliner killed 260 people. India's aviation regulator has flagged multiple safety lapses at the airline, which was previously owned by the government until 2022. Pilots at Air India, owned by Tata Group and Singapore Airlines have also come under scrutiny. This week, India's Directorate General of Civil Aviation sent warning notices to four Air India pilots, flagging "serious safety concerns" related to regulatory compliance and flight crew decision-making. The DGCA said the pilots accepted an aircraft for operation last year despite prior knowledge of "repeated snags" and "existing systems degradations," according to warning notices dated December 29 seen by Reuters. The aircraft is a Boeing 787 used for long-haul flights, according to Flightradar24.

Bangladesh's national airline 'receives' Pakistan's nod for direct flights

CAA asks Bangladeshi airline to use Pakistan's airspace on approved routes; flights expected to resume this month

DNA

KARACHI: Direct flights between Pakistan and Bangladesh are set to resume after the federal government granted permission to Bangladesh's national airline to operate flights between Dhaka and Karachi, sources told Geo News on Friday. Pakistan and Bangladesh have drawn closer in recent months, and this renewed bonhomie appears to have paved the way for the decision to resume direct flight services. Currently, travellers between the two countries rely on connecting flights via Dubai or Doha. The sources said that the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) granted approval to the Bangladeshi national airline after receiving clearance from the federal government. The permission was issued by the Director General of the CAA. They said that Bangladesh's national flag carrier has initially been allowed to operate flights until March 30, 2026. The airline has also been granted permission to use Pakistan's airspace on approved routes. Sources within CAA said the airline will be required to operate strictly on designated air routes while flying through Pakistan's airspace. They added that complete flight details must be shared with Karachi airport authorities before departure from Dhaka. "Flights between Pakistan and Bangladesh are expected to begin later this month," the sources added. Bangladesh High Commissioner to Pakistan Iqbal Hussain Khan had earlier confirmed that Biman Bangladesh Airlines is preparing to launch three weekly flights to Karachi. He made these remarks while speaking to The News on

the sidelines of his address at the Foreign Services Academy. "Yes, we are starting direct flights with Pakistan. Our national airline will operate three weekly flights to Karachi", the Bangladesh high commissioner had said when asked about the development.

PM expresses satisfaction over GDP growth

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Friday said that significant growth in the country's GDP in first quarter (Jul-Sept) of current fiscal year was encouraging, pointing out that the government had brought the country from the brink of default to economic stability. Chairing a meeting of the Federal Cabinet at the PM House, the prime minister emphasized that soon after assuming the charge, the incumbent government had resolved that loss-making state-owned enterprises would be privatized. "The privatization of PIA is an extremely important milestone in this regard." He stated that the privatization of loss-making state-owned enterprises was part of the government's vision for economic reforms. He expressed satisfaction that the privatization of 75% shares of PIA was completed with great success and the bidding process remained extremely transparent. Furthermore, he described his recent meetings with President of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, as extremely beneficial in the context of bilateral relations and mutual consultation. The prime minister further said that a day earlier, he had a pleasant telephone conversation with Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia, in which satisfaction was expressed over the pace of economic and strategic relations between the two countries. The prime minister said that discussions were also held regarding further broadening the relations. On the occasion, the prime minister also congratulated the members of the federal cabinet on the New Year and extended good wishes. — DNA

Adil Raja, Haider Mehdi, others sentenced

ATC announces verdict in May 9 riots case; journalists Wajahat Saeed, Sabir Shakir, Moeed Pirzada among those convicted



NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: An anti-terrorism court in the federal capital on Friday awarded multiple life sentences to Adil Raja, Haider Mehdi, Wajahat Saeed, Sabir Shakir and Moeed Pirzada for "committing digital terrorism" in a case related to the May 9, 2023 riots. The verdict, announced by ATC Judge Tahir Abbas Sipra, relates to a case registered at the Aabpara Police Station against Syed Akbar Hussain and journalists Shakir and Pirzada. Whereas Mehdi, Saeed and Shaheen Sebhai were sentenced in a case lodged at the Ramna Police Station.

Apart from the life sentences, the court also handed down a total of 35 years' imprisonment under other provisions and imposed a fine of Rs1.5 million. During the case hearing, Raja Naveed Hussain Kiani appeared on behalf of the prosecution, whereas the convicts were represented by Advocate Gulfar Goraya — who was appointed by the court as the defence counsel. During the case, the prosecution presented a total of 24 witnesses before the court, which completed the trial in absentia upon the former's request. The ATC judgment comes days after the federal cabinet declared Raja, a former Pakistan Army major, a proscribed person under Section 11[EE] of the ATA 1997. Raja, who is based in the United Kingdom, was among the two retired Pakistan Army officers convicted and sentenced under the Army Act for violations of the provisions of the Official Secrets Act in 2023. Along with him, Captain (retd) Haider Raza Mehdi was also sentenced for the same offence via Field General Court Martial in November 2023.

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