



# Islamabad POST

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Facilitation desk established at country's airports

Detailed News On Page-08

No tears for Maduru, says UK PM

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CM Afridi announces energy plans

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## New York Mayor slams US action as 'act of war'

"This is not about drugs or democracy it is about oil," says former vice president Kamala Harris

NEWS DESK

NEW YORK City Mayor Zohran Mamdani said he personally called President Donald Trump to object to what he described as a "pursuit of regime change" in Venezuela, following the overnight capture of President Nicolas Maduro and his wife. President Trump announced on Saturday that he was putting Venezuela under temporary American control after the United States captured President Nicolas Maduro in an audacious raid and whisked him to New York to face drug-trafficking charges. "We will run the country until such time as we can do a safe, proper and judicious transition," Trump said during a press conference at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida. "We can't take a chance that someone else takes over Venezuela who doesn't have the interests of Venezuelans in mind." Trump also said as part of the takeover, major US oil companies would move into Venezuela, which has the world's largest oil reserves, and refurbish badly degraded oil infrastructure, a process experts said could take years. Speaking to reporters on Saturday, Mamdani said he had contacted Trump "directly" to make his position clear. "I called the president and spoke with him directly to register my opposition to this act," he said. Mamdani said his objection was based on opposition to a "pursuit of regime change" and actions he believes go against federal and international law, which he said should be applied consistently. "It is about oil" Meanwhile, reacting to the development, former US vice president Kamala Harris said that President Trump's actions did not make America safer, stronger, or more affordable. "That Maduro is a brutal, illegitimate dictator does not change the fact that this action was both unlawful and unwise. We've seen this movie before.

Continued on Page 06

## US Republicans largely defend Trump's action in Venezuela

WASHINGTON: Republican leaders in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate are reacting to President Donald Trump's announcement of the capture of Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, in a "large-scale strike" against Venezuela. The two are in U.S. custody in Brooklyn, a borough of New York City, and charged with "narco-terrorism conspiracy, cocaine importation conspiracy, possession of machine guns and destructive devices, and conspiracy to possess machine guns and destructive devices against the U.S.," according to Attorney General Pam Bondi. U.S. Senator Tom Cotton, a Republican, praised Trump's decision-making and called Maduro an illegitimate dictator. He said the Venezuelan leader was running a "vast drug-trafficking operation." Cotton also said he was briefed on Maduro's capture by U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio. "The interim government in Venezuela must now decide whether to continue the drug trafficking and colluding with adversaries like Iran and Cuba or whether to act like a normal nation and return to

Continued on Page 06

## China for release of Venezuelan President

DNA

BEIJING: China has strongly condemned the reported capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife by U.S. forces, calling the action a "serious violation of international law and sovereignty." In a statement issued by the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Beijing demanded the immediate release of Maduro and his spouse, stressing that the sovereignty of Venezuela must be respected. "No country has the right to interfere in the internal affairs of another nation through unilateral military action," the statement read. Chinese officials emphasized that the detention of a sitting head of state sets a dangerous precedent in global diplomacy.

Continued on Page 06

## UNSC meets today

NEWS DESK

UNITED NATIONS: The United Nations Security Council will hold an emergency session on Monday amid mounting international alarm over the United States' military action in Venezuela and concerns that the crisis has now moved beyond bilateral tensions. On Saturday, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned that the crisis in Venezuela could undermine the foundations of international law by setting a "dangerous precedent" for similar actions in the near future. The meeting was requested by Colombia and supported by China and the Russian Federation, with Venezuela also formally appealing to the Council.

Continued on Page 06

## At least 80 Yemeni separatists killed

APP

ADEN: At least 80 troops from Yemen's secessionist Southern Transitional Council (STC) have been killed in fighting with Saudi-backed forces and strikes since Friday, a military official from the group told AFP on Sunday. At least 152 members of the UAE-backed STC forces were wounded and 130 were taken captive, the official said, giving a preliminary toll of casualties following the start of the operation.



BEIJING: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar met with Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi, in Beijing. – DNA

## Iron brothers

## Pak, China reaffirm all-weather strategic ties in Beijing talks

Pakistan, China unveil logo for 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations

DNA

BEIJING: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, along with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, jointly unveiled the official logo commemorating the 75th anniversary of Pakistan-China diplomatic relations, marking the formal launch of year-long celebrations to honor this historic milestone. The unveiling ceremony symbolized the enduring friendship and strategic partnership between Pakistan and China, rooted in mutual trust, shared values, and close cooperation across political, economic, and cultural domains. Both leaders underscored that the 75th anniversary is not only a celebration of the past but also a reaffirmation of

Continued on Page 06

## Ishaq Dar talks to Malaysian, Egypt counterparts

DNA

BEIJING: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar held a telephone conversation with the Foreign Minister of Malaysia, Mohamad bin Haji Hasan. He also talked to the foreign minister of Egypt. During the discussion, the two leaders reviewed the current state of bilateral relations and reaffirmed

Continued on Page 06

## Bangladesh will not play T20 WC matches in India

Nazrul said he would also ask that the IPL be blocked from Bangladeshi broadcasters

SPORTS DESK

DHAKA: Bangladesh will not play their T20 World Cup matches in India after Mustafizur Rahman was released by his Indian Premier League (IPL) team amid growing tensions between the countries, Bangladesh's sports adviser Asif Nazrul said on Sunday. Kolkata Knight Riders said on Saturday they had released the Bangladesh bowler after being told to do so by India's cricket board (BCCI). Bangladesh are scheduled to play three T20 World Cup matches in Kolkata next month, with the February 7-March 8 tournament being co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka. "Bangladesh will not go to India

to play the World Cup. The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has taken this decision today," Nazrul, who is an adviser to the Ministry of Sports, said in a statement after an emergency meeting of the BCB. "We welcome this decision taken in the context of the extreme communal policy of India's cricket board." Earlier, Nazrul had said, "We will not accept any insult to Bangladeshi cricket, cricketers and Bangladesh under any circumstances." "The days of slavery are over," he had said. Nazrul said he had ordered the BCB to write to the International Cricket Council (ICC). "The board should inform that, where a Bangladeshi cricketer cannot play in

Continued on Page 06

## Diplomatic discontent: Pakistan's foreign office faces mounting criticism

One of the most pressing grievances voiced by diplomats relates to Goods and Services Tax (GST) refunds. Diplomats argue that while in their home countries such refunds are processed swiftly, in Pakistan the process is either delayed indefinitely or not honored at all

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Foreign Office (FO), the institution tasked with representing the country's image abroad, is facing growing criticism from diplomats and foreign missions stationed in Islamabad. Concerns have been raised over inefficiency, lack of cooperation, slow pace of work, and recurring corruption scandals that have tarnished the reputation of the office. Diplomats from several countries have expressed dissatisfaction with the way the Foreign Office handles routine matters. According to officials, the FO often demonstrates a lack of interest in resolving issues promptly, leading to delays in communication and coordination. This slow pace of work has become a source of frustration for foreign missions, who expect efficiency and professionalism in their dealings with Pakistan's premier diplomatic institution. One of the most pressing grievances voiced by diplomats relates to Goods and Services Tax (GST) refunds. Diplomats argue that while in their home countries such refunds are processed swiftly, in Pa-

kistan the process is either delayed indefinitely or not honored at all. This issue has become a major source of contention, with foreign missions repeatedly raising the matter with the authorities. The lack of resolution not only inconveniences diplomats but also reflects poorly on Pakistan's commitment to international norms and diplomatic privileges. Adding to the discontent is the recent corruption scandal in the attestation department of the Foreign Office. Reports suggest that malpractice in this department has been ongoing for years, with officials allegedly demanding bribes to expedite routine attestation services. Such practices have eroded trust and created a perception of systemic corruption within the institution. The attestation scandal is not the first time the Foreign Office has been embroiled in controversy. In the past, corruption was reported in the allocation of liquor quota permits for foreign missions, as well as in the import of vehicles under diplomatic privileges. These scandals led to disciplinary actions, with some FO officials being dismissed from service. In certain cases, even diplomats themselves were sacked for their involvement in corrupt prac-

tices. The Foreign Office is often described as the "face of Pakistan" to the outside world. Its role in facilitating diplomatic relations, ensuring smooth communication, and projecting a positive image of the country is critical. However, recurring inefficiency and corruption have undermined this role, creating a negative impression among foreign missions. Diplomats argue that if Pakistan wishes to strengthen its global standing, the FO must operate as a model institution efficient, transparent, and corruption-free. The dissatisfaction of foreign missions carries significant consequences. Diplomats are not only representatives of their countries but also key stakeholders in fostering bilateral relations. Their negative experiences with Pakistan's Foreign Office risk influencing their governments' perception of Pakistan. This, in turn, could affect cooperation in areas such as trade, investment, and cultural exchange. A tarnished image of the FO reflects directly on Pakistan's credibility in the international community. Observers believe that the Foreign Office must urgently address these issues to restore confidence. Reforms aimed at improving efficiency, ensuring transparency,

and eliminating corruption are seen as essential. Strict accountability measures, including the dismissal of corrupt officials and the introduction of digital systems to reduce human discretion, could help rebuild trust. Despite the challenges, there is hope that better sense will prevail and the Foreign Office will set its house in order. Pakistan's leadership has often emphasized the importance of diplomacy in advancing national interests. To achieve this, the FO must embody professionalism and integrity. By addressing diplomats' concerns particularly the GST refund issue—and rooting out corruption, the Foreign Office can reclaim its role as a respected institution and a true reflection of Pakistan's values. The criticism directed at Pakistan's Foreign Office serves as a wake-up call. Diplomats and foreign missions expect efficiency, cooperation, and respect for international norms. The persistence of inefficiency and corruption not only inconveniences them but also damages Pakistan's global image. As the custodian of the country's diplomatic relations, the FO must rise above these challenges, embrace reform, and demonstrate that it is capable of representing Pakistan with honor and credibility.

## Briefs

Inquiry finds unrelated persons entered Punjab PA

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: An inquiry report into unrest during KP CM Sohail Afridi's visit to the Punjab Assembly has found that unrelated and convicted individuals entered the premises alongside him, sources said on Sunday. The report was prepared by an investigative committee after disturbances during the visit, with statements of assembly employees and eyewitnesses formally recorded, Punjab Assembly Secretariat sources said. The PTI-backed KP CM had arrived in Lahore on December 26, 2025, for a three-day visit to partake in political activities, including a visit to the Punjab Assembly. However, his visit to the provincial legislature's building was marred by altercations between members of his delegation and the security officials.

Family falls in open drain

DNA

KARACHI: Five members of a family, including two children, were rescued on Sunday after falling into an open drain in Korangi's Mehran Town area, according to Rescue 1122 officials. A Rescue 1122 spokesperson said the Central Command and Control received the alert and immediately dispatched a water rescue team and trained divers to the site. "The rescue team carried out a rapid operation and rescued all five affected individuals, who were heading to attend a wedding ceremony," he said. The spokesperson said all affected individuals were rescued and taken to the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre by ambulance for medical treatment. However, one of the women rescued from the drain was reported to be in critical condition, the spokesperson added.



# CM Afridi announces affordable energy projects

Chief Minister Sohail Afridi ordered an immediate inquiry into the removal of children from Zamung Kor, a model institute established for orphaned and underprivileged children

DNA

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Muhammad Sohail Afridi on Sunday chaired a meeting regarding the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Transmission Line and Grid System Company, where detailed progress on provincial power and hydropower projects was reviewed. During the meeting, the chief minister directed that all ongoing transmission line projects be completed within the stipulated time and with high quality standards. He also instructed that the feasibility study for the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Distribution Company be completed within six months and that the Regulatory Authority Act draft be finalized promptly. Sohail Afridi stated that hydropower projects would be completed on a priority basis and the electricity generated from these projects would be supplied to industries at affordable rates. He emphasized that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's power projects would play a vital role in industrial growth, economic stability and job creation. Officials briefed the meeting that upon completion of ongoing projects over the next four years, the

province will gain 800 megawatts of electricity. A 120-kilometer transmission line is being laid from Maltan Power House to Chakdara Grid, with 40 kilometers of work currently underway on Lot One. The 36-megawatt Daral Khwar Hydropower Project has been completed, while seven projects with a combined capacity of 224 megawatts are already operational. According to the briefing, the 84-megawatt Gorkan Mitaltan project is 87 percent complete and will become operational by December 2026. Meanwhile, the 95-megawatt Gabral Kalam and 215-megawatt Madain Hydropower Projects are expected to be completed in 2027. The chief minister stressed that public tax money was a trust and that no negligence or irresponsibility would be tolerated in this regards. He said the government is not thinking about the next election, but about the next generation, adding that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's power projects are a key part of this long-term vision. Meanwhile, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi on Sunday ordered an immediate inquiry into the removal

of children from Zamung Kor, a model institute established for orphaned and underprivileged children. The chief minister paid a surprise visit to the institute, where he met the children and administration and issued on-the-spot directives. He instructed the authorities to ensure the provision of hygiene kits, installation of cameras in classrooms and immediate recruitment of required teaching staff. Afridi also approved the establishment of a complaint cell for children and announced that the provincial government would bear the fees of students enrolled in private colleges. He directed the digitalization of Zamung Kor's accounts and stipend payment systems, provision of transport facilities and allocation of a special quota for children under the ETEA merit scholarship program. During the visit, the chief minister inspected various sections of the institute, including the girls' campus and reviewed the quality of food being provided. He emphasized that the care and protection of these children is the government's constitutional, moral and humanitarian responsibility, which he will personally oversee.



ISLAMABAD: ICT technician repairing CCTV cameras during maintenance work along Srinagar Highway in the Federal Capital.

## Fuel card system expanded in KP to curb corruption

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has announced the expansion of its fuel card system to all provincial departments, following its initial implementation at the Civil Secretariat. According to official sources, the step was a strategic move designed to curb alleged financial corruption regarding fuel consumption. An official letter has already been dispatched to all provincial departments to ensure compliance across the board. Under the new regulations, fuel cards will be governed by specific limits to prevent unauthorized private use of government vehicles. These cards will facilitate the supply of petrol or diesel only through designated companies. Once the assigned limit on a card is exhausted, no officer will be permitted to increase fuel allotment for their vehicle without explicit government orders, ensuring a more transparent and controlled distribution of resources. A formal policy has already been finalized for high-ranking officials, including Secretaries, Deputy Secretaries, and Additional Secretaries, while a similar framework is currently being prepared for officers in other departments. However, the system does not apply to all roles; fuel cards will not be issued to certain administrative and law enforcement positions, including Deputy Commissioners, Assistant Commissioners, Inspector General (IG), and District Police Officers (DPOs).—APP

## Free SIMs distributed to 2.4m BISP beneficiaries in Punjab

MUZAFFARGARH: Director General Benazir Income Support Programme Punjab, Haider Murtaza, stated that free SIMs have so far been distributed to around 2.4 million BISP beneficiaries across Punjab, which accounts for 49 percent of the total target, ensuring complete transparency in the process. He shared these remarks while speaking to media representatives during his visit to SIM Distribution Centers in Muzaffargarh city, where he reviewed the ongoing SIM distribution process for registered beneficiaries. During the visit, the director general inspected operational arrangements, beneficiary

facilitation measures, and overall service delivery at the centers. He interacted with women beneficiaries, listened to their concerns, and closely observed the service delivery process to ensure that assistance was being provided in a smooth and respectful manner. Haider Murtaza also reviewed the Digital Financial Literacy Training being imparted to beneficiaries at the centers. He highlighted that this training aims to help beneficiaries understand the proper use of SIMs and wallet accounts. He further explained that wallet accounts are being opened on these SIMs and that, in the future, all BISP

payments will be disbursed through these wallet accounts to ensure secure, convenient, and timely access for beneficiaries. He added that this initiative will play an important role in making women independent and empowered in society. The director general clearly instructed women beneficiaries that these SIMs are absolutely free of cost and no money should be given to anyone under any circumstances. He emphasized that social protection wallets are being entrusted to women as a responsibility, which they must safeguard with utmost care.—APP

## Huge quantity of phosphate seized in Abbottabad

DNA

ABBOTTABAD: The district administration has intensified its crackdown against illegal mining in Abbottabad, seizing around 100 tons of illegally extracted phosphate and taking machinery and vehicles into custody. According to official sources, the action was carried out on the directives of Deputy Commissioner Abbottabad Sarmad Saleem Akram. Assistant Commissioner Abbottabad Afrasiab Zubair Hundal, along with the Additional Director Mines (Technical and Surveillance) and officials of Mangal Police Station, conducted an inspection of the Tarnai mining area. During the visit, two machines were found operational in Block-IV despite the fact that the relevant mining lease had expired nearly three months ago. Authorities also found that minerals were being transported without proper covering, resulting in severe dust pollution and spillage on roads, creating environmental and public safety concerns. Drivers and workers were found operating without safety gear, including masks and gloves, and in violation of standard operating procedures (SOPs). As part of the operation, the administration seized the machinery involved and impounded 25 vehicles, initiating legal proceedings against those responsible. Officials stated that the district administration will continue indiscriminate action against illegal mining, environmental pollution, and activities causing inconvenience to the public, in line with the provincial government's public agenda and good governance roadmap.

## Nurses' leadership key to improving patient care standards'

LAHORE: Nurses play a pivotal role in instilling hope and providing continuous care to patients, said Principal of Ameer-ud-Din Medical College, Prof. Dr. Muhammad Farooq Afzal. He made the remarks while addressing a Nursing Leadership Workshop organized under the Nursing Faculty Development Program at the College of Nursing, AMC/LGH, on Sunday. Prof. Afzal noted that the nursing profession has rapidly evolved, with nurses now contributing to improved patient care through specialization, research, and leadership. He emphasized that nursing services form a fundamental pillar of healthcare, and, in line with Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif's vision, strengthening nursing

leadership and providing world-class training was a top institutional priority. The workshop was attended by Program Director Dr. Saira Zeeshan, Principal College of Nursing Samrah Naz Kanwal, DCNS Fazilat Lal, NS Saima Fatah, Nursing Supervisor Naseem Akhlaq, nursing instructors Shehnaz Dar and Ramzan Bibi, faculty members, nursing officers, and students. Dr. Saira Zeeshan said the workshop aimed to enhance the capacities of nursing faculty, align them with professional standards, and prepare them for leadership roles in healthcare. Sessions featured lectures by Dr. Naseem Rafiq, Principal Shalimar College of Nursing, and Dr. Nazia Ilyas, Principal College of Nursing, University of Child

Health Sciences Lahore, focusing on leadership, teamwork, and effective communication. Participants described the sessions as highly beneficial, expressing confidence that the training would enhance decision-making, leadership skills, and overall patient care. Prof. Dr. Farooq Afzal told the media that the Faculty Development Program would be further expanded to enable nurses to elevate patient care standards globally. He added that such initiatives would create new opportunities in research, leadership, and professional development, directly benefiting patients. "A strong nursing system is the backbone and guarantee of an effective healthcare system," he concluded.—APP

## SNGPL improves gas supply through mod tech: GM

MULTAN: General Manager Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) Ahmed Jawad Khan has said that the company is ensuring safe and reliable gas supply to consumers while improving service delivery through modern technology to make it more transparent and user-friendly. Talking to APP, he said that domestic consumers were given priority in gas supply and load management during winter was kept relatively balanced to minimize inconvenience. He said that old and dilapidated gas pipelines were being replaced in phases, resulting in a significant reduction in gas leakage incidents and emergency situations. Under various development initiatives, Rs 83 million were spent on new TBS installations, operational phases and system upgradation, which helped resolve low-pressure issues in areas, including Gross Mandi, Zakariya Town, Naqshband Colony and Hassanabad. Ahmed Jawad Khan further informed that 1,200 points were rerouted from main sewerage holes, leading to a substantial decline in water-related complaints in gas lines. He said that Rs2.286 billion were spent on phased replacement of worn-out pipelines, which resolved low-pressure issues for around 50,000 households and also helped reduce system losses. Highlighting digital initiatives, the general manager said that consumers could now view and pay their gas bills online and lodge complaints through online platforms and email alerts, eliminating the need for repeated visits to SNGPL offices. Speaking about future development targets for Multan region, he said that projects worth Rs83 million would be executed to further improve gas pressure in Multan and adjoining areas. He added that special focus would be given to ensuring uninterrupted gas supply to industrial consumers to support economic activities. Regarding gas theft control, Ahmed Jawad Khan said that special inspection and enforcement teams were actively working in the field. So far, 883 raids have been conducted, 22 MMCF of gas theft detected and Rs27 million recovered, while action against illegal compressors and connections was continuing. On issuance of new gas meters, he said that meters were being provided in accordance with available gas resources and merit, with priority given to domestic consumers. He added that an online system had been introduced to ensure transparency in the gas connection process.—DNA

## Malam Jabba emerges as skier's paradise, awaits digital projection

Experts believed that tourism is not just about leisure but livelihoods for people of Swat

MINGORA: As the first rays of winter sunlight touched the snow-covered slopes of Malam Jabba on Sunday, 25-year-old Faraz Ali stood quietly for a moment, breathing in the crisp mountain fresh air. Moments later, laughter replaced his nervous excitement as he slid down the slope for the very first time, which is a memory he says he will carry forever. "I came here with my friends from Nowshera just to try skiing," Faraz told APP, his cheeks flushed from both cold and excitement. "I had seen skiing only in videos. Experiencing it myself in Malam Jabba feels amazing. Such beauty needs digital projection to attract skiers from national and international world." Faraz is one of hundreds of first-time skiers who flocked to the picturesque hill resort after heavy snowfall blanketed the area on start of new year. From beginners cautiously finding their balance to seasoned skiers gliding effortlessly, Malam Jabba has transformed into a lively winter playground where joy echoes across white slopes. Throughout the day, the sun played hide-and-seek with drifting clouds, casting shifting

shadows on the snow and enhancing the valley's magical charm. Friends and families gathered near the slopes, children built snowmen, and visitors paused frequently to capture photos of pine trees standing tall under thick layers of snow. Nested in the Koh-e-Hindukush range at an altitude of 2,804 meters, Malam Jabba is Pakistan's largest ski resort, boasting two ski tracks stretching over 800 meters. Known for skiing, snowboarding, ice hockey, and curling, the resort has steadily grown into a symbol of winter adventure tourism in the country. But Malam Jabba is more than just sports. The gentle chirping of birds, snow-laden forests, and distant mountain peaks create a setting that feels almost untouched. Tourists arrive not only for adventure, but also for peace while couples on honeymoon walks, families enjoying warm meals, and travelers savoring the region's famous brown trout fish beside crackling fires. "This place has something very special," said Salahuddin Sheikh, a visitor from Kohat district. "I have visited Murree and

Chitral, but the snowfall and skiing experience here feels more intense and natural." He smiled as he spoke about sharing freshly cooked trout with his family after a long day in the snow amid cold breeze arriving from Malam Jabba hills. The trout fish, snowfall, paragliding, skiing, chapli kabab and river rafting make Swat ideal winter tourists destination of Pakistan, he said. The snowfall has also revived tourism across Swat's other scenic destinations, including Miandam, Matiltan, Utror, Gabral, and Loye Sar, drawing visitors from Peshawar, Mardan, Lahore, Rawalpindi, Islamabad, and beyond. Improved road connectivity through the Swat Motorway has made access easier, encouraging weekend travelers and families to explore the region. Property dealer Riaz Khan, a frequent visitor to Swat, described Malam Jabba's winter beauty as unmatched. "I have traveled to many countries, but I have not seen such a blend of accessibility, natural beauty, snowfall, and peaceful environment in one place," he said.—APP

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

JANUARY

Jan 01 / CUBA  
Revolution Day

Jan 01 / Palestine  
Palestine Revolution Day

Jan 01 / Sudan  
National Day

Jan 04 / Myanmar  
Independence Day

Jan 06 / Iraq  
Armed Forces Day

Jan 12 / Tanzania  
Armed Forces Day

Jan 14 / Uzbekistan  
Armed Forces Day

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Armed Forces Day

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Jan 20 / Laos  
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Potohar Town.....9209224

Rawal Town.....5773343

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480



ISLAMABAD: Motorists on their way at Murree Motorway, in the Federal Capital, as the plastic safety wall installing for protecting commuters. – Online

# Education Ministry expands NAT to private sector

The initiative will be implemented by the Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE) with technical support from the American Institutes for Research (AIR)

ISLAMABAD: Private schools across the country are set to be included in the National Achievement Test (NAT) for the first time in 2026, following a decision by the Federal Ministry of Education and Professional Training. The move broadens the scope of the NAT, which has traditionally covered public sector institutions, and aims to provide a more comprehensive picture of student performance nationwide. In addition to the expanded NAT, the Ministry will launch

Pakistan's first-ever National Foundational Learning Assessment to gauge early learning outcomes at the national level. Briefing the media, Federal Secretary for Education Nadeem Mahbub stated that the Ministry has aligned the national assessment framework with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) indicators. This alignment aims to generate credible and comparable evidence on learning quality to fulfill international reporting commitments.

Mahbub said the National Achievement Test will be administered at Grades 5 and 8, covering schools across all provinces and regions. He noted that the inclusion of private institutions will ensure a more comprehensive and representative picture of student learning outcomes nationwide. Over 20,000 students will be assessed under the NAT 2026 and the National Foundational Learning Study through a scientific sampling process to ensure

validity. Highlighting the context, the Secretary noted that the NAT 2023 results had revealed a "serious learning crisis," prompting the Prime Minister to declare an Education Emergency. "It is the shared responsibility of federal and provincial governments to bring out-of-school children back and address their learning needs," he added. The initiative will be implemented by the Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE) with technical support from the American Institutes for Research (AIR).

# ‘One Health’ framework finalized to tackle AMR

ISLAMABAD: Public health experts, environmental scientists, and veterinary specialists have finalized a comprehensive policy 'Working Paper' after a series of intensive technical sessions, urging immediate institutional reforms to counter the growing threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in Pakistan. The consensus was reached during a policy dialogue organized by the Health Services Academy (HSA), where experts unanimously agreed that adopting the "One Health" approach is inevitable to prevent future pandemics. The working paper specifically recommends the institutionalization of One Health, the establishment of an 'Integrated Surveillance System' to detect diseases shared by humans and animals, and the enforcement of an effective and strict regulatory framework to curb the misuse of antibiotics. Addressing the inaugural session, Federal Minister for Health, Syed

Mustafa Kamal, termed the One Health approach a significant milestone for national health security. He remarked that human health is intrinsically linked with animal health and the environment. The Federal Minister assured that the government would adopt the One Health framework and, in light of the technical experts' recommendations, introduce strict regulatory measures to prevent the unnecessary use of antibiotics, thereby strengthening Pakistan's preparedness against disease outbreaks. Discussing the implementation of these technical recommendations, Vice Chancellor of the Health Services Academy, Prof. Dr. Shahzad Ali Khan, stated that the Academy has already begun translating the policy into action. He informed that, in response to the experts' call for a specialized response mechanism, a 'One Health Secretariat' has been established, and the formation of a formal 'One Health Workforce' is underway. He further

added that the training of the first batch of frontline workers has commenced to ensure that trained human resources are available to execute the cross-sectoral collaboration proposed in the working paper. Providing the technical basis for the working paper's recommendations, National Coordinator for One Health, Prof. Dr. Tariq Mahmood Ali, noted that AMR is a present reality that caused approximately 1.27 million deaths globally in 2019. He warned that if the strategic measures proposed in the working paper are not taken, the global GDP could suffer a loss of US\$3.4 trillion annually by 2030, and AMR-related deaths could exceed 39 million by 2050. He particularly emphasized the need for legislation in the livestock sector, pointing out that 70 to 80 percent of antimicrobials worldwide are used in food-producing animals, which is a major cause of the spread of resistance.—APP

# NHMP provides emergency aid to over 18,000 travellers

The report reaffirmed that the National Highways and Motorway Police remains committed to the uniform enforcement of law and the highest standards of public service, adding that ensuring safe, secure, and respectable travel facilities for citizens remains its top priority.

ISLAMABAD: The National Highways and Motorway Police (NHMP) on Sunday released its performance report for the year 2025, highlighting extensive public service, road safety initiatives, and enforcement measures aimed at ensuring safe and dignified travel for citizens. According to the report, the Motorway Police provided emergency assistance and timely medical aid to over 18,000 travellers during the year, while more than 5.4 million people were guided through the toll-free helpline 130. As part of its facilitation services, the NHMP issued 18,500 driving licences, 103 CE category licences, and 1,480 international driving permits. To promote awareness about safe driving, the Motorway Police organised 2,674 road safety programmes across the country. During patrols, lost valuables recovered during journeys – including

gold jewellery, 186 mobile phones, 48 wallets and 331 other valuable items – were traced and returned to their rightful owners. The report further stated that 48 stolen and 17 non-custom-paid vehicles were recovered and handed over to the relevant authorities and owners. As many as 169 missing children were safely reunited with their families, while 70 dangerous criminals were apprehended and handed over to the concerned district police. During enforcement operations, the NHMP recovered 29 illegal weapons, 1,349 rounds of ammunition, 309 kilograms of narcotics, 2,450 litres of liquor and more than 10,000 cartons of non-custom-paid cigarettes, which were handed over to law enforcement agencies. Additionally, seven smuggling attempts and six robbery incidents were foiled. In terms of

traffic enforcement, over 13.2 million challans were issued for violations of traffic laws. During campaigns against serious violations and over-speeding, FIRs were registered against more than 11,000 drivers. A total of 690 traffic accidents were reported during the year, including 349 fatal and 341 non-fatal incidents. The NHMP said its social media team and FM-95 radio station continued to keep commuters informed about road safety and traffic conditions, while monthly open courts (khuli katcheries) were also held to address public grievances. The report reaffirmed that the National Highways and Motorway Police remains committed to the uniform enforcement of law and the highest standards of public service, adding that ensuring safe, secure, and respectable travel facilities for citizens remains its top priority.—APP

# 8 lawbreakers held, narcotics, weapons seized

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police have arrested eight lawbreakers and recovered narcotics and illegal weapons during an ongoing crackdown across the federal capital to protect citizens' lives and property. An official told APP on Sunday that police teams from Karachi Company, Kohsar, Tarnol and Humak police stations arrested five accused and recovered 15 litres of liquor and five pistols along with ammunition from their possession. Separate cases have been registered against the arrested suspects, while further investigation is under way. The official said that during a special campaign launched to arrest proclaimed offenders and court absconders, three wanted criminals were also apprehended from different areas of the city SSP Investigation Muhammad Usman Tariq Bhutta said that Islamabad Police are fully committed to maintaining peace and ensuring the safety of citizens in the federal capital. He stressed that no one would be allowed to disturb law and order.—APP

# Chief Drill Instructor honored on retirement

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police honored Deputy Chief Drill Instructor Sher Muhammad on his retirement after completing 41 years of dedicated service marked by discipline, professionalism and commitment to duty. A police official told APP on Sunday that a graceful farewell ceremony was held at the Capital Police College to acknowledge his outstanding contributions to the force. The ceremony was attended by DIG Law and Order/Training Malik Jameel Zafar as the chief guest, along with senior police officers, instructors and staff members. The official said DIG Jameel and other senior officers warmly welcomed the retiring officer and paid rich tribute to his long and distinguished service. While addressing the ceremony, speakers praised Sher Muhammad's sincere and professional career, saying he set exemplary standards in drill, discipline and training throughout his service. They said his services would always be remembered as a guiding example for Islamabad Police, especially for young officers undergoing professional training. DIG Jameel extended best wishes to the retiring officer for his future life and said the police department would always value and remember his contributions to strengthening training standards in ICT Police. On the occasion, commemorative gifts were presented to Deputy Chief Drill Instructor Sher Muhammad in recognition of his 41 years of devoted service to the force.—APP

# AIOU Sindh chapter convocation held

ISLAMABAD :The Convocation of Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) Sindh Chapter was held at Bahria Auditorium Karsaz in Karachi on Sunday. Chief Minister of Sindh, Syed Murad Ali Shah was the chief guest of the ceremony, while the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood hosted the event. The convocation was attended by all four deans of the university, faculty members, principal officers, heads of AIOU regional offices across Sindh, representatives of various educational institutions and prominent social figures, said a press release here on Sunday. Addressing the ceremony, Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah said that former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's academic association with AIOU was clear evidence of the institution's greatness and prestige. He stated that Shaheed Benazir Bhutto had been a student of this university which is a source of pride not only for the university but for the entire nation. He further said that Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto envisioned establishing an educational institution that could deliver education to the common citizen. At that time, Allama Iqbal Open University was among the world's early open universities and today distance education has become a global reality, he added. On this occasion, Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood in his address said that Allama Iqbal Open University is providing quality and reliable educational services in Sindh. He informed that the number of the University's students in Sindh has now exceeded 120,000 which was clear evidence of public trust. He expressed his commitment to further expanding the university's network in Karachi and other parts of Sindh and to establishing new model study centers so that students in remote areas may also have access to quality educational facilities. At the end of the convocation, degrees were awarded to successful male and female students, while participants highly appreciated the splendid organization of the ceremony and the excellent arrangements.—DNA

# Chilly weather engulfs Murree, Pindi

RAWALPINDI: The cold weather in northern Punjab is at its peak, particularly in the hilly and beloved hill station Murree as for locals and the touring lot alike, the chilly air has invoked hot coffee, spicy soups and the rejoicing winter outing. In Rawalpindi, the temperature remained low during the weekend, compelling the majority to remain in duvets during present clear but continuous cloudy days. Evenings on the weekend remained cooled to as low as 10 celsius, very conducive for an evening travel to Murree with family or friends No rain is in sight for the next few days as reported by the MET Office, which has furthered the tourists' flocking to the hills. For tourists heading to Murree, this is prime time to experience the magic of Pakistan's winter hills. Whether you are in Pindi or away, the light snowfall of Murree invites you to enjoy nature. The PMD forecasts very cold and dry conditions in the hill station and surrounding Galiyat areas, where temperature is currently ranging between 0 °C to 2 °C during the sun, and nights with minimum temperatures dipping between -2C and 1C. Dense fog is spreading at the plains of the province, the PMD warns of moderate to dense fog that is likely to form during early mornings and late evenings. Looking further into the week, the MET department expects the continuation of cold weather trends. Traveling via motorways and linking main arteries, the National Highways and Motorways Police (NH&MP) have also released travel advisory as dense fog always leads to roadside accidents. A spokesman of NH&MP confirmed APP about continued vigilance and appropriate responses to the developing fog situation on motorways and highways. He said partially halt on commutes has been made for limited time on scattered areas, particularly at northern fronts of Punjab. "However Pindi-Murree route is clear for travel with safty measures", he said. Murree administration is equally rendering their guiding and rescuing services through established service centers. Seamless traffic flow, alertness of 1122 emergency service and monitoring are fully operative in Murree, reflecting a coordinates mechanism at the touring place of Murree. —DNA



## Briefs

**RCCI President lauds launch of Karachi-Dhaka direct flights**

DNA

RAWALPINDI: President, Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce & Industry (RCCI), Mr. Usman Shaukat, has warmly welcomed the launch of direct flights between Karachi and Dhaka, terming it a landmark development for strengthening Pakistan-Bangladesh economic ties, bilateral trade, and people-to-people connectivity. Mr. Usman Shaukat recalled that during the Pakistan-Bangladesh Business & Tourism Opportunities Conference held in Dhaka in September, RCCI had strongly advocated the restoration of direct air connectivity between the two countries. He noted that the same demand was reiterated during his visit to the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry (DCCI) on the sidelines of the conference, in the presence of DCCI President Mr. Taskeen Ahmed and members of the Board. Coordinator to the Prime Minister on Commerce, Mr. Ihsaan Afzal Khan, was also present during the RCCI-DCCI networking session, underscoring the importance of government-to-government and chamber-level engagement. The RCCI President emphasized that direct flights have been a longstanding demand of the business community, as improved connectivity is vital to facilitate bilateral trade, strengthen business-to-business collaboration, promote tourism, and deepen cultural and people-to-people linkages between Pakistan and Bangladesh.

**Pak develops Basmati rice variety with longest-ever grain**

ISLAMABAD: Scientists at the Rice Research Institute (RRI) have developed a new Basmati rice variety featuring the longest grain ever recorded in Pakistan, measuring 9.66mm. "Sultan Super Basmati, developed in 2025, has a grain length of 9.66mm, the longest so far in Pakistan's rice varietal spectrum," Dr Usman Saleem, Senior Scientist at the RRI, Kala Shah Kaku, told Wealth Pakistan. He said the cooked grain of Sultan Super Basmati attains a length of up to 20mm, a rare trait that enhances its appeal in international markets. Earlier, in 2023, the institute had developed Sona Super Basmati, which held the record with a grain length of 9.5mm. Prior to that, Kainat Basmati was considered the longest-grain variety in Pakistan, measuring 8.26mm. However, scientists note that Kainat is not a pure Basmati line but rather a fine rice variety with Basmati-like aroma. Sultan Super Basmati has a yield potential of up to 77 maunds per acre, significantly higher than the average yield of around 45 maunds per acre achieved by existing varieties. Dr Saleem said the new variety possesses a strong and typical Basmati aroma and superior cooking qualities. "It cooks evenly and maintains excellent grain elongation. Although it is a slightly late-sown variety, it matures around the same time as other commonly grown Basmati types," he added. —DNA

# First organic market organized in Islamabad

Chairman CDA said that by organizing such successful markets, we are not only laying the foundation for a healthy society but are also encouraging citizens towards the positive and responsible use of green spaces. He further said that we intend to organize similar healthy markets in various areas of the Federal Capital, Islamabad, so that more citizens can benefit.

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Taking a significant step towards promoting a healthy lifestyle among citizens in the Federal Capital, Islamabad Metropolitan Corporation (MCI) successfully organized the first Organic Market in F-7 Park on Saturday. It is important to note that this market was not just a shopping center but also proved to be a platform for healthy living and community bonding. Set against the backdrop of pleasant winter sunshine, the market enhanced the park's natural beauty. Stalls offering natural, chemical-free, fresh and healthy food items and products attracted citizens. Special activities for children and families were also arranged at the market, making it a beautiful blend of recreation and health. A total of 20 selected vendors set up their stalls at the market, which included fresh fruits and vegetables, homemade bakery items, delicacies prepared by artisans and high-quality cheese. Citizens greatly appreciated these natural products and enjoyed shopping, preferring them as a healthy alternative. On this occasion, citizens also praised the initiative, saying that such health-conscious efforts and fresh products doubled the enjoyment of shopping. Consumers said that the availability of such healthy



and quality products is an excellent initiative. The arrangement of the first organic market emphasized a healthy environment, well organized layout, soft music and strict implementation of a 'Zero Littering Policy.' Citizens were urged to pay special attention to keeping the park clean. Chief Officer of the Islamabad Metropolitan Corporation (MCI), Dr. Anam Fatima, said that this initiative is part of our effort to promote parks as shared community spaces. She added that this first organic market has proven to be a successful experience, showing that citizens are increasingly adopting awareness regarding a healthy lifestyle and quality products. She further said that the CDA and MCI intend to continue such initiatives in the future. On this occasion, Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, said that this market is also a means of providing our citizens access to healthy products in their nearest places. Chairman CDA said that by organizing such successful markets, we are not only laying the foundation for a healthy society but are also encouraging citizens towards the positive and responsible use of green spaces. He further said that we intend to organize similar healthy markets in various areas of the Federal Capital, Islamabad, so that more citizens can benefit.

**ICCI tells graduates modern skills key to job success**

ISLAMABAD: President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), while talking to a group of fresh graduates who visited the Chamber to interact with its leadership, emphasized that acquiring modern, market-relevant skills is essential for professional success in today's highly competitive environment. He said that traditional qualifications alone are no longer sufficient, and graduates must equip themselves with digital, technical, entrepreneurial and soft skills that are in demand both locally and globally. He stressed that Pakistan's youth is a great asset and, if properly skilled, can play a decisive role in strengthening the national economy.

The ICCI President highlighted that the Chamber is fully committed to facilitating youth development and is actively fostering linkages with universities and the National Vocational & Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC) to bridge the gap between academia and industry. He underlined the urgent need to transform academic syllabi in line with industry requirements, so that graduates are job-ready and capable of contributing effectively from day one.

Speaking on the occasion, Senior Vice President (SVP) shared his vision for creating stronger academia-industry collaboration, stating that continuous engagement between educational institutions and the private sector is vital for aligning skills with real-world business needs. —DNA

**Police conduct search, combing operations across Islamabad**

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory Police carried out search and combing operations in various areas of the federal capital under the supervision of zonal superintendents of police to curb crime and ensure public safety. A public relations officer told APP on Sunday that lady police personnel also took part in the operations, while officers briefed the deployed force in detail before launching the drive. During the search operations, police teams checked 277 individuals, 200 houses, and 30 shops in different localities. In addition, 116 motorcycles and 39 vehicles were inspected during checking. The officer said that, for verification and further inquiry, 23 suspicious persons, 27 motorcycles and four vehicles were shifted to police stations. APP

## Pakistani public Goodwill toward China strengthens: IIRMR

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A research report published by Institute of International Relations and Media Research (IIRMR) has found that Pakistani public goodwill toward China has strengthened markedly between 2015 and 2025, with respondents crediting CPEC-linked development, improved security, and increased social interaction for the shift. Authored by Dr Hassan Siddique, a communications specialist at the World Bank's Punjab Green Development Programme and a senior executive official of the Institute of International Relations and Media Research, the study examined how public perceptions evolved before and after CPEC's implementation till 2025, Gwadar Pro reported. The report investigated two core questions: how Pakistanis viewed China prior 2015 and how those views changed after a decade of corridor projects till 2025. Using a quantitative approach, the researchers surveyed respondents from government, the establishment, business, academia, media,

cultural circles, think tanks, religious groups, civil society, and the general public. Closed-ended items measured attitudes across economic, social, and strategic dimensions, while statistical comparisons and visualisations tracked shifts in sentiment. The research findings showed that Pakistanis entered the CPEC era with already favourable views, shaped by longstanding diplomatic cooperation and defence ties. Before 2015, China was largely seen as a steadfast political and strategic ally, though with limited presence in day-to-day economic life. Expectations at the time centred on China eventually assuming a more active developmental role.

The study reported that perceptions improved further after visible CPEC outcomes, particularly in infrastructure, transport links, and connectivity. Respondents highlighted ease of doing business, enhanced security, and increased social interaction between Chinese and Pakistani workers as key contributors. Cultural exchange and routine workplace cooperation were cited as elements that elevated trust and made the corridor a people-centred undertaking.

According to the authors, performance and delivery were the most decisive opinion drivers, while media exposure and people-to-people contact served as secondary reinforcements. The report concluded that Pakistani goodwill toward China is closely tied to tangible outcomes, transparency, and clear communication of shared goals. The authors noted that CPEC's ongoing expansion and its social spillovers are likely to continue shaping public attitudes, with future perception trends depending on project continuity and economic impact. Beyond geopolitics, enhanced exchange among religious groups, think tanks, and the bureaucracy (civil, military, and judicial), besides cultural and educational exchanges, has also played a critical role in shaping these perceptions. The trend of learning the Chinese language has evolved from a cultural curiosity into a strategic economic and educational necessity within the context of CPEC. The findings showed that Pakistani students and professionals increasingly view Chinese language proficiency as a tool for career advancement, academic mobility, and cross-border collaboration.

## Women, kids lead New Year celebration at Gwadar's Beach Park

ISLAMABAD: With colorful celebrations and family-friendly activities, residents of Gwadar welcomed the New Year at Model Beach Park, marking the start of 2026 with music, cultural events, and fireworks. The event was held under the auspices of the Gwadar Development Authority (GDA) in collaboration with the locally run Baloch Insight Café, drawing large crowds, especially women and children, to the women-focused park, according to Gwadar Pro. The celebration included musical performances, creative cultural activities, and interactive games organized for women and children. The festivities culminated in a fireworks display that lit up the night sky, with attendees cheering and applauding performances by local youth musicians and artists. Participants said such events not only bring joy but also promote social harmony, cultural awareness, and positive community engagement. The gathering was aimed at welcoming the New Year with renewed hope for progress, prosperity, peace, and stability in the region. Model Beach Park, developed by the GDA as Gwadar's only dedicated recreational space for women and children, aims to provide a secure and peaceful environment for families to relax and enjoy outdoor activities. The initiative has received wide public appreciation as a step toward creating inclusive social spaces in the rapidly developing port city. A highlight of the park, and the New Year's event, was the Baloch Insight Café, a venture established by three local women entrepreneurs that has become a popular social spot. The café, regarded as one of the first female-run eateries in Gwadar's public spaces, serves as a hub for women to socialize and pursue economic opportunities. Its founders say the café reflects a broader effort to empower women through entrepreneurship and community engagement. Women's growing participation is increasingly visible across Gwadar, not only in community spaces such as the Baloch Insight Café, but also in higher education, where a considerable number of female students are now enrolled across departments at the University of Gwadar. —DNA

## CDA capital emergency service releases 2025 report

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Capital Emergency Service, operating under the leadership and strategic directives of Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) Muhammad Ali Randhawa, successfully ensured the protection of citizens' lives and property by responding to a total of 16,190 emergency calls during the year 2025. According to the annual performance data released by Dr. Abdur Rahman, Director General of Capital Emergency Service, the department maintained a high level of operational readiness to provide timely intervention across various emergency categories throughout the federal capital.

The annual report reveals that medical emergency services faced the highest volume of calls, accounting for 11,081 of the total incidents. This significant workload included responding to 5,511 road traffic accidents (RTC), providing general medical assistance in 5,181 cases, and attending to 300 incidents related to falls and slips. These figures underscore the critical role the service plays in the city's daily healthcare and safety infrastructure. In the field of fire safety and rescue, the department managed 3,914 fire-related calls and numerous specialized rescue operations. Firefighters successfully controlled 634 forest and green area fires, 396 building fires, 180 incidents caused by short circuits, 93 vehicle fires, and 278 garbage fires.

## GPA ensures uninterrupted MGD desalination plant operations

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Gwadar Port Authority (GPA) has issued a public tender for the procurement of critical chemicals for its 1.2-million-gallon-per-day (MGD) desalination plant as part of efforts to ensure uninterrupted operations of the facility, a cornerstone of the city's drinking water system. Bids for the chemicals will be accepted through 11 a.m. on Jan. 5, with submissions scheduled to be opened at 11:30 a.m. the same day, as per the notice, Gwadar Pro reported. Developed under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the desalination plant has emerged as a backbone of Gwadar's water supply, particularly after its restoration to full operation in 2025 helped stabilize supplies during last year's prolonged dry spell. The Gwadar Development Authority (GDA) has designated the facility as a permanent component of the city's daily water-supply network and a key safeguard against shortages during periods of low rainfall. The plant has maintained steady production since it was fully operationalised last year,

as reflected in recent output figures, including 915,000 gallons on Jan. 1; 535,000 gallons on Jan. 2; and 1,069 million gallons on Dec. 31. The plant was completed and inaugurated on December 4, 2023, following a project implementation agreement signed on July 5, 2021, according to the official CPEC website. The site says the project, built with Chinese support, cost \$12.7 million to deliver up to 1.2 million gallons of potable water daily to Gwadar city and port, easing pressure on dam storage and tanker-supplied sources. A recent GDA report on water management noted that the reverse-osmosis facility has played a "backbone-like role" in providing drinking water to old Gwadar town and boosting the city's resilience against recurring shortages linked to climate-driven dry spells. In a parallel government push to secure reliable power for the facility and other critical infrastructure, Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Prof. Ahsan Iqbal on December 4 ordered the fast-track implementation of solarisation for Gwadar's desalination plant and pumping stations, along with 132 kV grid-stability upgrades, to tackle the port city's longstanding electricity and water shortages.

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## Venezuela could now define Trump’s legacy - and America’s place in the world

ANTHONY ZURCHER

AFTER launching a night of shock and awe in Venezuela, Donald Trump now appears to be getting into the nation-building business. In a remarkable press conference at his Mar-a-Lago resort on Saturday morning, the president announced that US forces had successfully captured Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife in an overnight raid in Caracas. Then Trump said a team that included Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth, working with Venezuelans, would be taking control of the beleaguered nation. “We are going to run the country until such time as we can do a safe, proper and judicious transition,” he said. What exactly “running the country” actually means is unclear, but the pledge represents an abrupt change of course for the president, rife with contradictions and daunting obstacles. A president who campaigned against “forever wars”, who sharply criticised past US efforts at regime change and who promised to implement an “America first” foreign policy is now staking his presidency on successfully reconstructing a South American nation whose economy is in shambles and whose political stability has been undermined by decades of dictatorship. He said his administration has a “perfect track record of winning” – and that this would be no different. He pledged to recruit American energy companies to rebuild Venezuela’s crumbling industrial infrastructure, providing funds for the American reconstruction efforts and benefitting the Venezuelan people. He declined to rule out deploying American soldiers to Venezuela to advance these efforts. “We’re not afraid of boots on the ground...we had boots on the ground last night,” he told reporters. Trump, a sharp critic of the US invasion of Iraq, will now have to heed the words of one of the American architects of the Iraq War, Secretary of State Colin Powell, “If you break it, you own it.” Trump entered office nearly a year ago promising to be a peacemaker, but over the past year he has demonstrated that he is more than willing to use military force around the globe. In the past week, he ordered air strikes on Syria and Nigeria. In 2025, he targeted nuclear facilities in Iran, suspected

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drug-trafficking boats in the Caribbean, rebel forces in Yemen, armed groups in Somalia and Islamic militants in Iraq. Unlike the past actions, which have largely involved missiles and aircraft that reduce the exposure of American forces to harm, Trump’s Venezuela strike – and his commitments to the future of that nation – are notably different. His goal, he said during his press conference, is to “make Venezuela great again”. Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene, a former Trump loyalist who broke with the president after accusing him of abandoning his political base, was quick to condemn the president’s actions on X. “Americans’ disgust with our own government’s never ending military aggression and support of foreign wars is justified because we are forced to pay for it and both parties, Republicans and Democrats, always keep the Washington military machine funded and going,” she wrote. “This is what many in Maga thought they voted to end. Boy were we wrong.” Another prominent Trump critic, Republican Congressman Thomas Massie of Kentucky, contrasted the legal justification for Maduro’s arrest – on weapons and cocaine trafficking charges – with Trump’s explanation that the operation was to reclaim confiscated US oil and stop tetrahydrocannabinol production. Most Republican lawmakers rallied behind the president, with House Speaker Mike Johnson describing the military action against a “criminal regime” as “decisive and justified”. During his press conference, the president said the Venezuelan operation advanced his “America First” priorities because it ensured US regional security and provided a steady source of oil. He dusted off the Monroe Doctrine – an early 19th Century American foreign policy that asserted the Western Hemisphere should be free from influence by European powers – and rebranded it the “Donroe Doctrine”. The action in Venezuela, Trump said, shows that “American dominance in the Western Hemisphere will never be questioned again.” The goal of the new US national security strategy, he said, was to “protect commerce, territory and resources that are core to our national security”. He branded the Western Hemisphere as America’s “home region”. Trump’s decision to capture Maduro will raise larger concerns of global politics, however, and American relations with the world’s other major military powers. The Chinese foreign ministry issued a statement expressing shock and condemning what it said was a reckless attack on a sovereign nation. During the Biden administration, the US offered similar condemnations of Russia following its invasion of Ukraine. Now the Trump administration is trying to broker a peace deal between those two nations – one that has frequently appeared to be more favourable to the Russian side. Don Bacon, a centrist Republican congressman who is retiring at the end of this year, expressed concern about the message Trump’s actions might send. “My main concern is now Russia will use this to justify their illegal and barbaric military actions against Ukraine, or China to justify an invasion of Taiwan.

# US Seizes Venezuela While Iran Erupts in Economic Revolt

Qamar Bashir



Trump went further. He accused Cuba of embedding its personnel within Venezuelan security forces, of sustaining the Maduro system, and of overseeing elements of state control. He called the Cuban government corrupt and incompetent, running an economy in ruins, and he warned that Havana might be next. Argentina was also singled out as a government he described as mismanaged and resistant to American interests. Colombia, too, was placed on notice. Even Greenland was mentioned again in the familiar language of strategic ambition

I N the dark and trembling hours of January 3, 2026, the mighty arms of the United States stretched deep into Caracas, Venezuela, in what President Donald Trump described as the most daring, precise, and coordinated military operation ever mounted in the Western Hemisphere. More than fifteen thousand U.S. ground, air, and naval personnel took part in the strike, moving with breathtaking speed, sealing borders, disabling command networks, neutralizing security systems, and overwhelming any potential resistance before the first rays of dawn touched the capital. By the time the city awoke, the mission was complete. Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife had been captured and removed from Venezuelan soil without significant resistance from the military, intelligence, or political structures that once upheld the regime. Trump declared that Maduro would now face justice in New York under existing federal indictments accusing him of narcotics trafficking, financing cartel activities, and orchestrating the flow of cocaine into the United States – charges U.S. prosecutors had filed years earlier in the Southern District of New York. Trump praised the operation as a triumph of intelligence mastery and overwhelming force, suggesting that every moment of Maduro’s movements and every layer of Venezuela’s security architecture had been mapped and anticipated before the first American boot touched the ground. But what followed in his press conference was more astonishing still. When asked who would now govern Venezuela, President Trump stated bluntly that the United States would run Venezuela – not temporarily in a symbolic sense, but practically, functionally, and administratively – until American oil companies were reimbursed for the assets that had been nationalized, until they had regained operational control, rebuilt production capacity, restored the pipeline grid, and resumed the pumping of oil to full capacity. In other words, Trump declared that the United States would govern Venezuela until U.S. companies had recouped their economic losses and restored the flow of profits and petroleum. Only then, he said, would there be a transition to a Venezuelan-run government. For all intents and purposes,

the United States had not only removed a president – it had taken control of a nation that holds the largest proven oil reserves in the world, greater even than Saudi Arabia’s. This was not framed as humanitarian intervention. This was open, unapologetic economic conquest tied directly to corporate loss and the restitution of American business rights. Trump went further. He accused Cuba of embedding its personnel within Venezuelan security forces, of sustaining the Maduro system, and of overseeing elements of state control. He called the Cuban government corrupt and incompetent, running an economy in ruins, and he warned that Havana might be next. Argentina was also singled out as a government he described as mismanaged and resistant to American interests. Colombia, too, was placed on notice. Even Greenland was mentioned again in the familiar language of strategic ambition. The message was clear and deliberate. If a nation resists U.S. political or economic priorities, if it obstructs American corporate assets, or if it stands in alignment with Washington’s adversaries, it may now face overwhelming military and economic pressure – up to and including regime removal. At the same time, the Middle East trembles. Iran, long sanctioned and squeezed, now faces an internal economic collapse that has pushed people into the streets in more than thirty cities. The Iranian rial has plunged to record lows. Prices for food and basic goods have soared. Salaries have evaporated. Inflation has hollowed out household life. The working poor and middle class alike now carry the unbearable weight of survival. Demonstrations echo across Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz, Mashhad, and beyond. Women remove their hijabs openly on camera as an act of defiance. Chants fill the air. Shops shutter. Traffic stops. Security units respond with force. Arrests multiply. The government insists it will restore order. Yet history quietly whispers that revolutions endure only as long as they provide bread. Since the 1979 revolution, Iran has withstood sanctions, sabotage, cyber-warfare, covert operations, assassinations, and countless diplomatic isolations. But this crisis is different. This crisis lives in the kitchen, the market, the currency exchange, the child’s empty lunchbox, the unpaid electricity bill,

and the father who cannot afford medicine. Economic pain has become political reality. If Iran cannot stabilize its crippled currency, reconnect to global markets, relieve sanctions pressure, and prove to its people that life can improve, then the flames of protest will not vanish. They will deepen. They will harden. They will return again and again. Benjamin Netanyahu has long called Iran an existential threat, urging action and regime change. Trump now echoes a new chorus: the Iranian regime is weakening, faltering, running out of breath. Tehran, meanwhile, insists it remains unbroken. But the truth is simple. No government survives forever on slogans alone. It must feed its people. Against this backdrop, the United Nations appears increasingly sidelined. International law looks fragile. Sovereignty – the sacred shield of nations – now seems conditional on power. When a superpower can enter a sovereign nation, remove its president, place him on a military aircraft, fly him to New York, declare that it will govern that nation until private corporate losses are fully reimbursed, and then warn a list of additional countries that they may be next – the global order has shifted in real time. Two great human stories now run in parallel. Venezuela has been conquered not metaphorically, but administratively and economically under a new form of corporate-military governance. Iran teeters on the brink of internal fracture driven by economic collapse. And Trump has openly declared to Cuba, Argentina, Colombia, and Greenland that they too will face American power if they stand in Washington’s way. The map is being redrawn. Not quietly. But diplomatically. But with microphones, sanctions, indictments, and armies. Let us hope that from these convulsions emerge not only new borders and new alliances, but dignity, prosperity, and justice for the ordinary people whose lives move beneath the gears of great power. Because in the age now dawning, might does not whisper. It speaks in the open. – Press Secretary to the President (Rtd) Former Press Minister, Embassy of Pakistan to France Former Press Attaché to Malaysia Former MD, SRBC Macomb, Michigan, USA

# GCC and the Global Technology Contest

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



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A RECENT report released by the Middle East Institute has drawn attention to a strategic shift that is unfolding quietly but steadily across the Arabian Gulf. Authored by Mohammed Soliman, a senior fellow at the Institute, the study argues that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is no longer a peripheral player in advanced technologies. Instead, it is emerging as a central arena in the intensifying technological competition between the United States and China. At the heart of this argument lies the concept of a collective “GCC AI Stack”: a coordinated framework through which Gulf States can pool resources, infrastructure, regulation and talent to shape their technological future. For years, Washington, Beijing and a handful of East Asian and European capitals, dominated discussions about advanced computing and digital innovation. The Gulf’s role was often reduced to that of an energy supplier or a consumer of imported technologies. This perception is now outdated. With substantial financial reserves, ambitious national visions and a growing appetite for strategic autonomy, Gulf States are positioning themselves as builders rather than buyers of next-generation technological systems. The report highlights that the GCC’s importance is not simply a function of wealth. It stems from a convergence of factors: access to energy at scale, political will to invest in long-term infrastructure and a geographic position that connects Asia, Europe and Africa. Together, these factors make the Gulf uniquely suited to host large-scale computing facilities and data infrastructure that underpin modern technological development. From a geopolitical perspective, this shift carries significant implications. The rivalry between the United States and China is no longer confined to trade tariffs or military deployments. It has expanded into standards-setting, supply chains and control over the tools that will shape future economies. In this contest, computing capacity and digital ecosystems matter as much as aircraft carriers once did. The GCC’s

evolving technology landscape, therefore, becomes a strategic variable rather than a neutral backdrop. One of the report’s central arguments is that Gulf States can act as a force multiplier for American technological capacity. This does not imply subordination or dependency. Rather, it suggests a partnership model in which Gulf investments complement American innovation. The United States retains a lead in research, advanced chips and foundational technologies, but it faces constraints in scaling infrastructure rapidly at home due to regulatory, environmental and political hurdles. The Gulf, by contrast, can move faster in building large facilities and deploying capital, provided there is strategic alignment. This alignment, however, cannot be taken for granted. Gulf States maintain diversified foreign relations and have cultivated economic ties with China over the past two decades. Beijing has been an active partner in infrastructure development, telecommunications and digital services across the Middle East. The report does not frame this as a zero-sum dilemma for the Gulf. Instead, it argues that without a clear and attractive policy pathway from Washington, Gulf capitals will continue to hedge, seeking benefits from both sides. What distinguishes the MEI report is its emphasis on collective action within the GCC. Individual Gulf states have already launched ambitious national initiatives, from Saudi Arabia’s technology-driven Vision 2030 to the United Arab Emirates’ push to become a regional innovation hub. While these efforts are impressive, the report contends that fragmentation limits their strategic impact. A shared framework—covering infrastructure standards, data governance, investment rules and workforce development—would allow the GCC to punch above its collective weight. Such coordination would also reduce duplication and unhealthy competition among Gulf neighbors. Instead of racing to outbid one another for the same projects,

states could specialize within a shared ecosystem. One country might focus on large-scale infrastructure, another on regulatory innovation and a third on talent development. The combined effect would be greater than the sum of its parts. For the United States, the message is equally clear. Engagement with the Gulf on advanced technologies cannot be an afterthought or confined to security dialogues. It requires a coherent policy that treats Gulf partners as stakeholders in a shared technological future. This includes providing clarity on export controls, encouraging joint ventures and investing in people-to-people links such as education and research exchanges. Without such steps, Washington risks ceding influence by default rather than design. At the same time, the report underscores that Gulf States are not merely seeking external validation. Their interest in developing advanced technological capabilities is rooted in domestic imperatives. Economic diversification, job creation for a young population and the need to manage increasingly complex societies all demand more sophisticated tools. Technology is seen not as a luxury but as a necessity for governance and growth in a post-hydrocarbon era. Critically, the report does not ignore the risks. Rapid technological development raises questions about regulation, data protection and social impact. A collective GCC approach could help address these concerns by establishing shared norms and safeguards. It could also provide a platform for dialogue with external partners, ensuring that cooperation is grounded in mutual trust rather than transactional convenience. The broader implication of the MEI study is that the global technology landscape is becoming more multipolar. Power is diffusing not only among states but also across regions that can offer scale, stability and strategic alignment. The Gulf’s rise in this domain reflects a broader trend in which economic and technological agency is no longer monopolized by traditional centers.



## Briefs

## New York Mayor slams US..

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Wars for regime change or oil that are sold as strength but turn into chaos, and American families pay the price," Harris said in a post on X. "The American people do not want this, and they are tired of being lied to. This is not about drugs or democracy. It is about oil," the ex-president remarked. Earlier, the mayor described the US military operation that led to Maduro's capture as "an act of war" and a "blatant pursuit of regime change." In a post on X, Mamdani said he had been briefed on the operation and on plans to detain Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, in federal custody in New York City.

## US Republicans largely...

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the civilized world," Cotton said. "I urge them to choose wisely." Similarly, U.S. Sen. Marsha Blackburn, also a Republican, said she fully supports Trump's actions in Venezuela. "Nicolas Maduro will face justice on American soil," Blackburn said. "I fully support the Trump administration for doing what is needed to protect American lives." The House Republican Chairperson, Republican Congresswoman Lisa McClain, also emphatically backed President Trump's decision-making in a post on social media.

## Four policemen martyred...

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Police have launched a search operation in the area and are investigating the incident. Separately in Bannu, a police constable was martyred after unidentified individuals opened fire in the Mandan area. Police said Constable Rashid Khan came under attack while he was on his way from home to report for duty at Mandan Police Station. The incidents occurred amid a rise in terrorism targeting law enforcement agencies in the country, particularly in the bordering provinces of KP and Balochistan, since the Afghan Taliban took power in Afghanistan in 2021.

## Pak, China reaffirm...

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the commitment to further deepen bilateral ties in the years ahead. The logo reflects the spirit of the "iron-clad" Pakistan-China friendship and represents seven and a half decades of close collaboration, solidarity, and people-to-people exchanges. A series of diplomatic, cultural, and commemorative activities will be organized throughout the year in both countries to celebrate the occasion in a befitting and memorable manner.

## Bangladesh will not...

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India despite being contracted, the entire Bangladeshi cricket team cannot feel safe going to play in the World Cup," he wrote. "I have also instructed the board to request that Bangladesh's World Cup matches should be held in Sri Lanka." Nazrul said he would also ask that the IPL be blocked from Bangladeshi broadcasters.

## China for release of...

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They warned that such actions could destabilize not only Venezuela but also the wider Latin American region. Beijing reiterated its support for Venezuela's independence and urged the international community to oppose what it termed "illegal intervention." The statement also highlighted the importance of dialogue and peaceful resolution of disputes, noting that unilateral measures undermine the principles of the United Nations Charter.

## Rising Stars Hockey Club hosts hockey fiesta, wins first match



SAIFULLAH ANSAR / DNA

ISLAMABAD: Rising Stars Hockey Club Islamabad successfully organized a vibrant Hockey Fiesta featuring a Home & Away series. In the opening phase, Meer Latif Hockey Club Gujranwala visited Islamabad, where an exhilarating and competitive match unfolded between the two sides. Rising Stars Hockey Club Islamabad showcased outstanding skill and determination, clinching

victory with a narrow 3-2 scoreline. Adnan, Asad and Nadeem scored one goal each from the Rising Stars Hockey Club. From Mir Latif club their center forward scored both the goals. The second phase of the series is scheduled for January 10, when Rising Stars will travel to Gujranwala to face Meer Latif Hockey Club on their home turf. To mark the occasion, the Rising Stars management presented commemorative shields to the esteemed guests accompanying the Gujranwala team: Khawaja Zazar Kaleem – Chair-

man, Meer Latif Hockey Club; Former President, Punjab Hockey Association Khawaja Faiq Kaleem – President, Meer Latif Hockey Club; Chairman, Pakistan-Romania Business Council (FPCCI) Allah Ditta Bhatti – Former International Hockey Player; Manager/Coach, Meer Latif Hockey Club Hifz Ur Rehman – Secretary, District Hockey Association (DHA), Gujranwala The Chief Guests of the match were His Excellency Kamal Ahmed Basha, Ambassador of Brunei, and Edward Preda Deputy Head of Mission

from the Romania Embassy. On behalf of Rising Stars Hockey Club, commemorative shields were presented by Patron-in-Chief Asif Masood Bhatti President, Mehmood Ahmed, General Secretary Sohail Akram Janjua, Ex President Ansar Mahmood Bhatti The match was officiated by Wajahat Munir and Imran Akram as umpires. Following the thrilling encounter, a dinner was hosted in honor of both teams and the distinguished guests, celebrating sportsmanship and camaraderie.

## Root, Brook stand passes 150 as England 211-3 in 5th Ashes Test

SYDNEY: Joe Root and Harry Brook shared in an unbroken 154-run partnership on Sunday to rescue England and give them the upper hand at tea on day one of the fifth and final Ashes Test against Australia. Batting after skipper Ben Stokes won the toss at a sold-out Sydney Cricket Ground, they steered the tourists to 211-3 when they went off for bad light with tea called 10 minutes early. Root was not out 72 and Brook on 78, coming together with England tottering at 57-3 after losing Ben Duckett (27), Zak Crawley (16) and Jacob Bethell (10) before lunch. The world's top two-ranked batsmen set about counter-attacking on a decent batting pitch providing little movement for the bowlers, who toiled hard in the second session without joy. Both brought up hard-fought half-centuries and with storm clouds looming, kept the scoreboard ticking over at a fast clip. England came into the game buoyed by a four-wicket win inside two days at the previous Test in Melbourne, desperate to keep the momentum going. It snapped a 15-year winless streak in Australia but came too late to save the series with the hosts retaining the urn by winning in Perth, Brisbane and Adelaide. Australia sprung a surprise by including allrounder Beau Webster in place of quick Jhye Richardson with off-spinner Todd Murphy overlooked. It is the first time in almost 140 years that the hosts have not played a front-line spinner during a Sydney Test. – APP

## Swiss investigate bar managers

CRANS MONTANA: The managers of the Swiss ski resort bar where dozens died during a fire at a New Year's celebration are under investigation for negligent manslaughter, authorities said Saturday. French couple Jacques and Jessica Moretti owned and managed Le Constellation bar in Crans-Montana, which was crammed with young partygoers when a blaze began in a packed basement at around 1:30 am (0030 GMT) on Thursday. Forty people were killed and 119 injured, most of them seriously, according to the latest toll. A criminal investigation has been opened against the bar managers, authorities in the southwestern Swiss canton of Valais said in a statement Saturday. Police also said Saturday that they had so far identified eight Swiss nationals killed in the fire: all under the age of 24, and two of them just 16 years old. – Agencies

## Litton Das to lead Bangladesh T20 World Cup squad

DHAKA: Bangladesh on Sunday named their squad for the T20 World Cup beginning in February, leaving out middle-order batters Jaker Ali Anik and Mahidul Islam, and selecting five fast bowlers.

Wicketkeeper and batter Litton Das will also lead Bangladesh in the tournament in India and Sri Lanka, the Bangladesh Cricket Board said. But the announcement also came as Dhaka requested that its four group matches in India be moved to Sri Lanka, after anger because India forced a Bangladesh player to quit the Indian Premier League.

Bangladesh are due to play the West Indies in Kolkata on February 7, the opening day of the World Cup. They are then due to face Italy on February 9, and England on February 14, both also in Kolkata, followed by Nepal on February 17 in Mumbai.

Top-order options Tanzid Hasan Tamim and Parvez Hossain Emon made the squad, while Towhid Hridoy is the only specialist middle-order batter. Shamim Hossain and Nurul Hasan have been picked as finishers, while a varied bowling attack will be led by left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman and fast bowler Taskin Ahmed.



The spin department includes off-spinner Mahedi Hasan, left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed and leg-spinner Rishad Hossain, while seam support will come from Tanzim Hasan Sakib, Shoriful Islam and Mohammad Shaifuddin.

**Bangladesh World Cup T20 squad:** Litton Das (captain), Mohammad Saif Hasan, Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Parvez Hossain Emon, Towhid Hridoy, Shamim Hossain, Nurul Hasan Sohan, Mahedi Hasan, Rishad Hossain, Nasum Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, Taskin Ahmed, Mohammad Shaifuddin, Shoriful Islam. – APP

## Ishaq Dar talks to....

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their shared commitment to further strengthen cooperation across a wide range of sectors. The ministers also exchanged views on recent regional developments, including the evolving situation in Asia and the Middle East. Both sides emphasized the importance of continued consultation and agreed to remain in close contact at all levels to promote peace, stability, and mutual prosperity.

## PM expresses...

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always played the role of a frontline force in maintaining peace and law and order in the country. He reaffirmed the government's resolve to continue supporting law enforcement agencies in their fight against terrorism and crime. The prime minister emphasized that the sacrifices of the martyrs would not go in vain and assured that all possible measures would be taken to ensure peace and security.

## UNSC...

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According to the Council presidency, the session will be held under the agenda item "Threats to International Peace and Security," and the secretary general is expected to brief the members. In a statement issued through his spokesperson, Stephane Dujarric, Secretary General Gutierrez said he was "deeply alarmed.

## LA wildfire survivors struggle to rebuild

To rebuild his home, Koerner, a 67-year-old head of a security company, had to front up several hundred thousand dollars as his mortgage lender refused to release insurance payouts for months

ALTADENA: Less than a year after watching flames raze his home in the Altadena foothills, Ted Koerner has moved into a brand new house, one of the first to rebuild in this Los Angeles suburb. It has been an uphill battle, and Koerner is visibly moved as he brings his dog, Daisy, back home. "We've been through a lot this year," he told AFP. Altadena was hardest hit by the fires that ravaged parts of the sprawling US metropolis in January 2025. Thousands of homes

were destroyed and 19 people died in the town – compared to 12 killed in the upscale Pacific Palisades neighborhood.

To rebuild his home, Koerner, a 67-year-old head of a security company, had to front up several hundred thousand dollars as his mortgage lender refused to release insurance payouts for months.

The hurricane-strength 160 kilometer (100 mile) per hour gusts of wind that spread the fire at breakneck speed last January are still fresh in everyone's minds. But despite

the destruction and the pervasive threat of climate change in California, dogged survivors refuse to move away.

"Where are you gonna go?" sighs another Altadena resident, Catherine Ridder, a 67-year-old psychotherapist. "There's no place around here that's not vulnerable to catastrophic weather."

Her construction project has begun and she hopes to move in by August – before the \$4,000 monthly rent she pays for a furnished apartment exhausts the hous-

ing allowance from her insurance.

To speed things up, the Californian bureaucracy has streamlined its processes. Los Angeles County is issuing building permits within a few months. Before, it often took more than a year. But Ridder has been frustrated by delays in inspections to verify compliance with new building codes, such as requiring a fire sprinkler system in the roof. "There's a lot of chaos and delays. I mean, maybe it's faster than pre-fire stuff, but this doesn't feel easy at all," she told AFP.



## Briefs

Israeli forces  
kill three  
Palestinians  
in Gaza

CAIRO: Israeli forces shot and killed at least three Palestinians in separate incidents in the southern Gaza Strip city of Khan Younis on Sunday, local health authorities said. Medics reported that the dead included a 15-year-old boy, a fisherman killed outside areas still occupied by Israel in the enclave, and a third man who was shot and killed east of the city in areas under Israeli control. Israel has carried out repeated air strikes since a ceasefire took effect in October, saying they are aimed at preventing attacks or destroying militant infrastructure.

Gaza's health ministry says 420 Palestinians have been killed since the ceasefire began, while militants have killed three Israeli soldiers. Israel and Hamas have traded blame for violations of the ceasefire agreement brokered under US President Donald Trump.

Israel retained control of 53 percent of Gaza under the first phase of Trump's plan, which involved the release of hostages held by militants in Gaza and of Palestinians detained by Israel. The final hostage remains to be handed over are those of an Israeli police officer killed on October 7, 2023 — the day Gazan militants invaded Israel, killing 1,200 and taking some 250 hostages, according to Israeli tallies. Israel's military assault on Gaza has killed more than 71,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza health ministry, and led to accusations of genocide and war crimes that Israel denies.—APP

UK PM  
Starmer says  
he will 'shed  
no tears' over  
Maduro

LONDON: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on that he was pleased to see the end of President Nicolas Maduro's rule in Venezuela and wanted a smooth transition to a government that better reflected the will of Venezuelans. "We regarded Maduro as an illegitimate President and we shed no tears about the end of his regime," Starmer said in a statement on the British government website "The UK government will discuss the evolving situation with US counterparts in the days ahead as we seek a safe and peaceful transition to a legitimate government that reflects the will of the Venezuelan people," he added. French President Emmanuel Macron said on Saturday that Venezuelan opposition leader Edmundo González Urrutia should help oversee the change in power in Venezuela, after the capture of President Nicolas Maduro by US armed forces. "The transition to come must be peaceful, democratic, and respectful of the will of the Venezuelan people. We hope that President Edmundo González Urrutia, elected in 2024, will be able to ensure this transition as quickly as possible," wrote Macron on X.—APP

PFA actions  
Rs 89.5m  
fines imposed  
in 2025

BAHAWALPUR: The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) collected Rs 89.5 million in fines for violations of food safety rules and regulations across Bahawalpur Division during 2025. According to a press release issued here, the authority carried out an extensive crackdown throughout the year as part of its mission to ensure the provision of safe and quality food from farm to plate. The statement said that action against unsafe food practices resulted in fines exceeding Rs 89.5 million being imposed on 6,332 food business operators, while 39,377 warning notices were issued across the division. The press release concluded that the PFA Bahawalpur chapter would continue its campaign to ensure the availability of safe and quality food for the public.—APP

Lee lands in China, hoping  
to sidestep Taiwan tensions

"China's official position is that there is no such thing as a ban on Korean content, but from our perspective the situation looks somewhat different," said Wi, the presidential adviser

BEIJING: South Korea's President Lee Jae Myung arrived in China on Sunday, eager to boost economic ties with Seoul's largest trading partner while keeping a lid on potentially explosive issues such as Taiwan. Lee is the first South Korean leader to visit Beijing in six years and his four-day trip comes less than a week after China carried out massive military drills around Taiwan, the self-ruled island it claims as part of its territory. The exercise, featuring missiles, fighter jets, navy ships and coast guard vessels, drew a chorus of international condemnation that Seoul has notably declined to join. Lee, accompanied by a delegation of business and tech leaders, hopes to expand economic cooperation in meetings with President Xi Jinping and other top officials. And he hopes to possibly harness China's clout over North Korea to support his bid to improve ties with Pyongyang. Hours before Lee departed for Beijing, Seoul's military said the

North had fired a ballistic missile into the Sea of Japan — its first test of the year. Seoul has for decades trodden a fine line between China, its top trading partner, and the United States, its chief defense guarantor. But Kang Jun-young, a professor at Seoul's Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, said Beijing was now seeking to draw South Korea away from Washington's sphere of influence. "China views South Korea as the weakest link at a time when trilateral cooperation among South Korea, the United States and Japan is strengthening," he told AFP. Lee has deftly stayed on the sidelines since a nasty spat erupted between Beijing and Tokyo late last year, triggered by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's suggestion that Japan could intervene militarily if China attacks Taiwan. "Taking sides only worsens tensions," he told journalists last month. And he has long dodged questions about whether Seoul would intervene in the event of a conflict

over Taiwan, which Beijing has not ruled out using force to seize. Lee said in an interview with Chinese state broadcaster CCTV on Friday that he "clearly affirms" that "respecting the 'one-China' principle and maintaining peace and stability in Northeast Asia, including in the Taiwan Strait, are very important." On economic ties, Lee has called for South Korea and China to work toward "more horizontal and mutually beneficial" trade. He is bringing with him a large delegation of executives from some of South Korea's biggest and best-known firms including Samsung — one of the world's top memory chip makers which produces crucial components for the booming AI industry. Hyundai Motor Group's executive chair, Chung Eui-sun, is also part of the delegation alongside figures from the entertainment and gaming industries. A summit with Xi is planned for Monday, followed by trade talks with top officials including Premier Li Qiang on Tuesday, according

to top South Korean adviser Wi Sung-lac. Lee will then travel to the financial hub of Shanghai, home to a substantial South Korean business community, where he will attend a startup summit and visit the former headquarters of the Korean government-in-exile during Japanese rule. Xi and Lee last met in November on the sidelines of a regional summit in Gyeongju in South Korea — a meeting Seoul framed at the time as a reset following years of tense relations. The South Korean president plans to pitch a potential role for China in his efforts to rekindle frayed ties with the North, which is heavily dependent on Beijing as a trading partner. Officials also hope the meetings will lead to China easing an unofficial ban on imports of South Korean pop culture, in place for almost a decade. "China's official position is that there is no such thing as a ban on Korean content, but from our perspective the situation looks somewhat different," said Wi, the presidential adviser.—Agencies



Beijing: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, held meeting with Liu Haixing, Minister of the International Department of the Communist Party of China.

Exhibitions, events  
sector drives ME's  
new era of growth

CAIRO: Across the Middle East, exhibitions and large-scale events are increasingly reshaping how economies grow. Once viewed primarily as platforms for visibility and networking, they are now functioning as economic infrastructure — influencing investment decisions, accelerating partnerships and helping cities compete on a global stage. From business forums and cultural platforms to design-led showcases, the exhibitions and events sector has become embedded in national development strategies across the GCC and wider region. Governments and private-sector players alike are investing heavily in venues, skills and year-round programming, viewing the ability to bring markets together as a strategic economic asset. Saudi Arabia is among the most prominent examples of this shift. As part of Vision 2030, the Kingdom is undertaking a major expansion of its exhibition and conference infrastructure. By 2030, more than 1 million sq. meters of additional space is expected to be added, reinforcing Saudi Arabia's ambitions to position itself as a global hub for business, culture and investment. That expansion aligns with broader economic goals. Saudi Arabia plans to raise the cultural sector's contribution to gross domestic product to 3 percent — equivalent to SR180 billion (\$48 billion) — by 2030, up from under 1 percent, according to Minister of Culture Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Farhan. To organize the sector's rapid growth, the Saudi Conventions and Exhibitions General Authority has launched a global exhibition and conference season running annually from October to May. The season clusters major international business, investment and cultural events into a defined period, improving predictability for global organizers and partners. Recent editions have included gatherings such as Cityscape Global, the Future Investment Initiative, the Fortune Global Forum, the Global Health Exhibition and the International MICE Summit. According to SCEGA, Saudi Arabia has emerged as one of the fastest-growing business events markets among G20 countries, with over 200 major international events hosted annually. That growth has been accompanied by investment in human capital. Saudi professionals now account for nearly 20 percent of Certified in Exhibition Management certificate holders globally, one of the highest proportions worldwide. The economic function of exhibitions is increasingly evident in the outcomes they generate. At the International MICE Summit in Riyadh, hosted by SCEGA, industry leaders signed 20 agreements and memorandums of understanding on the first day alone, involving companies with a combined global revenue exceeding \$9 billion. Speaking to Arab News in November, SCEGA CEO Hatim Al-Kahily said the summit demonstrated Saudi Arabia's ability to convene global sector leaders in Riyadh. For operators working directly in the sector, the impact of exhibitions is measured well beyond attendance figures. Lubna El-Masri, marketing and communications director at Riyadh Exhibitions Company, said events now operate as economic accelerators. "A good exhibition doesn't just create footfall; it creates deals, jobs, and confidence. It pulls a whole ecosystem with it, from hotels and logistics to local SMEs and creative talent," she told Arab News. She said venue design has evolved accordingly. "The smartest shift I've seen is treating venues like 'always-on' platforms, not occasional event spaces. Flexible layouts, digital access, data, it's all about making the experience smoother and more scalable." Exhibitions also play a strategic role in building international partnerships, El-Masri said, adding that they "are one of the quickest ways to build trust." She continued: "When international partners see the scale, the quality, and the seriousness on the ground, it changes the conversation.—DNA

New year finds Palestinians  
between hope, continued hardship

DUBAI: War-weary Gaza enters 2026 amid cold weather, flooded tents and bombed-out homes. Israel's offensive has displaced hundreds of thousands and damaged or destroyed 80 percent of the enclave's buildings. With shelters inadequate and supplies scarce, Palestinians' suffering deepens as winter sets in. But global attention is now gripped by crises elsewhere, including the US capture of Venezuela's president, Israel's recognition of Somaliland statehood, and conflict in southern Yemen. Against that backdrop, Israel's continued violations in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have largely receded from view. As the new year begins, Palestinians across the occupied territories face deep uncertainty over what 2026 may bring. The US administration has signaled it will soon announce the next phase of its Gaza plan, which would include further Israeli withdrawals, an international stabilization force, and a new governing structure for Gaza with broad international participation. But as officials debate the future of a population devastated by over two years of war, conditions on the ground continue to deteriorate. Severe cold, flooding and collapsing shelters caused by torrential rains have killed at least 18 people in recent weeks, according to local health authorities. Amnesty International said in December the deaths were "utterly preventable," blaming Israel's ongoing restrictions on the entry of critical supplies needed to repair damaged infrastructure. Unless aid is allowed to flow freely into Gaza, rights groups warn that the dire humanitarian situation under the fragile ceasefire will continue

to worsen well into 2026. UN agencies have warned that humanitarian conditions in Gaza will remain "catastrophic" this year. An estimated 1.9 million people still require urgent shelter support, water and sanitation systems remain badly damaged, and winter storms are compounding risks for those living in tents or ruined buildings. Those conditions are expected to worsen further as Israel tightens restrictions on aid operations. New limits affecting 37 international NGOs, along with legislation targeting the UN relief agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA), are likely to disrupt humanitarian work if not reversed. Aid groups warn the impact could be "fatal" for civilians who depend on outside assistance to survive. In December, Israel said it will revoke the operating licenses of several aid groups, including Doctors Without Borders (MSF) and the Norwegian Refugee Council, accusing them of failing to meet security and transparency requirements. Those requirements include disclosing the identities and roles of Palestinian staff to "rule out any links to terrorism." MSF told the AFP news agency that it "would never knowingly employ people engaging in military activity," adding that such individuals would "pose a danger to our staff and our patients." "If MSF is prevented from working in Gaza, it will deprive hundreds of thousands of people from accessing medical care," the organization told Reuters, underscoring the stakes for civilians already struggling to obtain health services. For its part, the Norwegian Refugee Council told Reuters that "at a time when needs in Gaza far exceed the available aid and services, Israel

has and will continue to block life-saving aid from entering." These restrictions come as food insecurity remains acute. The latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification analysis projects that, despite modest improvements after the ceasefire, hundreds of thousands of people in Gaza will remain in "emergency" food insecurity and over 100,000 in "catastrophe/famine" conditions into 2026. The analysis also estimates that by October 2026, at least 101,000 children between six and 59 months will suffer from acute malnutrition, and nearly 37,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women will require urgent nutritional support. A separate conflict-risk forecast by the Peace Research Institute Oslo anticipates fewer conflict-related deaths in Palestine in 2026 than in 2025, largely due to the Gaza ceasefire. Still, it warns that renewed large-scale fighting cannot be ruled out. The US-brokered ceasefire that took effect Oct. 10 has not ended Israeli strikes. Since then, at least 414 Palestinians have been reportedly killed and more than 1,140 injured. Israeli human rights organizations have described 2025 as the "deadliest and most destructive" year for Palestinians since 1967, citing a sharp escalation in killings and displacement across Gaza and the occupied West Bank. A joint report released in early December by 12 Israeli rights groups said the death toll in Gaza surpassed 36,000 by March 2024 and rose to 67,173 by October 2025. More than 20,000 children and about 10,000 women were among the dead, while the number of wounded exceeded 170,000.—Agencies

North Korea  
denounces  
US capture of  
Maduro

SEOUL: North Korea denounced on Sunday the United States' capture of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro as a "serious encroachment of sovereignty," state media said. Pyongyang's foreign ministry "strongly denounces the US hegemony-seeking act committed in Venezuela," said a ministry spokesperson in a statement carried by the official KCNA. "The incident is another example that clearly confirms once again the rogue and brutal nature of the US," they added. Following their capture and transport to the United States, Maduro and his wife were flown by helicopter to New York City, where they face drug-trafficking and weapons charges. They were seized by US special forces during a pre-dawn attack Saturday in which air strikes pounded sites in and around the Venezuelan capital Caracas. The raid represents a nightmare scenario for North Korea's leadership, which has long accused Washington of seeking to remove it from power. Pyongyang has for decades justified its nuclear and missile programs as a deterrent against alleged regime change efforts by Washington.—APP

Digitisation  
ensures  
efficient,  
inclusive  
economy: Saif

LAHORE: Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) Coordinator Saif Ur Rehman has said that digitisation is the key to build a transparent, efficient and inclusive economy in Pakistan. Talking to a delegation of traders here Sunday, he said, by leveraging modern digital tools, the government can significantly reduce corruption, leakages and inefficiencies which have plagued public institutions. Digital payment systems, e-governance portals and automated tax collection can minimize human discretion, ensuring greater accountability and traceability of financial transactions, he added. The Coordinator said that introduction of digital IDs, online land records, and e-procurement systems enhances transparency and builds public trust by making information easily accessible to citizens. Digitalisation also broadens the tax base by documenting the informal economy, enabling fair taxation and increasing state revenues without overburdening compliant taxpayers. Moreover, he said, digital platforms promote financial inclusion by bringing unbanked populations into the formal financial system through mobile banking and fintech solutions. —APP

'Garlic  
cultivation can  
cut import bill  
up to USD  
52m'

LAHORE: Pakistan can save USD 52 million (Rs 14.5 billion) spent on the import of garlic from China in 2024 by cultivating the same in Sahiwal division. Convener of Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) regional committee on food, Shahid Imran, stated this in a meeting with a delegation of progressive farmers led by Ch. Nazir Ahmad Arain, here Sunday. The Convener suggested government to select a few union councils (UCs) in the Sahiwal division — an area well known for potato cultivation and equally suitable for garlic — and extend interest-free loans ranging from Rs 100,000 to Rs 200,000 per acre (varying from year to year) to farmers for procuring high-quality seed and agricultural inputs because the high upfront cost for seeds remains the largest barrier to go for garlic cultivation. He said, China is the world's largest garlic producer and exporter, with over 20 million tonnes of production and yields nearly two and a half times higher than Pakistan's average, some of these trained graduates (in garlic farming) could be deployed in the selected UCs for the first two to three years. Shahid Imran said, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) need to be set up in targeted UCs for garlic value-addition products such as garlic powder, paste, flakes, and oil require relatively low-capital plants.—APP

French owners of Swiss  
bar under scrutiny after  
New Year blaze

GENEVA: An investigation into a fire at the Swiss ski resort of Crans-Montana which killed 40 and left 119 injured has cast a spotlight on the French owners who are suspected of "negligence". Jacques and Jessica Moretti were interviewed as witnesses at the start of the investigation into the deadly blaze that erupted as revellers were ushering in the New Year. But the owners of Le Constellation bar and two other establishments in Crans-Montana and the neighbouring commune of Lens on Saturday were objects of a criminal inquiry launched by the public prosecutor for "negligent homicide, negligent bodily harm, and negligent arson". Before it is known whether there will be a trial, the investigation will have to establish the couple's responsibility for the tragedy, which, according to initial findings, was likely caused by smouldering candles fixed to champagne bottles placed too close to the ceiling in the establishment's basement. According to local newspapers, Jacques Moretti is from Ghisonaccia in Upper Corsica and his wife Jessica is from the Cote d'Azur. Before Switzerland, Jacques Moretti ran a bar in the port of Bonifacio, a popular Corsican seaside town in Corsica. Jean-Charles Orsucci, mayor of Bonifacio since 2008, confirmed to AFP that Jacques Moretti had a business on the port in the late 2000s. He added that he had always had "good relations" with Moretti. The couple settled in the upscale Swiss Alpine resort of Crans-Montana in 2015 and bought Le Constellation, according to commercial registries, which also list the opening of two other businesses — Le Senso cafe-restaurant registered in 2020 in Crans-Montana and the Corsican inn Le Vieux Chalet, registered in 2023 in Lens. "He's a friend, he settled here, it was his first bar, then he had two others. He's a hard worker, he's a friend of the resort," Charles-Andre Bagnoud, a notary in Crans-Montana, told AFP. "He did his job very seriously, and we saw him every day, he was always there, always there, always committed," Bagnoud said.—DNA

Power outage after  
drone strikes in  
Sudan's El-Obeid

PORT SUDAN: The power supply was cut on Sunday following drone strikes in the Sudanese city of El-Obeid, the capital of North Kordofan state, the national electricity company said, as fighting raged in the oil-rich southern region. Since April 2023, Sudan has been gripped by a war between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), with Kordofan the latest battleground after the RSF launched an offensive to seize the strategic region. "El-Obeid power station... was attacked by drones, leading to a fire in the machinery building, which led to a halt in the electricity supply," the electricity company said. Army-aligned forces had announced on Wednesday that they had retaken several cities south of El-Obeid from the RSF. The Joint Forces — an umbrella organization of armed groups fighting alongside the army — said they had "achieved sweeping field victories in the North Kordofan axis." In a statement, the group affirmed "progress and control over several strategic areas, key among which are Kazqil, Hamadi, El-Rabash, Habila and El-Dubaibat." It said those areas had been "cleared of rebel militia (RSF) elements after inflicting many losses on them in lives and military equipment." A source in the Sudanese army told AFP that "this progress will open up the road between El-Obeid and Dilling" — a city in South Kordofan state controlled by the army and besieged by the RSF. According to a UN-backed report, Dilling is in the throes of famine. The army source added that government forces in Dalama to the south had cleared a path to Dilling and entered it.—APP



## Briefs

Lighting  
kills two in  
South Africa

JOHANNESBURG: Lightning struck 150 people gathered at a festival north of South Africa's capital Pretoria, killing two, local health services said on Sunday. The incident occurred on Saturday night near the village of Mathibestad, about 70 kilometers (40 miles) of Pretoria, where a traditional celebration is held every year. The North West health department said 150 patients came to a health clinic after being struck by lightning during the event, adding that two died and 13 were in critical condition and transferred to another health facility. Storms are frequent in this part of South Africa during the current summer season in the southern hemisphere. — Agencies

Drone strikes  
kills one  
in Russia

MOSCOW: One person was killed and two others wounded when a Ukrainian drone struck a car in the Russian border region of Belgorod, local officials said Sunday, ahead of peace talks to end the nearly 4-year-old war in Paris this week. Belgorod regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said a young child was among the wounded. In Ukraine, three people were wounded in the Kharkiv region in drone strikes overnight into Sunday, the country's State Emergency Service said. Meanwhile, the death toll from a Russian missile attack on the city of Kharkiv on Friday increased to four when two other bodies were found under the rubble of a building, Kharkiv regional head Oleh Syniehubov wrote on Telegram Sunday. The latest attacks came after national security advisers from Europe and other allies visited Kyiv on Saturday to discuss security guarantees and economic support, as a US-led diplomatic push to end the war in Ukraine intensifies. — APP

Britan, France  
attacked  
Daesh in Syria

## NEWS DESK

LONDON: Britain's and France's air forces conducted a joint operation on Saturday evening to bomb a suspected underground arms cache previously used by the Daesh group in Syria, Britain's defense ministry said. Western aircraft have been conducting patrols to stop a resurgence of the Daesh militant group that ruled parts of Syria until 2019. Intelligence analysis identified an underground facility believed to be used to store weapons and explosives in mountains north of Palmyra, Britain said. "Our aircraft used Paveway IV guided bombs to target a number of access tunnels down to the facility; whilst detailed assessment is now underway, initial indications are that the target was engaged successfully," Britain's defense ministry said in a statement.

PIA privatisation  
challenged in  
Lahore High Court

## BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: A constitutional petition has been filed in the Lahore High Court (LHC) challenging the recent privatisation of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA). Filed by Advocate Nabeel Javed Kahloon, the petition seeks to set aside the sale of the national carrier, describing it as illegal and unconstitutional. The Cabinet Committee on Privatisation (CCoP) had endorsed a Rs135 billion bid from an Arif Habib Group-led consortium for a 75 per cent stake in the airline. The winning bid was approximately 35pc higher than the government's reference price of Rs115bn. The consortium has pledged to invest an additional Rs80bn to Rs125bn into the airline for fleet modernisation and operational restructuring. The petitioner argues that the privatisation process, specifically the Expression of Interest (EOI) published on May 7, 2025 and the subsequent sale on Dec 23 violates the Pakistan International Airlines Corporation (Conversion) Act, 2016. Petitioner says Dec 23 move is in violation

of law governing the airline. He states that the federal government, while issuing the EOI, did not appreciate the legal fact that PIA is a trans-provincial institution included in the Federal Legislative List, Part II, hence without the approval of the Council of Common Interests (CCI) as mandated under Article 154 of the Constitution, since no privatisation could take place. He argues that the government, through its cabinet committee, passed an order illegally for the privatisation of PIA without the approval of CCI and Parliament. He contends that any restructuring or transfer of assets should remain within government-controlled entities as per the sections 3 and 4 of the 2016 Act. The petitioner claims that massive public funds have been injected into the airline over decades and its sale to a private group is a matter of significant public interest. He contends that the respondents, to justify privatisation, falsely portrayed PIA as a burden on the public exchequer and wrongly stated that its value is five times less than its accumulated losses (approximately Rs800bn).

Govt sets up pre-departure  
desks to assist travelers*Interior Minister Naqvi says service will ensure smoother and more hassle-free travel experience*

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Sunday announced the launch of "Pre-Departure Facilitation Desks" by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), which will assist passengers travelling abroad. "These desks will provide guidance and assistance to international travellers on immigration procedures, clearances, ensuring a smoother and more hassle-free travel experience," said Naqvi in a post on X. The minister further added that the desks are accessible in person and also via helplines and email, and that relevant details are available at airports, border points and on the FIA website. The FIA's service comes against the backdrop of recent reports of the offloading of passengers from foreign en route flights over the issue of documents. In recent months, rumours have been widely circulating on social media platforms claiming the arbitrary offloading of passengers from flights. However, in November, the FIA clarified that no passengers were being offloaded from flights, and the authority was facilitating passengers whose documents were legal and complete. The agency, amid the government's strict measures to curb human smuggling and prevent people from illegally travelling



abroad, however, said that only those going abroad via illegal means are stopped after due profiling. Meanwhile, last month, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also directed authorities to safeguard Pakistani travelers with valid travel documents, following reports of passengers being offloaded from

flights. Chairing a review meeting on the eradication of human trafficking and illegal travel, PM Shehbaz ordered swift action against individuals travelling abroad illegally or holding dubious travel documents. However, the premier stressed that "special care must be ensured so that

passengers with valid travel documents are not inconvenienced". The premier further instructed the Protectorate of Emigrants to improve its coordination with the FIA and other relevant institutions to facilitate those travelling abroad legally for employment.

*Hundreds march in silence to honor victims of Swiss bar fire that left 40 dead*

## DNA

CRANS-MONTANA: Hundreds marched in silence Sunday to honor the victims of the New Year's Eve fire at a bar in the Swiss Alpine resort of Crans-Montana, which left 40 dead and many severely injured. Sombre mourners, many with reddened eyes, filed silently out of the chapel to organ music after the hourlong Mass at the Chapelle Saint-Christophe in Crans-Montana. Some exchanged hugs, others applauded, before joining the silent march up the hill to Le Constellation bar. Many hundreds of people, some cradling flower bouquets, walked in the dense snaking procession in the bright sunlight past shuttered stores. Up on the mountain overlooking the town, snow machines sent plumes of white flakes into the air. At the top of the street, in front of Le Constellation that is still largely shielded from view by white screens, the swelling crowd stood in near total silence, some weeping. Then they broke out into sustained applause — hands in gloves and mittens against the cold — as a stream of mourners and well-wishers deposited flower bouquets at a makeshift memorial piled with flowers, cuddly toys and other tributes. "We are going through a moment of crushing darkness but we are going through it together," one speaker said. During the Mass, the Rev. Gilles Cavin spoke of the "terrible uncertainty" for families unsure if their loved ones are among the dead or still alive among the injured. "We pray for their friends hard hit by misery on this day that was meant to be one of festivities and friendship," he said.

Noth Korea  
fires ballistic  
missile

## DNA

SEOUL: North Korea fired several ballistic missiles from its capital Pyongyang toward the sea off its east coast at around 7:50 a.m. local time on Sunday, South Korea's military said. The first launch of North Korea's ballistic missiles in two months comes as South Korean President Lee Jae Myung will make a state visit to China starting on Sunday, where Seoul has said peace on the Korean peninsula would be discussed. "Our military has strengthened surveillance and vigilance in preparation for further launches," the Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement, saying it is closely sharing information with the United States and Japan. The missiles are believed to have already fallen, according to Japan's Ministry of Defense. The last time Pyongyang tested its ballistic missile was in November.

Myanmar junta releases  
more than 6000 prisoners

## DNA

BANGKOK: Myanmar's military government granted amnesty to more than 6,100 prisoners and reduced other inmates' sentences Sunday to mark the 78th anniversary of the country's independence from Britain. It was not immediately clear whether those released include the thousands of political detainees imprisoned for opposing military rule. The amnesty comes as the military government proceeds with a month-long, three-stage election process that critics say is designed to add a facade of legitimacy to the status quo. State-run MRTV television reported that Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, the head of the military government, pardoned 6,134 prisoners. A separate statement said 52 foreigners will also be released and deported from Myanmar. No comprehensive list of those freed is available. Other prisoners received reduced sentences, except for those convicted of serious charges such as murder and rape or those jailed on charges under various other security acts. The release terms warn that if the freed detainees violate the law again, they will have to serve the remainder of their original sentences in addition to any new sentence. The prisoner releases, common on holidays and other sig-

nificant occasions in Myanmar, began Sunday and are expected to take several days to complete. At Yangon's Insein Prison, which is notorious for housing political detainees, relatives of prisoners gathered at the gates early in the morning. However, there was no sign that the prisoner release would include former leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who was ousted in the military takeover in 2021 and has been held virtually incommunicado since then. The takeover was met with massive nonviolent resistance, which has since become a widespread armed struggle. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, an independent organization that keeps detailed tallies of arrests and casualties linked to the nation's political conflicts, more than 22,000 political detainees, including Suu Kyi, were in detention as of last Tuesday. Many political detainees had been held on a charge of incitement, a catch-all offense widely used to arrest critics of the government or military and punishable by up to three years in prison. The 80-year-old Suu Kyi is serving a 27-year sentence after being convicted in what supporters have called politically tinged prosecutions. Myanmar became a British colony in the late 19th century and regained its independence on Jan. 4, 1948. The anniversary was marked in the capital, Naypyitaw, with a flag-raising ceremony at City Hall on Sunday.

Caracas in Turmoil as Capture of  
Maduro Sparks Hope and Fear

## NEWS DESK

CARACAS (As the dust settles in Venezuela's capital, citizens are reacting with a mix of hope, fear, and uncertainty to the dramatic fictional capture of President Nicolás Maduro by U.S. forces. After a night rocked by explosions in the Caracas Valley, residents emerged into the streets Saturday, their moods ranging from celebration to condemnation. Dina, a local resident, expressed cautious optimism. "For now, I'm grateful to the U.S. for taking Maduro out of here," she said. "At least I can see some light at the end of the tunnel again." Yet the political climate remains tense. Jorge, another Venezuelan, voiced both gratitude and anxiety. "We're well-supported by Trump and the United States, but what happens next? It doesn't guarantee us anything." Supporters of Maduro rallied in Caracas, demanding his release. Mayor Carmen Meléndez, a staunch loyalist, denounced what she called the "kidnapping" of Venezuela's

leader. Meanwhile, opponents celebrated, pointing to years of repression, disputed elections, and corruption scandals under Maduro's rule. In this fictional scenario, Maduro and his wife are extradited to New York City to face drug trafficking and weapons charges. President Trump has declared that the U.S. will oversee Venezuela's governance and oil reserves until a permanent replacement is established. But skepticism remains. "He says something now and tomorrow he changes his mind," Dina said of Trump. "The only good thing is the promise of U.S. investment, which might improve our economy." Despite Maduro's ouster, danger persists. Pro-government colectivos roam the streets, intimidating residents. Jorge described seeing armed motorcyclists, saying, "It makes you afraid to even buy bread right now." Concerns also center on Maduro's ally, Diosdado Cabello, Venezuela's Minister of Interior, Justice and Peace. "He is very spiteful," Jorge said. "Hopefully the army sides with the people." Sandra, another Venezuelan, echoed relief but warned of the long road ahead.

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