



# Islamabad POST

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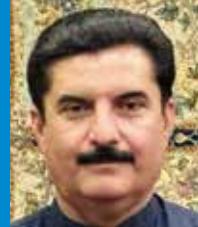
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Machado vows  
to return to  
her country

Detailed News On Page-08

Kundi for timely  
resolution of  
public issues

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## CM KP discussed ISPR chief blames 'political-terror nexus' for spike in terrorism

PTI resisting counter-terror efforts at every forum, seeking help from Afghanistan; Nearly 71% of terrorist incidents occurred in 2025 reported from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, says army's spokesperson



DNA

RAWALPINDI: Reviewing the security situation across the country, particularly over the previous year, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Director-General Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry has said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) is the worst-affected province by terrorism due to a "political-criminal-terror nexus". Addressing a press conference to brief the media on the current security situation and other key matters on Tuesday, Lt Gen Chaudhry said that nearly 71% of terrorist incidents occurred in 2025 reported from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

"The primary reason for this is a politically conducive environment and the flourishing political-criminal-terror-nexus which is flourishing there," he said. In his opening re-

marks, the military's spokesperson said that the purpose of the media briefing was to give a comprehensive overview of counter-terrorism measures taken in the past year. Providing details of counterterrorism efforts in 2025, the ISPR chief said that law enforcement agencies carried out 75,175 intelligence-based operations (IBOs) across the country. Giving a breakdown, he said 14,658 IBOs were conducted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 58,778 in Balochistan, while 1,739 operations took place in the rest of the country. Lt Gen Chaudhry said that 5,397 terrorism incidents were reported nationwide during the last year. Of these, 3,811 incidents, he said, occurred in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 1,557 in Balochistan, and 29 incidents were reported in other parts of the country. He said that 2,597 terrorists were killed during counterterrorism operations last year.

While providing details of 10 major terror attacks across the country, he said that civilians and soft targets had been deliberately targeted, and Afghan militants were involved in all attacks. "We have evidence of the presence of all terrorists... where they are and where they operate," he said.

During the press briefing, video confessions of arrested terrorists were also played. Lt Gen Chaudhry said 21 civilians were martyred in the Jaffar Express attack, adding that the incident would never fade from the memory of Pakistanis. He further stated that a civilian bus was also targeted in Noshki, while an attack on the Frontier Corps headquarters in Quetta resulted in the martyrdom of eight civilians. "The attack on the FC headquarters in Quetta was carried out by Afghans," the ISPR DG said, adding that a similar attack had taken place on the FC headquarters in Peshawar in November. Referring to an attempted attack on Cadet College Wana in November,

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PM directs for  
strategy to  
boost exports

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday directed authorities to formulate a comprehensive five-year strategy to boost agricultural exports. He emphasized that reforming the agriculture sector and educating farmers on international standards were top priorities of the government. The prime minister was chairing a meeting of a Working Group comprising private sector experts. The working group was established to align the agriculture sector with the international requirements and to increase the country's agriculture exports.

"The federal government, within its own jurisdiction, is undertaking reforms in the agriculture sector and, in collaboration with provincial governments, is taking measures to promote agricultural development,"

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ISLAMABAD: Bangladesh Air Force Air Chief Marshal Hasan Mahmood Khan called on Pakistan Air Force (PAF) Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Babar Sidhu in Islamabad. — DNA

## Pakistan, Bangladesh air chiefs discuss potential JF-17 aircraft procurement

*Bangladesh assured of fast-tracked delivery of Super Mushshak trainer aircraft, says military's media wing*

Senate delegation  
to visit US  
on Jan 20

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Bangladesh Air Force Air Chief Marshal Hasan Mahmood Khan called on Pakistan Air Force (PAF) Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Babar Sidhu in Islamabad, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement on Tuesday. According to the military's media wing, Pakistan and Bangladesh's air force chiefs have held detailed discussions on the potential procurement of JF-17 Thunder fighter jets. "Detailed discussions were also held on the potential procurement of JF-17 Thunder aircraft," it said.

The visiting air chief was accorded a guard of honour, according to the ISPR. "The meeting also focused on strengthening operational cooperation and institutional synergy, with emphasis on training, capacity building, and collaboration in aerospace advancements," the ISPR statement read. The ISPR said that ACM Sidhu briefed his Bangladeshi counterpart on PAF's recent advancements and reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to supporting the Bangladesh Air Force through a comprehensive training framework from basic to advanced flying and specialised courses across PAF institutions. "He also assured fast-tracked delivery of Super Mushshak trainer aircraft, along with a complete training and long-term support ecosystem," the ISPR statement read. "The Bangladeshi air chief praised

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CENTRELINE REPORT

NEW DELHI: India recently hired a lobbying firm to arrange Foreign Minister S Jaishankar's meetings with top US officials during the May conflict with Pakistan last year. The four-day war in May 2025 began after India's unprovoked attack on Pakistan, during which Pakistan downed six Indian fighter jets, including three Rafales, and dozens of drones. The conflict ended on May 10 with a US-brokered ceasefire. Indian news outlet, The Hindu, has now revealed that the Indian Embassy in

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**Briefs**

Azerbaijan will not send peacekeepers to Gaza

BAKU: Azerbaijan has no intention of sending a contingent of its troops to take part in peacekeeping operations outside its borders, including in Gaza, President Ilham Aliyev said late on Monday. Aliyev, interviewed by Azerbaijani television channels, said Azerbaijan had been in contact with Donald Trump's US administration with a list of questions about the operation of a peacekeeping force in Gaza, the proposed ISF. "We prepared a questionnaire of more than 20 questions and provided it to the American side. No participation in peacekeeping forces is envisaged," Aliyev said. "I am not considering participation in hostilities outside Azerbaijan at all." An Azerbaijani source had said last November that Azerbaijan would provide no troops for such an operation unless there was a complete halt to fighting between Israel and Hamas.

**No raise in gas tariff for next six months**

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik on Tuesday announced that the government has decided to maintain the gas tariff for the next six months. The decision is made in line with the direction of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to provide relief to consumers, the minister said while chairing a briefing. The Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) had raised the liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) price by Rs 10.68 per kg earlier this month, bringing the rate to Rs 219.67 per kg.

**Ishaq Dar received Iranian ambassador**

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar today received the Ambassador of Iran, H.E. Mr. Amiri Moghaddam. During the meeting, the Ambassador conveyed New Year greetings on behalf of Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and delivered a letter addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister. Senator Ishaq Dar warmly reciprocated the greetings. The Iranian Ambassador also briefed the Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister on the progress achieved under various bilateral institutional mechanisms aimed at strengthening cooperation across diverse areas. Reaffirming Pakistan's commitment, Senator Ishaq Dar emphasized the importance of deepening engagement with Iran in key priority sectors, underscoring Islamabad's resolve to further consolidate ties with Tehran.

**Amnesty report**

27th Amendment poses 'serious threat' to judicial independence

Rights group urges immediate review of law, judicial independence, separation of powers, and accountability

**FIAZ CHAUDHRY**

ISLAMABAD: Amnesty International has warned that the recent 27th Constitutional Amendment poses a serious threat to judicial independence and the rule of law, saying it entrenches executive control over the courts and shields key state officials from accountability. In a statement released a day earlier, the rights group said the amendment undermines an already weakened judiciary by establishing a Federal Constitutional Court that lacks "independence, erodes judges' security of tenure". Despite its far-reaching implications, Amnesty noted that the amendment was rushed through parliament without consultation with civil society or opposition parties. The organisation highlighted that two senior Supreme Court judges resigned in protest on the day the amendment became law on November 13, 2025 followed by the resignation of a Lahore High Court judge two days later.

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# Wheat sowing targets met, perishable food, sugar prices decline

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal chaired a meeting of the National Price Monitoring Committee (NPNC) to review inflation trends, availability of essential commodities and measures to ensure price stability and strengthen food security, particularly ahead of Ramazan, the holy fasting month. The meeting was attended by Chief Economist Dr Imtiaz Ahmad, Chief Statistician of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), and representatives from the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, the ICT administration, provincial governments and the State Bank of Pakistan, a news release said. The PBS presented a detailed overview of inflation trends, noting that headline inflation increased from 4.1 per cent in December 2024 to 5.6pc in December 2025. Major contributors to year-on-year inflation were higher gas charges, rising gold prices, and increases in the prices of wheat, milk and chicken. In contrast, prices of several key commodities, including potatoes, tomatoes, onions, tea, pulses, electricity and stationery, showed a declining trend. PBS also presented data from the Decision Support System on Inflation (DSSI), indicating improvements in the price stability of essential food items. Comparative analysis of 2024 and 2025 showed that prices of kitchen staples such as onions and potatoes remained lower in the current cycle.

Wheat flour (20kg bag) prices increased from around Rs1,800 to Rs2,146 in the last one year. While some items such as pulse moong showed minor fluctuations, overall trends pointed towards easing pressure on sensitive price indicators ahead of Ramazan. The meeting was informed that wheat sowing targets have been achieved and the full seasonal target is expected by February, strengthening domestic food security. Prices of sugar and chicken, which had risen earlier in the year, have declined significantly, with sugar prices falling from over Rs180 per kilogram to around Rs150. To address structural factors affecting price stability, Ahsan Iqbal directed the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to prepare a detailed study on cold chain infrastructure. "Cold chains are essential for absorbing market shocks, reducing post-harvest losses and balancing demand and supply," he said, adding that the ministry should work with the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics to examine global best practices and appropriate incentives. The minister also directed the preparation of policy working papers on the poultry, dairy and juice sectors to promote value addition and exports, noting that egg exports have increased and should be supported through better processing, quality assurance and market access. He expressed concern over food quality, particularly the use of oil in ghee production. "There is an increase in cardiac health incidents, and food quality standards must be strictly enforced," he said, directing the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to write to provincial food control authorities to ensure enforcement of regulated melting temperatures and prevent the use of any harmful oils. Ahsan Iqbal also called for an agriculture-related import substitution report and a national agriculture self-sufficiency working paper, in consultation with provinces, to reduce reliance on imports and conserve foreign exchange. The Ministry of National Food Security and Research reported that national food stocks are stable, with wheat sufficient for the next four months and sugar availability improved due to the crushing season. Domestic production of rice, chicken and potatoes remains strong. However, the minister directed that supply chains for gram, edible oil, dates and pulses, which rely on imports and see higher demand during Ramazan, be reviewed and streamlined within one week to avoid shortages or manipulation. The minister also reviewed provincial arrangements for Ramadan, directing provinces to coordinate with PBS on stock monitoring and instructing deputy commissioners to prevent hoarding and profiteering to ensure price stability. Ahsan Iqbal said sustained coordination among federal and provincial authorities, regulators and financial institutions is essential to protect consumers, strengthen domestic production and maintain macroeconomic stability.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Hockey legend Shahbaz Senior, Secretary General Pakistan Hockey Federation Rana Muhajid and Ansar Mahmood Bhatti Editor Daily Islamabad POST/CENTRELINE attending a sports event organized in Islamabad. DNA

## IGP reviews security, logistics of riverine check posts

LAHORE: Inspector General of Police (IGP) Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar on Monday chaired an important meeting at the Central Police Office to review security arrangements, human resources, logistics, transport and other operational matters related to riverine check posts across the province. According to a Punjab Police spokesperson, the meeting reviewed the performance of officers and personnel deployed at riverine check posts, along with the availability and operational condition of boats, vehicles, weapons and ammunition. Infrastructure facilities, including boundary walls, outposts, thermal imaging systems and bulletproof cameras, were also examined. The IGP directed further strengthening of riverine check posts to enhance crime control, arrest of wanted criminals and drug traffickers, prevention of smuggling and effective monitoring of border areas. He said that keeping in view the sensitivity of riverine and border areas, security at these check posts must be further reinforced. Dr. Usman instructed that all boats, vehicles and surveillance equipment at riverine check posts must remain fully functional at all times. He directed reconstruction and repair of dilapidated buildings, strengthening of outposts and doubling of boundary walls where required.—APP

## Kundi for timely resolution of public complaints

DERA ISMAIL KHAN: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi spent his second public day at the Kundi Model Farm here on Tuesday, meeting with citizens and party workers and personally listening to their concerns. The governor directed relevant authorities to ensure the timely and effective resolution of public complaints. Several delegations of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) workers and local dignitaries met the governor to raise issues related to development, basic facilities, and administrative matters. Governor Kundi emphasized that public service is his top priority and that true democracy lies in addressing citizens' problems at their doorstep. He described the Kundi Model Farm as a symbol of public engagement and added that this initiative will continue in the future to provide direct relief to the people. The party workers lauded the governor, saying that in the history of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, no other governor has ever sat among the public so openly to hear their concerns. Meanwhile, delegation from Lakki Marwat, led by Pakistan Peoples Party leader Qasimullah Khan Marwat, called on Governor Faisal Karim Kundi here at Kundi Model Farm on Tuesday. The delegation included party leaders Javed Iqbal Advocate, Faqir Muhammad, New Khan, and Ijaz Ahmed Wazir. During the meeting, the delegation briefed the governor on various issues faced by residents of Lakki Marwat related to federal departments and highlighted the difficulties being faced by the people. The governor listened to the concerns raised by the delegation and assured them that the relevant authorities would be contacted to resolve issues concerning federal departments. He said that timely redressal of problems identified by public representatives and party workers remained his top priority.—APP

## Over 8,000 foreign tourists visit KP's Northern areas

PESHAWAR: Secretary Culture and Tourism Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Saadat Hassan, said that under the vision of Chief Minister Muhammad Sohail Afridi and on the special directives of Chief Secretary Shah Ali Shah, comprehensive measures are being taken to promote tourism across the province. He said that all possible facilities are being provided to local and foreign tourists, due to which tourism authorities in the northern regions are working round the clock. He expressed these views while talking to the media during his visit to China Window, a Chinese Cultural and Information Centre established in Peshawar. During the visit, the Secretary toured various galleries of China Window, signed the Friendship Wall, and recorded his remarks in the visitors' book. Saadat Hassan stated that the Culture and Tourism Department is making dedicated efforts to promote tourism, preserve cultural heritage, and introduce the ancient Gandhara civilization to the world. He revealed that more than 8,000 foreign tourists visited the northern areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa last year, which he termed highly encouraging. In addition, millions of do-

## Smart agri imperative to tackle challenges of climate change

FAISALABAD: Chief Scientist Agricultural Research Dr Sajidur-Rehman said that climate-smart agriculture has become an urgent necessity to address growing challenges of climate change which are declining crop productivity and emerging threats to food security. He was addressing a seminar on "Modern Practices of Climate-Smart Farming" organized by Pakistan Society of Agronomy in collaboration with the Agronomic Research Institute Faisalabad at main library of Ayub Agricultural Research Institute (AARI) Faisalabad. Dr Sajidur-Rehman said that climate change has severely disrupted traditional farming systems, pushing the farmers into serious economic difficulties. He said that healthy soils not only support better crop growth but also play a vital role in mitigating climate change by absorbing carbon from the atmosphere. Highlighting key strategies, he underlined the importance of balanced fertilizer use, efficient water management, and adoption of modern agricultural technologies to conserve natural resources and ensure sustainable agricultural growth. He said that climate-smart farming practices were essential to safeguard agriculture against extreme weather patterns in addition to ensuring long-term productivity. On this occasion, newly elected President of Pakistan Society of Agronomy Dr Naveed Akhtar also took oath of his office and said that he would play an active role in promoting climate-smart agriculture and improving standard of agricultural research. Expert of University of Agricultural Faisalabad (UAF) Dr Fahad Rasool said that by adopting modern farming techniques, higher yields.—APP

## NHA, FWO to prepare joint report on motorways in 15 days: Aleem

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Communications Abdul Aleem Khan on Tuesday directed the National Highway Authority (NHA) and the Frontier Works Organization (FWO) to prepare a joint report within 15 days for improving the Motorway database and addressing pending issues, particularly the up-gradation of rest areas so that sustainable solutions to the problems being faced on Motorways can be ensured. He expressed these views while talking to senior officers during his visit to the Lahore-Islamabad Motorway (M-2). Federal Minister carried out a detailed inspection of various rest areas including Sukhi, Sial, Bhara and reviewed the facilities available on M-2 Lahore Islamabad Motorway including tuck

shops, mosques, washrooms, and overall infrastructure, said a press release. Taking notice of deterioration and poor conditions, Abdul Aleem Khan issued instructions to the concerned authorities for immediate and effective remedial measures. He emphasized that data should be collected based on daily traffic volume to ensure that necessary actions are taken in line with actual requirements. He made it clear that the expansion, renovation, and modernization of rest areas on M-2 in accordance with contemporary standards is essential. Aleem Khan stressed that the layout of shops at Motorway rest areas should be uniform and that the availability of food items at officially notified prices must be ensured.

He also directed the NHA to formulate a regular and sustainable plan specifically for Motorway rest areas. During his visit, the minister sought briefings from NHA & FWO officers and the Motorway Police on various administrative and service-related matters. At different locations, citizens and travelers met and interacted with Abdul Aleem Khan, expressing gratitude for the steps taken to improve travel facilities. At the Bhera Rest Area, an overseas Pakistani also called on Federal Minister Abdul Aleem Khan and stated that transport infrastructure in Pakistan is gradually improving. Citizens appreciated the recent improvements in the communications sector and thanked the Federal Minister Abdul Aleem Khan for his initiatives.—APP

## Muqam says investment on youth as PML-N core vision

PESHAWAR: Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs, Gilgit-Baltistan, SAFRON, and President of Pakistan Muslim League (N) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Engineer Amir Muqam, here Tuesday distributed laptops among talented students of University of Peshawar (UoP) on merit under the Prime Minister Laptop Scheme. In his key note address, Engr Amir Muqam said that investing in youth, providing facilities for the public, and building a strong Pakistan is the vision of the leadership of PMLN. "The destiny of nations is decided by their youth. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has made the greatest sacrifices in the fight against terrorism referring to APS massacre. The education of our children, the future of our youth, and our economy are all linked to peace," he said while addressing as Chief Guest an impressive ceremony at the University of Peshawar where laptops were distributed among university students under the Prime Minister's Laptop Scheme. Engr Amir Muqam was warmly received by the university administration, faculty and students upon arrival at the university campus. The federal minister said that he felt immense happiness and pride to be among the talented male and female students of the University of Peshawar, where 2,400 students are being provided laptops under the historic Prime Minister's Youth Program launched for the education empowerment of youth of Pakistan. He said that 14,000 students are being given laptops in various universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, adding over one million laptops were distributed among students and youth of Pakistan. The Prime Minister's Laptop Scheme was initiated by the PML-N government when Shahbaz Sharif was CM Punjab in 2011; however, unfortunately, this key program was intentionally stopped in 2018-2022 during Govt of PTI by depriving students of the facility. Keeping in view of its immense importance for students and youth of Pakistan, the Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has relaunched the laptop scheme for students of all provinces of Pakistan after coming into power in 2022. Federal Minister Engineer Amir Muqam congratulated from the bottom of his heart all the fortunate students of UoP who started benefiting from this landmark program. While paying tribute to the academic, research, and educational services of the University of Peshawar, he said that this institution has been a beacon of knowledge not only for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but for the entire Pakistan, and that its graduates have played a prominent role in serving the country and the nation in diverse fields and proved their mark. He reiterated that the destiny of nations is decided in the hands of youth. "Young people are the most valuable asset of any country, and Pakistan's future is bright because of its talented, courageous, and educated youth.—DNA



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif meets with the leader of PML N and senior politician Raja Zafar ul Haq at his residence.



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Forces Days

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Revolution DayJan 01 / Palestine  
Palestine Revolution DayJan 01 / Sudan  
National DayJan 04 / Myanmar  
Independence DayJan 06 / Iraq  
Armed Forces DayJan 12 / Tanzania  
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Rawal Town.....5773343

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# Ayaz for timely completion of 104 family suites project

Minister of State for Interior, Senator Talal Chaudhry, accompanied the Speaker during the visit. The Speaker was briefed in detail on the project's progress by Senator Talal Chaudhry, who informed him that construction work has entered its final stages

ISLAMABAD: Speaker of National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq on Tuesday underscored that the timely completion of the 104 additional family suites project is imperative to resolve the acute accommodation issues faced by Members of Parliament, warning that no further delay or negligence would be tolerated. The Speaker made these remarks during his visit to the Parliament Lodges, where he reviewed the progress of the under-construction project aimed at providing additional residential facilities to parliamentarians. Minister of State for Interior, Senator Talal Chaudhry, accompanied the Speaker during the visit. The Speaker was briefed in detail on the project's progress by Senator Talal Chaudhry, who informed him that construction work has entered its final stages. The 104 additional family suites project, originally launched in 2011, had remained stalled for several years. It was revived after a prolonged delay due to the special efforts and personal intervention of Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq. Emphasizing the significance of the project, the Speaker said that its early completion is among his top priorities, as Members of Parliament are currently facing serious residential difficulties. He directed the Capital Development Authority (CDA) to expedite the pace of work while ensuring the highest construction standards and maintaining strict oversight to complete the project within the stipulated timeframe. Reiterating his stance, Ayaz Sadiq said that the early completion of the project is unavoidable and



ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, inspecting the construction work of the New Parliament Lodges Project.

instructed the CDA to remain under continuous monitoring to ensure quality, transparency and efficiency. Talal Chaudhry assured the Speaker that all available resources would be utilized to ensure the swift and

timely completion of the project. He also appreciated the Speaker's keen personal interest in reviving and closely supervising the construction of the additional family suites. Acting Secretary National Assembly

Saeed Ahmed Maitla, Advisor for Law National Assembly Muhammad Mushtaq, along with senior officials from the Ministry of Interior and the CDA, were also present on the occasion.

## HEC launches Maktab to digitize university services

ISLAMABAD: The Higher Education Commission (HEC), has launched an integrated automation suite, MAKTAB, to transform universities by uplifting their core academic, administrative and financial functions. MAKTAB is an integrated suite comprising SAP-Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), Student Lifecycle Management System (SLC), and Blackboard's Learning Management System (LMS), deployed across 25 public sector universities under the World Bank-funded Higher Education Development in Pakistan (HEDP) project. The HEC has undertaken this flagship digital transformation programme to modernise and standardise academic and administrative operations of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This initiative marks a pivotal transition from fragmented and manual processes to a unified, technology-driven governance ecosystem that enhances efficiency, transparency, and real-time decision-making. In the first phase, 25 HEIs have successfully been onboarded on SAP-based ERP and customised SLC solutions that digitize their core functions. Simultaneously, Blackboard

LMS has been deployed to enable high-quality online, blended, and hybrid learning with robust analytics and instructional support tools. Collectively, these systems constitute the foundation of Pakistan's Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS), a national platform aimed at improving governance, strengthening accountability, and supporting evidence-based policy making. Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Ahsan Iqbal Chaudhary, graced the launch ceremony virtually. Minister of State for Federal Education and Professional Training, Wajih Qamar; Chairman HEC, Nadeem Mahbub; Executive Director HEC Dr. Zia Ul Haq; former Chairman HEC, Dr. Mukhtiar Ahmed; Vice Chancellors of participating universities, development partners, and other distinguished stakeholders attended the ceremony held to celebrate onboarding of universities and acknowledging the collaborative institutional efforts. Addressing the audience, Ahsan Iqbal congratulated the Higher Education Commission and the partner universities on the successful integration of MAKTAB,

describing it as a transformative step for Pakistan's higher education sector.

He noted that this achievement goes beyond the launch of a digital system and reflects a clear national resolve to institutionalize excellence and long-term reform. Emphasizing that robust institutions and a highly skilled human capital base are the true hallmarks of excellence in the 21st century, the Minister remarked that innovation, technology, and competitiveness serve as the core drivers of sustainable national progress. He further underlined that clarity of priorities, seriousness of intent, and consistency of effort are essential to translating vision into measurable outcomes. Recalling the achievements realized under Vision 2025, the Minister reaffirmed the Government's steadfast commitment to advancing the strategic pillars of Uraaq Pakistan and steering the country towards innovation-driven and inclusive growth. "Let's think deeply, act decisively, and act collectively" for development of the higher education system of Pakistan, the Minister stressed. —APP

## M-Tag deadline 10 days left as 129,436 vehicles registered

ISLAMABAD: The M-Tag registration drive in the federal capital has entered its final phase as only 10 days remaining before the deadline and so far, 129,436 vehicles have been issued M-Tags across the city. Officials confirmed that registration services were being provided at 16 designated points set up across the city. Due to the approaching deadline, these centers were seeing a steady flow of citizens seeking M-Tags for their vehicles. According to official figures, 2,982 ve-

hicles were issued M-Tags in the last 24 hours alone. This increase reflects growing public response as the cutoff date draws closer. The Excise and Taxation Department stated that daily registrations have risen compared to previous weeks. General Excise Irfan Nawaz Memon said that additional staff has been deployed at all M-Tag points to manage the rush. He explained that steps were taken to ensure that citizens do not face delays during the registration process. He added that the department has also increased the stock

of M-Tags to meet higher demand. Officials said that the registration process requires basic vehicle and owner details and is being completed at designated centers. They stressed that the department is making efforts to keep the process smooth and accessible during the remaining days. The DG Excise once again appealed to vehicle owners to ensure that M-Tags are installed on their vehicles by January 15. He warned that after the deadline, vehicles without M-Tags will be stopped at checkpoints across the city. Enforce-

ment measures will begin immediately after the cutoff date, he said. Authorities clarified that the campaign aims to bring all vehicles in the federal capital under the M-Tag system. They said the system will help manage traffic flow and vehicle records more effectively. Citizens visiting M-Tag centers were advised to plan their visits in advance and avoid waiting until the final days.—APP

## Veteran Shahzad Iqbal appointed as OGRA Member (Gas)

## DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Government has appointed Mr. Shahzad Iqbal as Member (Gas) of the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA).

Mr. Iqbal brings 35 years of extensive regulatory and sectoral experience to the Authority, with a distinguished career in Pakistan's oil and gas sector. Prior to this appointment, he served in senior leadership roles within OGRA's where he handled complex reg-

ulatory matters relating to gas transmission and distribution, tariff determinations, Unaccounted-for-Gas (UFG), consumer protection

and coordination with gas utilities and other stakeholders. His appointment is

expected to further strengthen OGRA's regulatory oversight of the gas sector, particularly at a time when the industry faces challenges related to supply management, infrastructure efficiency, pricing transparency, and consumer confidence.

OGRA remains committed to ensuring transparent, fair, and effective regulation of Pakistan's oil and gas sector in the public interest, and looks forward to Mr. Iqbal's contribution in advancing these objectives.

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**NDMA sounds alarm on harsh winter cold grip tightens across Northern Pakistan**

ISLAMABAD: The NDMA's National Emergencies Operations Center (NEOC) has warned of a severe cold wave in northern regions and northern Balochistan, with harsh conditions expected to persist in Gilgit-Baltistan, Kashmir, upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Potohar region, and northern Balochistan. According to the advisory, harsh winter conditions are likely to continue across Gilgit-Baltistan, Kashmir, upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Potohar region, and northern Balochistan in the coming days. A sharp rise in cold intensity is forecast for northern Balochistan, particularly in Quetta, Ziarat and Kalat. NEOC have cautioned that the severe weather may heighten the risk of respiratory ailments, urging citizens to adopt precautionary measures. The NDMA has cautioned that severe cold may damage standing crops, advising farmers to adopt protective measures. The advisory further warned that prevailing weather conditions, coupled with possible dense fog, could pose risks to commuters in plain areas, urging caution during morning travel. The Authority said it is ensuring timely early warnings and dissemination of information on potential hazards to relevant institutions and the public.—APP

Rapid works on Kachehri Chowk project reaches 42% completion

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi's flagship infrastructure project at Kachehri Chowk, involving a major flyover and multiple underpasses, has achieved 42 percent progress, according to the official record matching on ground progress. The day night shifts have shown marvelous output. Concrete slab casting has commenced on the Jinnah Park section. All three underpasses have now completed their slabs. A small remaining portion of the Jinnah Park section is pending, where temporary folding, shuttering has been installed to facilitate ongoing construction. Talking to APP here on Tuesday, Rana Qamar Ali, EXEN Punjab Highway Department informed that Peshawar Road section, including three underpasses, are being processed as part of the integrated development. The project aims to establish a signal-free corridor linking the Islamabad Expressway with GT Road and Peshawar Road via the old Airport Road. It encompasses multiple underpasses and flyovers across key junctions, including Kachehri Chowk, Iftikhar Janjua Road, Jinnah Park, three underpasses on Peshawar Road including Qasim Market, Race Course Graveyard signal and Chairing cross.—APP

## QAU launches DOMS to modernise administration

ISLAMABAD: Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU) has initiated a major step towards digital transformation with the launch of the Digital Office Management System (DOMS), also referred to as the e-Office system. This system aims to replace conventional paper-based workflows with secure, efficient, and transparent digital processes across all administrative and academic offices. DOMS enables faculty and administrative staff to electronically create, forward, track, and archive official files. Each user is provided with a personalized digital workspace ("My Desk") that displays pending actions, urgent files, and completed tasks, ensuring efficiency and clarity in official correspondence. The system maintains complete audit trails, promoting transparency and accountability in decision-making. The DOMS significantly reduces administrative workload, minimizes delays, and ensures easy access to official records. The initiative also supports environmental sustainability through reduced paper consumption. This digital initiative has been generously contributed and supported by QAU Alumni as a meaningful investment in their Alma Mater. —DNA

## Briefs

**Sanaullah advises PTI to drop hostile policy against state**

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister's Adviser on Political Affairs Rana Sanaullah on Tuesday called on the PTI to abandon its hostile stance toward the state, cautioning that it risks Imran Khan's political influence, the KP government's stability and his popularity and encouraged engagement through dialogue. While speaking to a local news channel, Rana Sanaullah stated that as a political leader operating under a democratic system, he feels compelled to advise Imran Khan to abandon his entrenched 13-15-year-old confrontational approach and adopt dialogue instead. He warned that continuing on a hostile path risks the stability of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government and damages Khan's popularity.

Rana Sanaullah criticized this attitude as undemocratic, saying that persistent clashes with the state only invite political danger and weaken public trust. He emphasized that leadership in a democracy requires compromise and engagement, not repeated confrontation that jeopardizes governance and political standing.

The adviser highlighted that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has repeatedly and categorically extended an official offer for table talks, yet PTI has failed to take the initiative seriously, instead resorting to criticism and negative rhetoric.

Rana Sanaullah called on the party to seize the opportunity for dialogue before their continued stance causes irreparable political harm.—APP

**ITP urges commuters to slow down**

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) on Tuesday advised citizens to exercise caution as fog reduced visibility in parts of the federal capital. An ITP official told APP that motorists and motorcyclists should reduce speed, maintain safe distances, and strictly follow traffic rules to ensure their own and others' safety on the road. The official said traffic police officers remain deployed on major roads to facilitate commuters and manage traffic during the foggy conditions. Citizens were urged to cooperate with the traffic police and avoid unnecessary travel until visibility improves. For assistance or in case of emergency, commuters can contact the Traffic Helpline 1915 or Pucar-15.—APP

**Islamabad shrouded in dense fog**

ISLAMABAD: Dense fog enveloped Islamabad on Tuesday morning, cutting visibility to less than five metres and plunging the capital's usually bustling streets into an unsettling quiet. Neurologists describe the effect as White Silence Syndrome, a fog-induced perceptual compression that narrows forward vision, dampens peripheral awareness and distorts surrounding sounds. Core symptoms appeared quickly. Residents reported strained eyes, muffled hearing, wobbly balance, and mental fatigue within minutes. "Your brain prioritizes survival," explained Dr. Faisal Ahmed, neurologist at PIMS Hospital. "It ignores edges, muffles noise, and doubles reaction times. Drivers misjudge gaps and struggle to navigate safely." Scientific studies link this syndrome to low light scattering. Fog droplets overload the visual cortex, slow auditory processing, and subtly spike stress hormones, leaving commuters tense and disoriented. By 7am, Islamabad felt the fog's full grip. Jinnah Avenue clogged with slow-moving traffic. Margalla roads disappeared in mist, and sectors F-7 through I-8 became nearly invisible. Ahmed Raza, a banker in G-9, parked his car after struggling through the fog. "I felt compressed, heavy," he said. "Horns sounded miles away, and I turned too slowly." The syndrome also warps roads visually. Landmarks such as Centaurus Mall vanished first, while potholes and kerbs remained visible, betraying drivers' instincts. —APP

# Al-Shifa's Dr Afghani receives lifetime achievement award

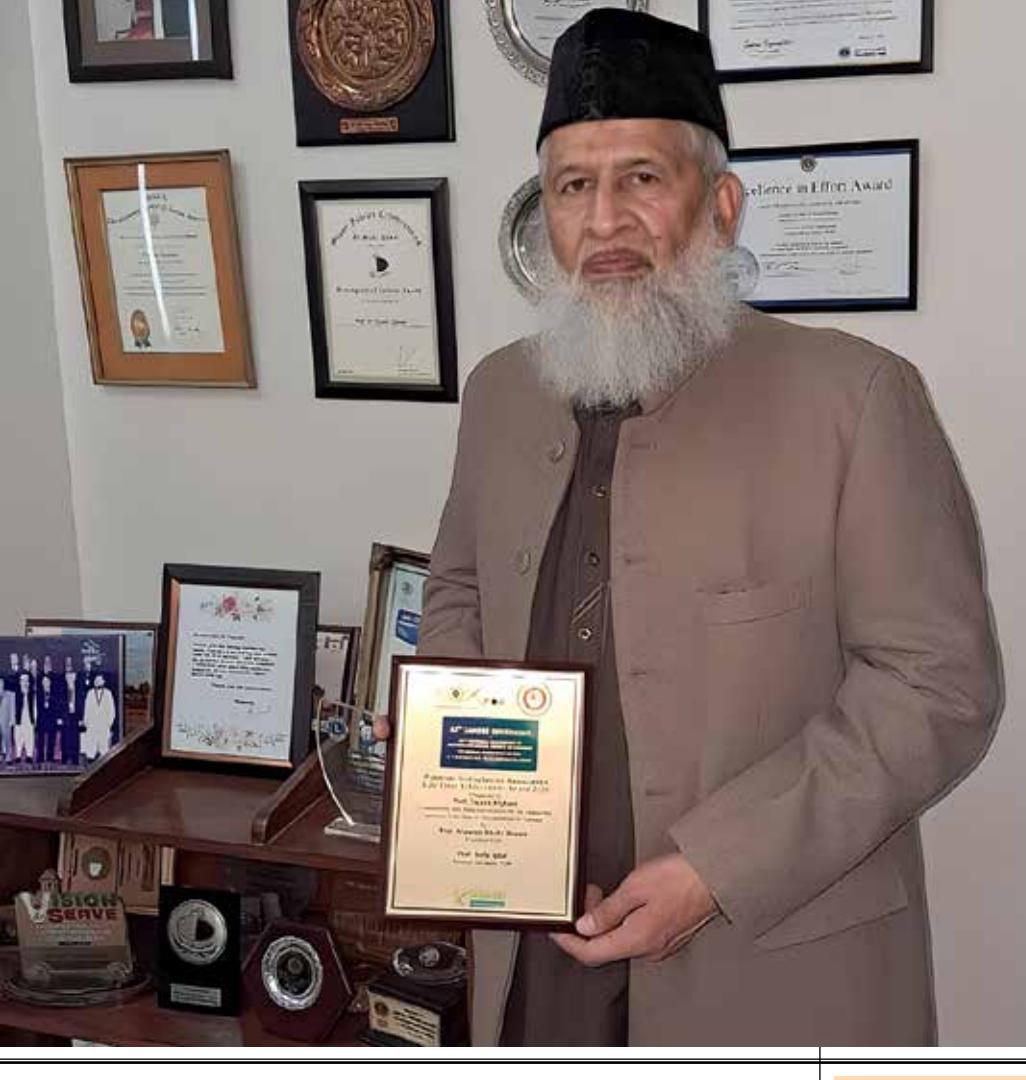
The focus remains on providing affordable specialised treatment to patients from across the country who need access to services not widely available in the public sector

**DNA**

RAWALPINDI: Senior ophthalmologist Dr Tayyab Afghani of Al-Shifa Trust Eye Hospital has been awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Pakistan Oculoplastic Association during an international eye conference held in Lahore in recognition of his long-standing contributions to specialised eye care and medical education.

Dr Afghani's work as head of the Orbit and Oculoplastics Department at Al-Shifa Trust Eye Hospital was lauded at the conference, and his role in developing services for complex eye diseases was described as revolutionary.

Dr Afghani is known for his work in ocular oncology, reconstructive surgery, and eye tumours. He played a key role in establishing Pakistan's first dedicated centre offering free treatment for eye cancer patients, addressing a major gap in access to specialised care for low-income families. He has authored more than 60 research papers and presented over 70 scientific studies at international conferences in more than 20 countries. His previous honours include the Distinguished Services Award, the Prevention of Blindness Award from the Asia Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology,



and two gold medals from the Ophthalmological Society of Pakistan.

Talking to the media, Dr Afghani said the award is an honour for him and the Al-Shifa Trust. He added that the hospital has expanded clinical services in line with international practices through sustained investment in infrastructure and training. The hospital has spent hundreds of millions of rupees on advanced diagnostic and surgical equipment to treat complex orbital and oncology cases.

He also underscored the institution's role in human resource development. The Trust is recognised as one of the country's largest training centres for ophthalmology, with programmes accredited by the College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan. It offers FCPS Part II training as well as diplomas and fellowships in sub-specialties such as paediatric ophthalmology, retina, and glaucoma.

According to data from the College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan and the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council, the country continues to face shortages of eye specialists, particularly in rural areas. The focus remains on providing affordable specialised treatment to patients from across the country who need access to services not widely available in the public sector.

## Chinese tech firm explores smart city collaboration

**DNA**

ISLAMABAD: A delegation from Beiming Software, a China-based technology company, has explored collaboration opportunities in smart cities and digital transformation during a visit to Pakistan, taking a new step in China-Pakistan cooperation in emerging technologies. During the visit, the company signed a strategic partnership agreement with Smart TechOne (Private) Limited, a subsidiary of Habib Rafiq Engineering (Pvt) Ltd (HRL Group). According to a Gwadar Pro's report on Tuesday, the Smart TechOne is working on Pakistan's digital transformation through projects such as Capital Smart City, Lahore Smart City, and Silicon Village. Under the agreement, the two sides plan to jointly develop and implement smart city solutions in Pakistan, with an initial focus on Capital Smart City. The collaboration aims to introduce intelligent urban management systems,

digital governance platforms, smart infrastructure, and data-driven public services to enhance efficiency, sustainability, and quality of life. The agreement was signed in a ceremony led by Muhammad Aslam Malik, Group Chief Operating Officer of HRL Group, with representatives from Beiming Software and HRL in attendance, including Wang Jiangping, Xue Jinghui, and Khalid Taimur Akram. In a separate development, Beiming Software also signed a partnership agreement with Smart Future Technologies (Private) Limited, another company linked to HRL's smart city ecosystem. The partnership will focus on the design, development, and deployment of smart city solutions nationwide, integrating technologies such as IoT, AI, cloud computing, and data analytics to improve urban management and public services. Founded in 1998, Beiming Software Co., Ltd. is a high-tech enterprise that uses technologies such as cloud computing, big data, artificial intelligence, and blockchain to support smart city development.

## Sino-Pak researchers map drought links along CPEC from Xinjiang to Gwadar

ISLAMABAD: A new climate study covering the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and areas along its route, including southwest Pakistan, says that understanding how dry weather develops into agricultural drought could help authorities improve drought management in arid regions. The study, published in January 2026 in the journal Atmospheric Research, is titled "Unravelling the spatiotemporal causality chain between meteorological and agricultural drought propagation in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor." According to a Gwadar Pro's report on Tuesday, it examines how meteorological drought propagates into soil-moisture deficits and agricultural drought along the CPEC corridor, which the authors describe as stretching from Kashgar in Xinjiang to the port of Gwadar in southwestern Pakistan. The authors say drought poses major risks to ecosystems and society, and that understanding how meteorological drought evolves

into agricultural drought is important for developing mitigation strategies. The study used data covering 1981 to 2022 and applied Enhanced Convergent Cross Mapping (ECCM) alongside neural-network models—ANN, DNN and FFNN—supported by explainable AI (XAI) to analyse drought propagation dynamics. The paper reports a strong causal relationship between meteorological and agricultural drought and notes that propagation timing varies by region. Based on ECCM, it finds that propagation times ranged from 3-4 months in northern/southern Xinjiang and eastern Pakistan to 1-2 months in eastern Xinjiang and western Pakistan. It also identifies maximum temperature and soil moisture as key drivers of drought transitions. The research was supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China, the Natural Science Foundation of Shenzhen, and High-end Foreign Experts Introduction Projects.—APP

### Cement export increases 11.48% to \$151.133m

ISLAMABAD: The exports of cement witnessed an increase of 11.48 percent during the first five months of the current fiscal year 2025-26 as against the exports of the corresponding months of last year. The cement exports from the country were recorded at US \$151.133 million during July-November (2025-26) against the exports of US \$135.574 million during July-November (2024-25), according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS). In terms of quantity, the cement exports also rose by 3.12 percent from 3,739,387 metric tons to 3,855,975 metric tons, the data revealed. Meanwhile, year-on-year basis, the cement exports witnessed a decrease of 46.32 percent during the month of November 2025 as compared to the same month of last year.—APP

## Wheat sowing targets met, perishable food, sugar prices decline

**DNA**

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal chaired a meeting of the National Price Monitoring Committee (NPMC) to review inflation trends, availability of essential commodities and measures to ensure price stability and strengthen food security, particularly ahead of Ramazan, the holy fasting month. The meeting was attended by Chief Economist Dr Intiaz Ahmad, Chief Statistician of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), and representatives from the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, the ICT administration, provincial governments and the State Bank of Pakistan, a news release said. The PBS presented a detailed overview of inflation trends, noting that headline inflation increased from 4.1 percent in December 2024 to 5.6pc in December 2025. Major con-

tributors to year-on-year inflation were higher gas charges, rising gold prices, and increases in the prices of wheat, milk and chicken. In contrast, prices of several key commodities, including potatoes, tomatoes, onions, tea, pulses, electricity and stationery, showed a declining trend. PBS also presented data from the Decision Support System on Inflation (DSSI), indicating improvements in the price stability of essential food items. Comparative analysis of 2024 and 2025 showed that prices of kitchen staples such as onions and potatoes remained lower in the current cycle. Wheat flour (20kg bag) prices increased from around Rs1,800 to Rs2,146 in the last one year. While some items such as pulse moong showed minor fluctuations, overall trends pointed towards easing pressure on sensitive price indicators ahead of Ramazan. The meeting was informed that wheat sowing targets have been achieved and the full seasonal target is expected

February, strengthening domestic food security. Prices of sugar and chicken, which had risen earlier in the year, have declined significantly, with sugar prices falling from over Rs180 per kilogram to around Rs150. To address structural factors affecting price stability, Ahsan Iqbal directed the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to prepare a detailed study on cold chain infrastructure. "Cold chains are essential for absorbing market shocks, reducing post-harvest losses and balancing demand and supply," he said, adding that the ministry should work with the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics to examine global best practices and appropriate incentives. The minister also directed the preparation of policy working papers on the poultry, dairy and juice sectors to promote value addition and exports, noting that egg exports have increased and should be supported through better processing, quality assurance and market access.

## Railways launches major track upgradation

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways has launched an extensive programme to upgrade aging rail infrastructure, expand the network and restore long-neglected sections, with the objective of improving safety, reducing travel time and strengthening national connectivity.

"The department owns a total of 11,881 track kilometers and 7,791 route kilometers across the country, adding that nearly 67 percent of the existing track has become over-aged," an official in the Ministry of Railways. Despite limited investment in railway infrastructure for more than seven decades, the official said, Pakistan Railways has continued to maintain operations to ensure sustainable service delivery. The official said the Ministry has recognized the deteriorating condition of railway tracks and is making substantial efforts to improve infrastructure through revenue generation and funding under the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP). Among the key ongoing projects, he said, is the construction of a 105-kilometer new rail link connecting Thar Coal Mines with Chhor Railway Station, a project expected to facilitate energy transportation and promote regional development. He said that several operational routes are currently being upgraded under PSDP-funded track safety initiatives. These include immediate and essential safety works on critical sections such as Tando Adam-Rohri, Rohri-Khanpur, Kiamari-Hyderabad, Khanewal-Shorkot-Faisalabad-Qila Sheikhpura-Shahdara, Sher Shah-Kundian, Rohri-Sibi and Kotri-Akhundabad.

These measures are aimed at enhancing operational safety and improving reliability on major rail corridors. At the planning stage, the official said Pakistan Railways has proposed large-scale upgradation of branch lines with financial support from the provincial governments of Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan. In Punjab, the official said seven sections spanning over 1,400 kilometers are planned for upgradation, including the Shahdara-Narowal-Sialkot, Raiwind-Kasur-Pakpatan-Lodhran and Kot Adam-Dera Ghazi Khan-Kasmor Colony routes. In Sindh, six sections covering nearly 1,000 kilometers—such as Karachi-Hyderabad, Hyderabad-Rohri and Kotri-Dadu—have been proposed for improvement. While in Balochistan, the Sariab-Quetta-Kuchlak section is also included in the upgradation plan, he added. To further enhance regional and international connectivity, the official said Pakistan Railways has initiated feasibility studies for new rail links.—APP

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## Netanyahu's recognition of Somaliland is a sinister diversion

HANI HAZAIMEH

ISRAELI Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's recent recognition of Somaliland as an independent state – the first official recognition of this breakaway region – has sent shockwaves across Africa and the Arab world. While Netanyahu's government frames it as a diplomatic breakthrough "in the spirit of the Abraham Accords," the timing and context make that narrative dangerously misleading. Far from being a benign act of statecraft, this provocative decision cannot be understood in isolation from the catastrophe unfolding in Gaza and the broader strategy of the Israeli government. Critics across the region have rightly condemned the recognition as a violation of international law and Somali sovereignty. The government in Mogadishu, backed by the African Union and Arab League, has labeled Israel's action an "illegal aggression" that threatens regional stability and undermines the principle of territorial integrity enshrined in the UN charter. What makes this episode particularly alarming is not merely that Israel has taken a controversial diplomatic stance. It is that this move appears to be part of a broader political calculus – one that treats human suffering and displacement as leverage in a realpolitik game. Reports emerging from Israeli media suggest that Netanyahu's recognition may be tied to an understanding with certain actors in Somaliland under which the region would agree to receive Palestinians from Gaza, perhaps as part of a long-term resettlement plan. If the reports are accurate, then this is not diplomacy, but engineered demography – a sinister extension of policies that have already wrought unimaginable devastation. Turning impoverished, structurally fragile regions such as Somaliland into bargaining chips in an attempt to "solve" the Gaza crisis by emptying the enclave of its original residents is not humanitarian relief; it is displacement dressed up as strategy. Even without this alleged linkage to Gaza, the timing – during the most catastrophic period of the war in Gaza in decades – speaks volumes. At a moment when the world debate should be focused on stopping the bloodshed, and ensuring the rights and safety of civilians, Netanyahu chooses to open a diplomatic front that is likely to inflame tensions across the Horn of Africa and the Middle East. The recognition has already drawn condemnation from Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, and other key actors who warn that it sets a dangerous precedent for secessionist movements elsewhere.

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Consider the strategic implications: Somaliland sits at the mouth of the Red Sea, adjacent to critical maritime routes and near volatile regions in Yemen and the Horn of Africa. Turning it into a recognized state with formal ties to Israel inserts Tel Aviv deeper into a geopolitical theater already rife with rivalries and competing interests. This is not a step toward peace; it is an escalation of influence – and potentially conflict – far from Israel's borders. Moreover, if the underlying motivation truly includes relocating Palestinians from Gaza, the ethical stakes become even more damning. Netanyahu's latest maneuver is not a path to peace. It is a detour into deeper discord – and the world should call it exactly that. Forced displacement is absolutely prohibited under international law, and any plan that effectively treats civilian populations as expendable for political convenience is morally indefensible. Gaza is a homeland, not a pawn. Palestinians do not want to be moved; they want justice, dignity, and the ability to live safely in their own land. The broader context cannot be ignored. Netanyahu's government has shown repeatedly that it will use any tactic – diplomatic, military, or demographic – to deflect attention from its own actions in Gaza, and to buy political time at home and abroad. This is a leader under pressure domestically and internationally: facing war fatigue, mounting scrutiny over conduct in Gaza, and isolation even among some traditional allies. Opening a new diplomatic file in Africa may be intended to distract or to create a narrative of global engagement. In reality, it exposes a regime grasping for legitimacy, while deepening its entanglement in war and controversy. Arab and Muslim states have responded with alarm because this is not just about Somaliland or Somalia. It is about respect for sovereignty, about the norms that govern international relations, and about the danger of allowing geopolitical opportunism to override legal and moral standards. When one state flouts these principles for tactical gain, the consequences ripple outward. If this decision is intended as a complement to the catastrophe in Gaza, then it underscores just how far Netanyahu's government has drifted from any credible path to resolution. Solutions to the Gaza crisis must be rooted in the protection of civilians, immediate humanitarian access, and a political process that acknowledges the rights of Palestinians. They cannot be predicated on displacement or innovative forms of segregation disguised as diplomatic breakthroughs. Recognizing Somaliland as a state, if done legitimately and with broad international consent, might one day be seen as support for self-determination. But in this context – rushed, unilateral, and potentially linked to plans for Palestinian relocation – it is nothing short of geopolitical opportunism that risks fueling further instability. The international community must not be seduced by the optics. It must demand clarity, transparency, and accountability. It must reaffirm the fundamental principles of international law, reject any use of displacement as policy, and focus all efforts on ending the agony in Gaza, not outsourcing it. Netanyahu's latest maneuver is not a path to peace. It is a detour into deeper discord – and the world should call it exactly that.

## From Punjabi Cinema to Global Politics

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



The United States justifies its action through a contested blend of domestic precedents; federal criminal indictments with extraterritorial reach, presidential authority under Article II of its Constitution, and legal doctrines such as Ker-Frisbie, which allow courts to try defendants regardless of how they are brought before them. Historical parallels, notably the 1989 capture of Panama's Manuel Noriega through "Operation Nifty Package" are cited as precedent. Moreover, Washington argues that since it has not recognised the Venezuelan leader as legitimate since 2019, he cannot claim sovereign immunity

HERE was a time when a visit to the cinema once a month was regarded as wholesome family entertainment. In the 1970s, Urdu and Punjabi cinema possessed a charm, vigour and moral clarity that modern audiences can scarcely imagine. The heroes were unmistakably heroic, the villains unapologetically villainous, and the dialogue – often thunderous – left a lasting imprint on the collective memory. Among the most commanding of those voices was Mazhar Shah, whose resonant tone and fierce screen presence dominated Punjabi and Urdu films for decades. From 1958 to 2016, he appeared in nearly 193 films, mostly portraying villains whose rage, arrogance and booming Punjabi tirades became legendary.

One particular scene remains etched in popular memory. Mazhar Shah as a villain in a film sends a proposal to the heroine's father, demanding her hand in marriage. When the father refuses, the rejection ignites fury. With a single command – delivered in that unmistakable, high-pitched growl – Mazhar Shah orders his henchmen to seize the girl. She is abducted from her home and brought to the villain's Dai'ra (Camp), the scene unfolding with the exaggerated drama typical of its era. I had not thought of that film for years, yet it resurfaced vividly in my mind when news broke of the arrest of the Venezuelan President and his wife on the alleged orders of the President of the United States. The cinematic echo was unsettling. In this real-life drama, neither the American President is a traditional villain nor the Venezuelan President a helpless heroine, yet the visual and symbolic resemblance was impossible to ignore.

Venezuela, long at odds with Washington, has consistently used international platforms, particularly the United Nations' General Assembly sessions to criticise American policies and Presidents. Its leaders have spoken defiantly, often invoking sovereignty, resistance and dignity. Against this backdrop, the manner in which the Venezuelan President was apprehended appeared less like a

routine legal action and more like a scene lifted from a political thriller. The operation, code-named "Operation Absolute Resolve," reportedly involved airstrikes on Venezuelan military targets, resulting in dozens of deaths, before the President and his wife were captured in Caracas and flown to New York to face federal charges ranging from narco-terrorism conspiracy to weapons offences. The charges stem from a 2020 indictment accusing him of leading the so-called "Cartel of the Suns" and collaborating with armed groups such as FARC.

What makes this episode particularly disturbing is not merely its dramatic execution but the strategic and legal context surrounding it. Venezuela is not a defenceless state. Its military, ranked 50th out of 145 countries by the Global Firepower Index for 2025, possesses significant manpower and a defence budget of around \$4.1 billion. Its geography and force structure make it regionally formidable, especially in defensive roles. More striking still is its natural wealth. Venezuela holds an estimated \$14.3 trillion in natural resources, driven primarily by its vast oil reserves – approximately 303 billion barrels, the largest proven reserves in the world, accounting for nearly 18 per cent of the global total. This positions Venezuela as a pivotal energy actor, surpassing even Saudi Arabia and Iran in sheer reserves, though sanctions and infrastructural decay have blunted this advantage.

Yet military strength and resource wealth proved irrelevant in the face of overwhelming power exercised beyond the usual boundaries of international conduct. No explicit law in the United States – or in any other country – authorises the use of military force to arrest or kidnap a foreign head of state for domestic prosecution. Such actions collide directly with established principles of international law, including the prohibition on the use of force enshrined in Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, the doctrine of non-intervention, and the customary rule of head-of-state

immunity. No UN Security Council mandate was obtained, and attempts to frame drug trafficking as a form of armed attack fail to meet accepted legal standards.

The United States justifies its action through a contested blend of domestic precedents; federal criminal indictments with extraterritorial reach, presidential authority under Article II of its Constitution, and legal doctrines such as Ker-Frisbie, which allow courts to try defendants regardless of how they are brought before them. Historical parallels, notably the 1989 capture of Panama's Manuel Noriega through "Operation Nifty Package" are cited as precedent. Moreover, Washington argues that since it has not recognised the Venezuelan leader as legitimate since 2019, he cannot claim sovereign immunity. International legal scholars, however, overwhelmingly reject this reasoning, warning that substituting domestic interpretations for international norms erodes the very foundation of the global order. If such incidents become normalised, the future of world peace appears bleak. When powerful states assume the right to seize foreign leaders by force, weaker nations will feel perpetually insecure, diplomacy will be hollowed out, and the incentive to resolve disputes through dialogue or legal mechanisms will diminish. The established system of extradition, governed by treaties and judicial review, exists precisely to prevent such unilateralism. The way forward lies in restraint and commitment to international law. Global peace cannot survive if cinematic impulses replace legal principles. Powerful states must resist the temptation to act as judge, jury and executioner beyond their borders. Multilateral institutions, however imperfect, must be strengthened, not bypassed. Otherwise, the world risks descending into a disorder where every thunderous command of "bring him" or "bring her" echoes not from a cinema screen, but across a fractured and fearful international stage.

## Economic protests add pressure to an already weakened Iran

Con Coughlin

Pezeshkian has also addressed the crisis in a speech to the Majlis, the Iranian parliament, on the country's proposed 2026 budget, which revealed a steep decrease in oil revenue and an increase in taxes – the result of the latest sanctions imposed by the Trump administration. As a concession to the protesters, Pezeshkian accepted the resignation of the central bank chief and appointed Abdolnaser Hemmati, the former economy minister, to replace him.

Hemmati, the former economy minister, to replace him. Pezeshkian's ability to address the protesters' concerns...

**I**n the four or so decades since the creation of Iran's Islamic Republic, the ruling regime has faced numerous challenges from its restive population. The "Green Revolution" in 2009, which many observers regarded as a precursor to the so-called Arab Spring that followed two years later, is still regarded as the most serious attempt to force the regime to undertake wholesale reform. In what began as a series of mass protests against the outcome of the disputed 2009 presidential election, which resulted in the reelection of the country's hard-line president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the movement soon developed into a nationwide call for democratic reform and social liberalization. It was only after regime hard-liners launched a brutal crackdown against the demonstrators that order was finally restored. The crackdown did not entirely succeed in crushing dissent, with more recent protests taking place over the regime's restrictive policies toward women, which prompted further nationwide demonstrations after a young Kurdish-Iranian woman died in police custody in 2022. But while the Iranian regime has previously proved to be highly effective at crushing any hint of political opposition that has emerged since the 1979 revolution, the current round of protests has the potential to mount a far more serious challenge to the regime's authority, not least because it is focused on one issue that the ayatollahs appear incapable of resolving – namely, the dire state of the Iranian economy. Maintaining a basic level of economic stability has always been a major challenge for the ruling regime, as decades of economic sanctions and international isolation have inflicted significant damage on the living standards of ordinary Iranians. Nor has the plight of the Iranian people been helped by the vast amounts hard-liners within the regime have invested in expanding Iran's military presence throughout the Middle East, investing heavily in militias and allies in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Gaza and Yemen – to name but a few. This lethal combination of hard-hitting sanctions and inept economic management on the part of the ayatollahs has now resulted in the regime confronting one of the biggest nationwide protest movements it has faced, with ordinary

Iranians taking to the streets to voice their anger at their country's dire economic predicament.

The primary cause of the unrest, which began when protests and strikes broke out in Tehran's Grand Bazaar in the closing days of 2025, is the collapse in the value of the rial, the Iranian currency, which, having already seen its value decline significantly in recent years, has now fallen by a further 40 percent since Iran's war with Israel in June. As a result, it now takes 1.42 million rials to buy \$1. Last year, a dollar could be bought for 820,000 rials. The latest collapse in the currency's value renders it all but worthless. With inflation running at 50 percent, many Iranian traders, businessmen and ordinary families now face the very real prospect of financial ruin.

The country's dire economic situation, moreover, is made worse by the fact that Iran is suffering from widespread youth unemployment, with the result that students are joining forces with middle-class traders to demand reform of the country's economic policies.

The pressure on the regime is compounded by the impact of a nationwide drought the country has suffered in recent months, which many Iranians believe has been exacerbated by years of underfunding in key Iranian infrastructure. The current round of protests has the potential to mount a far more serious challenge to the regime's authority.

With the protests spreading to other major Iranian cities, such as Isfahan, some of the demonstrators have been calling for regime change, while others have focused their criticism on the regime's wasteful investment in overseas conflict, with one popular chant declaring, "No to Gaza, no to Lebanon, I'd give my life for Iran only."

The eruption of protests in Iran certainly comes at a difficult time for the ruling regime. It was severely weakened by last summer's 12-day war with Israel, which resulted in the deaths of many of its top commanders.

The regime's weakness, moreover, can be seen in the fact that it has been forced to adopt more liberal policies in recent months, granting ordinary Iranians more freedom to articulate their concerns and easing the restrictive measures imposed against women.

In a bid to resolve the crisis, Iranian President Masoud

Pezeshkian has said he will meet representatives of the protesters. "I have asked the interior minister to listen to the legitimate demands of the protesters by engaging in dialogue with their representatives so that the government can do everything in its power to resolve the problems and act responsibly," Pezeshkian said, according to the state-run IRNA news agency.

Pezeshkian has also addressed the crisis in a speech to the Majlis, the Iranian parliament, on the country's proposed 2026 budget, which revealed a steep decrease in oil revenue and an increase in taxes – the result of the latest sanctions imposed by the Trump administration. As a concession to the protesters, Pezeshkian accepted the resignation of the central bank chief and appointed Abdolnaser Hemmati, the former economy minister, to replace him.

Pezeshkian's ability to address the protesters' concerns, though, is limited, as ultimate power lies with the country's 86-year-old supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, who, despite being in poor health, has the final say in the running of the government. Another issue the Iranian president must contend with is the prospect of further military action being taken by Israel and the US, with both Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US President Donald Trump warning Iran that it would face consequences if it continued work on its controversial nuclear and ballistic missile programs. Following their talks at Trump's Mar-a-Lago base in Florida last month, Netanyahu urged Trump to strike again at Iran and bring down the regime.

Trump indicated his main concern would be if Iran attempted to build up its reserves of ballistic weapons and reestablish its nuclear program. "Now, I hear that Iran is trying to build up again," he said. "And if they are, we're going to have to knock them down. We'll knock them down. We'll knock the hell out of them. But hopefully that's not happening." In previous decades, the sheer ruthlessness of the regime's response to anti-government protests enabled it to survive. This time, the scale of the economic crisis it faces means it may have to take a very different approach if it wants to maintain the support of the Iranian people.

Con Coughlin is one of Britain's leading journalists and an international best-selling author.

**Briefs**  
**ISPR chief blames political...**

FROM PAGE 01  
the ISPR DG said Afghan terrorists had tried to replicate the 2014 APS Peshawar attack. "This is a war of the nation, a war of every single child," he said, rejecting a narrative portraying the fight against terrorism as solely the military's responsibility. "A narrative is built, suggesting this is the army's war. This is not true," Lt Gen Chaudhry added. Addressing the hostilities with Afghanistan, the ISPR chief said that the Afghan Taliban regime had attacked Pakistani border posts, following which, "whatever was needed was done, and a hard message was given". "Afghanistan has become the centre of terrorist operations in the region," he said while explaining the factors behind terrorism. The ISPR chief said that the Afghan Taliban regime has found a "new hero" in the form of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He said that the nexus between Fitna Al-Khawarij and India became fully exposed in 2025, posing a serious threat to regional peace and security. He said that if Afghanistan and India wish to confront Pakistan, they are welcome to do so, adding that, "We will fulfill their desire." Reiterating the resolve to curb the menace of terrorism, he said: "We have to win the war against terrorism at all costs." "We have to win this war with strength." "In the last three months, we have closed the borders. There are many signs here for those who see and understand." Noting that Islamabad targeted terrorists at the Afghan border in October 2025, and "dozens of Afghan posts were eliminated within hours". "We targeted the TTP, not TTA," said Lt Gen Chaudhry.

**27th Amendment poses serious...**

FROM PAGE 01  
while it will not be bound by past Supreme Court judgments. The report also raised alarm over the transfer of the Supreme Court's original and advisory jurisdiction to the new court, including cases involving constitutional interpretation and fundamental rights. Powers to review political parties have also been shifted, a move Amnesty said could have serious implications amid repeated government statements about banning the opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). Amnesty further criticised provisions allowing the president to transfer high court judges without their consent, warning that transfers could be used punitively against judges who issue unfavourable rulings. Judges who refuse transfers now face suspension and possible removal. The rights group concluded that the amendment represents the culmination of a concerted assault on judicial independence. It called for an urgent review of the law and urged authorities to safeguard judicial impartiality, uphold separation of powers and ensure accountability in line with international standards.

**India 'hired lobbying firm to fix'...**

FROM PAGE 01  
Washington hired a lobbying firm led by Jason Miller, a former spokesperson of US President Donald Trump, during the same period. Citing the US Department of Justice's (DoJ) Foreign Agent Registration Act (FARA) website, the outlet reported that the lobbying firm, SHW LLC, was asked to schedule meetings for Jaishankar, the Indian foreign secretary and the Indian ambassador with US Vice President JD Vance, Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth, and CIA chief John Ratcliffe. According to the firm's filing, it also reached out to White House Chief of Staff Susie Wiles, US Trade Representative Jamieon Greer, and Ricky Gill at the National Security Council on May 10, 2025.

# PTF Delivers Landmark Achievements in 2025

*Pakistan clinched major international team-event medals during the year, highlighted by gold at the Davis Cup Juniors U16 in Malaysia, gold at the ATF South Asian U12 Championships in Sri Lanka*

OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Tennis Federation (PTF) marked 2025 as a historic year, delivering notable international success, strengthening domestic structures, and significantly expanding grassroots development across the country. Pakistan clinched major international team-event medals during the year, highlighted by gold at the Davis Cup Juniors U16 in Malaysia, gold at the ATF South Asian U12 Championships in Sri Lanka. Pakistan also made a remarkable debut at the ITF Masters 45+ World Championships in Turkey, winning two gold and one bronze medal, while the Wheelchair Tennis Team earned a bronze medal at the ITF World Team Cup Qualifiers in Colombo.

In recognition of its rapid progress, the Asian Tennis Federation (ATF) honored PTF as the fastest-progressing tennis federation in Asia, with the award presented to PTF President Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi at the ATF Annual General Meeting in Almaty. Player development remained a top priori-



ty secured 21 international wild cards for Pakistani players, and successfully hosted the first-ever ATP Challenger tournament in Islamabad, featuring top foreign profes-

sionals alongside local talent. Pakistan Tennis Federation prioritized player development by distributing Rs 35 million in prize money during last year. At the junior level, Pakistan's rising stars captured 20 ITF junior titles, led by Mikael Ali Baig's outstanding performances, while Soha Ali's appearance in an ITF junior doubles final marked a significant breakthrough for women's tennis in Pakistan. To strengthen infrastructure and long-term growth, PTF also constructed two new multi-purpose mini tennis and padel courts at its premises, aimed at introducing young children to the sport and broadening the participation base. At the National Tennis Centre (NTC), Islamabad, year-round free-of-cost training programs were conducted for elite players across all categories – Men, Women, and Juniors (U12 to U18) – under the supervision of the country's top coaches. Additionally, PTF invited foreign coach Robert Davis and fitness trainer Lalovic for a one-month high-performance national training camp in Islamabad, providing players from all age groups with valuable exposure to international training standards.

## Salah seals AFCON last-16 victory for Egypt over brave Benin

**Late Salah Strike Seals Egypt Extra-Time Win Over Brave Benin as Seven-Time AFCON Champions Reach Quarter-Finals After Agadir Thriller With Captain Heroics Injury Drama And Tough Resistance From Underdogs Africa**

AGADIR: Captain Mohamed Salah scored after 124 minutes to clinch a 3-1 extra-time victory for Egypt over plucky minnows Benin in an Africa Cup of Nations last-16 thriller in Agadir on Monday. Marwan Attia put the Pharaohs ahead in the second half and Jodel Dossou equalized for the Cheetahs, who are 58 places below the record seven-time AFCON champions in the world rankings. Yasser Ibrahim headed Egypt back in front in the first half of extra time, then Salah broke clear and beat goalkeeper Marcel Dandjinou with a shot from outside the area for his 10th AFCON goal. Salah, whose goals have helped Liverpool win many trophies, is seeking a first AFCON winners' medal, having twice been a runner-up. Record seven-time champions Egypt stay in Agadir to face title-holders Ivory Coast or Burkina Faso on Saturday in the quarter-finals. "Before the game, I said there are no easy teams, and Benin were tough opponents. Egypt are a great team and I want to make my people happy," said coach Hossam Hassan. "We are sad

about the injury to Mohamed Handy, which seems serious. His teammates played for him. We are mentally prepared to play either 90 minutes or extra time." Benin coach Gernot Rohr said: "What we saw was a match that was a fight, a real battle, while still playing football. Two teams engaged in a tough contest. "When you look at the Egyptian players, we do not have the same level. We missed our best striker Steve Mounie. He would have helped us a lot, particularly in aerial play." Egypt changed 10 of the team that drew with Angola in their final group match seven days ago with only midfielder Ibrahim Adel retained. Benin lacked captain and former Premier League striker Mounie, who had not recovered from an undisclosed illness. Egypt had a great chance to go in front after only eight minutes through Manchester City striker Omar Marmoush. He darted forward from the Egyptian half, gained possession and stayed ahead of two pursuing defenders only to be foiled by Dandjinou, who blocked the ball with his legs, then grasped it. A collision between Handy and Rodolfo Aloko led to a long delay, which ended with the Egyptian being carried off the field. Ahmed Aboul-Fetouh took his place in midfield. An incident deep in added time illustrated how wary Benin were of Salah. When the captain gained possession just outside the box, he was immediately surrounded by three opponents. Dandjinou rescued Benin 10 minutes into the second half when he bravely parried a close-range shot from Ramy Rabia after the ball ran loose to the defender following a corner. As the match passed the hour mark, it began to open up. A Salah attempt to chip the ball into the net was foiled by leaping Dandjinou. Then, a parry from 37-year-old Egypt goalkeeper Mohamed El Shenawy prevented substitute Dossou giving Benin a shock lead. Attia ended the goalless stalemate when Marmoush pushed the ball back to the midfielder and, from just outside the box, he side-footed it into the roof of the net. – APP

## Nigeria cruise past Mozambique to reach AFCON quarter-finals

FES: Nigeria delivered a commanding display as they thrashed Mozambique 4-0 in the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) round of 16 here at Fez Stadium on Monday, underlining their title credentials with a dominant performance. Ademola Lookman was the standout performer, scoring once and providing three assists, while Victor Osimhen struck twice to lead the Super Eagles comfortably into the quarter-finals. Akor Adams added the fourth goal as Nigeria recorded the biggest winning margin of the tournament so far. Nigeria set the tone early and thought they had taken the lead in the second minute when Osimhen finished from close range, only for the effort to be ruled out for offside. The breakthrough eventually came in the 20th minute when Lookman fired home a powerful shot from Adams' pull-back. Five minutes later, Osimhen doubled the lead with a simple tap-in at the back post after Lookman delivered a dangerous low cross across the goalmouth. Nigeria continued their dominance after the break, and Osimhen struck again just two minutes into the second half, benefiting from a rebound before finishing from close range. Adams completed the rout in the 75th minute with an impressive strike from a tight angle, once again following intelligent play from Lookman. Mozambique struggled to cope with Nigeria's pace and physicality, creating just one notable chance in the first half, which was swiftly dealt with by the Nigerian defence. Nigeria now advances to Marrakech, where they will face either Algeria or the Democratic Republic of Congo in the quarter-finals, while Mozambique's historic AFCON run comes to an end. – Agencies

## Mahindra Racing Confident of Mexico City Formula E Bounceback

LONDON: As Mahindra Racing targets an immediate response when the Formula E World Championship resumes in Mexico City this weekend, driver Nyck de Vries is confident the team can build on the positives from a difficult season opener in Sao Paulo last month. The team showed improved pace in Brazil to become the only outfit to place both cars in the knockout Qualifying Duels, with de Vries and Edoardo Mortara starting the big race fifth and third on the grid respectively. De Vries went on to finish ninth, picking up two points, but Mortara was forced to retire as a result of contact damage. "I'm looking forward to getting back to racing this weekend in Mexico," de Vries said. "Sao Paulo was a tough start to the season but there were plenty of positives for us to take away, and ultimately it's only one race, the season is long and we have plenty of opportunities ahead of us." "This event (in Mexico City) always brings out a fantastic crowd. You can really feel the energy from the grandstands in the Foro Sol and around the paddock, so I'm also looking forward to being back in that atmosphere," Mortara said. Team confidence remains high heading into round two of the season at the Autodromo Hermanos Rodriguez. "It's always nice to have a little break over the festive period, so I'm feeling recharged and ready to get back to racing," he said. "As a team, it's very important to keep Sao Paulo in perspective; it was a tough start but we have 16 more races ahead of us, starting with Mexico, and we know we have the car and the team to compete for strong results. – APP

## Bangladesh indefinitely 'bans IPL telecast' amid tensions with India

NEW DELHI: Marking another major escalation between Bangladesh and India, the former has ordered an indefinite ban on the telecast and promotion of the Indian Premier League (IPL), India Today reported on Monday. The tournament-related broadcasts, promotions and event coverage have all been suspended by Bangladeshi authorities with immediate effect, in a decision taken in the public interest and approved by the appropriate authority. The move comes in the aftermath of the IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders' (KKR) decision to "release" Bangladeshi pacer Mustafizur Rahman after being told to do so by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). The KKR's decision followed amid increasing tensions between the two countries, which saw hundreds protest near Bangladesh's High Commission in New Delhi after Hindu factory worker Dipu Chandra Das was killed in Bangladesh's Mymensingh district. Apart from the said incident, there have been protests in Bangladesh against India as well in relation to the murder of popular student leader Sharif Osman Hadi, with Bangladeshi police saying that the suspects, Faisal Karim Masud and Alamgir Sheikh had fled to India through the Haluaghat border. "There is no logical reason for this decision of the BCCI and such a decision has distressed, shocked and angered the people of Bangladesh," reads the Bangladeshi government's IPL-related order referring to the Mustafizur controversy.

"No rational reason for such a decision by the Indian Cricket Board is known, and such a decision has pained, saddened, and aggravated the people of Bangladesh." "Under these circumstances, until further notice, a request is made as per instructions to stop the broadcast/telecast of all matches and programmes of the IPL," adds the order as reported by NDTV. Dhaka's move adds to its decision against going to India for the T20 World Cup 2026 due to its concerns on the "overall circumstances" in the neighbouring country. Citing growing concerns regarding the safety and security of the Bangladesh contingent, the BCB said that the Bangladesh team will not play its games in India. – Agencies



## Head, Smith centuries put Australia in charge of final Ashes Test

*Travis Head's Explosive 163 And Steve Smith's Unbeaten 129 Power Australia To Commanding Lead Over England As Hosts Seize Control on Day Three of Final Ashes Test At Sydney Cricket Ground*

SYDNEY: Run-machine Travis Head hit a swashbuckling 163 and Steve Smith a composed unbeaten 129 as Australia built a 134-run lead over England to seize control on day three of the fifth and final Ashes Test on Tuesday. It was destructive opener Head's third ton of the series, to go with the phenomenal match-winning 123 he made in Perth and 170 at Adelaide. Smith was equally impressive, with his first hundred of the series driving the hosts to 518-7 by stumps at a packed Sydney Cricket Ground in reply to England's 384.

Beau Webster was alongside him on 42 at the close. Australia lead the series 3-1 and have already retained the Ashes, with England desperate for another morale-boosting win after victory at the previous Test in Melbourne. "Nice batting wicket out there. Nice to start my innings on the back of a great innings from Travis Head," Smith told Fox Sports. "When you're out there and you

they forget about you and I was able to get into my work. Worked out well today." Head brought up three figures off just 105 balls and seemed destined to score 200. But he came undone in the third over after lunch by the part-time spin of Jacob Bethell, who was bowling for the first time in the series. In his second over, Bethell trapped the 32-year-old lbw attempting a sweep shot to end a magnificent knock. Skipper Smith treated Bethell with contempt, launching him for a big six on his way to a 37th Test hundred. It was Smith's 13th Ashes century to move past England legend Jack Hobbs. Only Donald Bradman with 19 has more.

Usman Khawaja, in his 88th and last Test after announcing his retirement, fell lbw to Brydon Carse for 17 while Alex Carey made 16 before Josh Tongue enticed an edge. Watchman Michael Neser made 24 and Cameron Green 37. Dropped catches: Head resumed on 91 and Neser on one after Jake Weatherald (21) and Marnus Labuschagne (48) were out on Monday. Head clattered an early midwicket boundary off Ben Stokes and reached three figures with his 17th four, crunched through the covers from Tongue, windmilling his bat in celebration. It was his 12th century and first in Sydney to cement his reputation as one of the game's most versatile batsmen.

Head only moved to the top of the order in the second innings of the first Test in Perth due to Khawaja's back injury, but he has made the position his own. With his hundred secure, he banged three straight fours off Matthew Potts then had a massive let-off on 121 when he pulled Carse and Will Jacks dropped a sitter near the ropes. Neser ably stuck around for 90 balls to foil England, who wasted their last two reviews on him. Batting like a top-or-

Pakistan, Bangladesh air chiefs discuss...

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PAF's combat record and expressed interest in benefiting from its operational expertise, seeking assistance in maintenance support for Bangladesh Air Force's ageing fleet and integration of air defence radar systems to enhance air surveillance," the press release read. The delegation, according to the military's media wing, also visited key PAF facilities, including the National ISR & Integrated Air Operations Centre, PAF Cyber Command, and the National Aerospace Science & Technology Park. "The visit underscored the strong historical ties between Pakistan and Bangladesh and reflected a shared resolve to deepen defence cooperation and build a long-term strategic partnership," the statement concluded.

## Senate delegation to visit...

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adding that the visit "reflects a shared commitment to strengthening democratic institutions through direct engagement between elected legislatures". The Secretariat added that the initiative came at a "critical juncture" of global and regional transformation, particularly in South Asia and the Middle East. It further said that the visit would be undertaken with clearly defined strategic objectives, including the "establishment of a permanent institutional mechanism" for sustained inter-parliamentary dialogue between the US Congress and the Senate of Pakistan. "The delegation aims to promote democratic values, exchange best legislative practices, enhance parliamentary oversight, and strengthen institutional cooperation beyond traditional executive-level diplomacy," it said. The Secretariat said that the visit would also focus on engaging with the Pakistani-American community to present the country's parliamentary perspective on regional and global issues, while advancing scientific, cultural, and policy-oriented cooperation. No Pakistani parliamentary delegation has held formal engagements at the Rayburn House Office Building under the auspices of the US Congress in the 77-year history of Pakistan-US relations.

## PM directs for strategy to boost exports

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the prime minister said adding that the government was taking measures to increase the per acre yield of the crops by providing farmers with standard seeds, fertilizers and pesticides timely and at affordable prices. PM Shehbaz Sharif pointed out that the government was also taking policy-level steps aimed at processing of the agriculture produce to make them export-ready goods. Recently, he said the 1000 Pakistani students had been sent to China at government expenses to train them on the modern agriculture technology. Pakistan has great potential in the agriculture sector, the prime minister said, adding that, within available resources, investment was being made in research for agricultural development in order to increase per-acre yield. He also emphasized that the government was taking measures to increase the export of the fisheries and horticulture products. He directed the relevant authorities to present the policy measures to produce palm oil along the coastal belt. The meeting was attended by Federal Ministers Ahsan Iqbal, Rana Tanveer Hussain, Dr Musadik Malik, Muhammad Aurangzeb, Attaullah Tarar, Minister of State Bilal Azhar Kayani, Special Assistant Haroon Akhtar, and senior government officials. During the meeting, Chairman Working Group Rana Naseem and his team briefed the participants on the issues faced by the sector and the future plan of action.

## Briefs

**Glowing waters in Australia's Tasmania linked to climate change**

MELBOURNE: Scientists say a bioluminescent bloom lighting up the southeast coastline of Australia's island state of Tasmania, with red tides by day and blue glows by night, stems from climate-driven ocean warming, not pollution from nearby salmon farms. The glow, reappearing almost a year after a similar event, is caused by Noctiluca scintillans, a bioluminescent marine plankton that feeds on microscopic algae and rises to the surface when it dies, creating red slicks that illuminate when disturbed, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation reported Tuesday. Authorities have advised against swimming in affected areas, though the spectacle continues to draw crowds to Tasmania's southern beaches. Marine biologist Lisa-ann Gershwin said while breathtaking, the bloom can emit ammonia, which can cause skin irritation for humans and deplete the oxygen in nearby waters, resulting in the deaths of some marine animals. APP

**Türkiye's daily wind power generation hits all time high**

BAKU : Türkiye's wind electricity generation hit an all-time record high, generating 28.2% of total power, Anadolu Agency reported citing data from Türkiye's Electricity Transmission Corporation (TEIAS). The country produced 253,128 megawatt-hours (MWh) of electricity from wind farms on Sunday, according to data provided by TEIAS. The last record was on June 29, 2024 when the country produced 228,604 MWh of electricity from wind farms. Wind plants were followed by imported coal and natural gas plants with 23% and 14.6% contribution to electricity production, respectively. Meanwhile, daily electricity production amounted to 899,027 megawatt-hours and electricity consumption totaled 887,046 megawatt-hours on Sunday. Hourly power consumption peaked at 42,775 megawatt-hours at 7 p.m. local time (1600 GMT), while the country's electricity usage dropped to the lowest level of 31,168 megawatt-hours at 5 a.m. local time (0200 GMT). On Sunday, Türkiye's electricity exports amounted to 12,871 megawatt-hours and imports totaled 909 megawatt-hours. APP

**Xi holds talks with ROK President Lee Jae Myung**

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping held talks with President of the Republic of Korea (ROK) Lee Jae Myung in Beijing on Monday. Xi said he and President Lee have met twice and conducted reciprocal visits, reflecting the importance both sides attach to China-ROK relations. As both friends and neighbors, China and the ROK should increase exchanges and maintain frequent communication. China has consistently placed relations with the ROK high on its regional diplomatic agenda and maintained continuity and stability in its policy toward the ROK, Xi said, adding that China is willing to work with the ROK to firmly uphold the direction of friendly cooperation, adhere to the principle of mutual benefit and win-win outcomes, promote bilateral strategic partnership along a healthy path, effectively enhance the well-being of both peoples, and contribute positively to regional and global peace and development. Xi stressed that China and the ROK have long adhered to the principles of valuing peace above all else and advocating harmony without conformity, which have transcended differences in social systems and ideologies to help each other succeed and achieve common development. APP

# Govt keeps gas prices unchanged: Ali Pervaiz

Highlighting the impact of ongoing reforms, the Federal Minister announced that on the directions of Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif gas prices will not be increased for the next six months in any category, providing major relief to consumers

ISLAMABAD: The 12th meeting of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Petroleum was held under the chairmanship of Syed Mustafa Mehmood, during which key developments in the gas and LNG sector were reviewed.

Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik informed the Committee that successful negotiations with Qatar have been concluded to divert Pakistan's surplus LNG cargoes to the international market, while respecting contractual obligations. He stated that Qatar has been a valuable and reliable supplier, honoring its commitments at a time when many global suppliers defaulted. Pakistan highly values this strategic relationship and has reached a mutually acceptable solution regarding excess LNG cargoes.

Highlighting the impact of ongoing reforms, the Federal Minister announced that on the directions of Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif gas prices will not be increased for the next six months in any category, providing major relief to consumers. The gas prices will remain same for all consumers for the next six months of current fiscal year. He



further briefed that the circular debt flow in the gas sector has been quelled, and there is no creation of fresh circular debt, marking a significant milestone in gas sector reforms. He added that enhanced gas supply is being provided

to domestic consumers across the country. No domestic field is presently under curtailment. Power is being gas beyond its IGCEP demand to avoid loadshedding.

The Managing Directors of the SUI

companies briefed the Committee on operational improvements. It was informed that enhanced gas supply is being provided to domestic consumers across the country, in line with the directions of Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif.

to ensure maximum relief to the public during the winter season. SNGPL reported a substantial reduction in Unaccounted-for Gas (UFG) losses from 9% to 5%, while SSGC reported that UFG losses have been reduced from 17% to 10%. The Committee was also apprised that IoT-based monitoring systems, including Town Border Stations, have been deployed at gas network tail ends to automatically generate alarms in case of pressure drops, improving real-time monitoring and service delivery. MD SNGPL further informed that gas supply hours have been extended from 5:00 am to 10:00 pm in line with the directions of Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif, to ensure maximum relief to the public during the winter season. Federal Minister Ali Pervaiz Malik also added that government is working for capacity building of Directorate General of Petroleum Concessions in consultation with World Bank. The Chairman and Members of the Standing Committee appreciated the progress made through reforms, improved governance, and enhanced consumer-focused measures in the petroleum and gas sector. DNA

## Tahir highlights diversifying Pak's export basket

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Pakistan to the Russian Federation, Faisal Niaz Tirmizi, visited the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) and held a comprehensive interaction with the ICCI leadership, including President Sardar Tahir Mehmood, Senior Vice President Tahir Ayub, and Vice President Irfan Chaudhry, along with members of the business community. Addressing the gathering, Ambassador Faisal Niaz Tirmizi highlighted the growing importance of Pakistan-Russia economic relations and briefed the business community on emerging trade and investment opportunities in the Russian market. He emphasized that Russia offers significant potential for Pakistani exporters, particularly in textiles, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, surgical instruments, sports goods, Pink Salt and IT services. The Ambassador assured ICCI members of the Embassy's full facilitation in resolving trade-related issues, promoting business-to-business linkages, and supporting Pakistani participation in exhibitions and trade fairs in Russia. The Ambassador also emphasized the

need for more and more B2B meetings to obtain the objective in the best interest of the business communities of both the sides. Speaking on the occasion, ICCI President Sardar Tahir Mehmood warmly welcomed the Ambassador and underscored the need to further expand bilateral trade and investment. He stressed the importance of diversifying Pakistan's export basket to Russia and strengthening institutional collaboration between chambers of commerce of both countries. Senior Vice President Tahir Ayub emphasized improving banking channels, logistics, and payment mechanisms to ensure smoother trade flows, while Vice President Irfan Chaudhry pointed out opportunities in energy cooperation, agriculture, IT, and joint ventures. The meeting concluded with a shared resolve to enhance Pakistan-Russia economic cooperation through sustained public-private sector engagement. Former President ICCI Mohammad Ejaz Abbasi, Roman Butt, Kashif Zahir also contributed their insights for the promotion of two countries business ties.



## Saudi surgeons train Indonesian doctors in maxillofacial surgery

JAKARTA: A 19-member surgical team from Saudi Arabia has trained Indonesian doctors in oral, maxillofacial and thyroid surgery under a King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center program to expand access to advanced medical procedures in eastern Indonesia. The Saudi medics were embedded with their Indonesian colleagues at the Wahidin Sudirohusodo Central General Hospital in Makassar, South Sulawesi province. "KSrelief's medical team consisted of surgeons and consultants, so doctors from our hospital had the opportunity to directly observe surgical procedures done by the Saudi doctors that have never been performed here," Aulia Yamin, spokesperson of the Makassar hospital, told Arab News on Tuesday. "There were also in-depth discussions on diagnosis and plans for surgery for highly complex cases." The KSrelief team was in Indonesia in late December, during which Saudi doctors performed free maxillofacial and thyroid surgery on 60 patients, she added. The transfer of knowledge by KSrelief also supported Indonesia's health system transformation plan, which seeks to improve access and quality of services in all regional government hospitals, particularly in eastern Indonesia. "Makassar is the primary transportation and health referral hub for eastern Indonesia, which means there's a high number of cases requiring maxillofacial and thyroid surgeries," Yamin said. "We hope that this collaboration can continue in the future for other cases, so that more Indonesians can benefit from the program." In this photo provided by the Saudi Embassy in Indonesia on Dec. 31, 2025, Saudi doctors are discussing a case at Wahidin Sudirohusodo Central General Hospital in Makassar, South Sulawesi. (Saudi Embassy in Indonesia) The KSrelief program had also included guest lectures by the Saudi doctors, covering facial and jaw reconstruction as well as updated and new approaches to parotid gland surgery. "We're really thankful to the very hard work that we saw here. The (Indonesian) team was with us day and night and throughout very long surgeries and very complex surgeries," Prof. Basem T. Jamal, who led the KSrelief team in Makassar, said in a video statement. "And not only was it supporting the medical effort, but there was always interest in expressing and exchanging knowledge and experiences, and it was really really, a very rich experience for all of us." KSrelief has conducted similar programs in other parts of Indonesia, including in Medan, North Sumatra in 2024 that focused on training Indonesian doctors in advanced cardiac procedures on adults and children. DNA

## Cuba faces uncertain future after US topples Maduro

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HAVANA: Cuban officials lowered flags before dawn to mourn 32 security officers they say were killed in the US weekend strike in Venezuela, the island nation's closest ally, as residents here wonder what the capture of President Nicolás Maduro means for their future. The two governments are so close that Cuban soldiers and security agents were often the Venezuelan president's bodyguards, and Venezuela's petroleum has kept the economically ailing island limping along for years. Cuban authorities over the weekend said the 32 had been killed in the surprise attack but gave no further details. The Trump administration has warned outright that toppling Maduro will help advance another decades-long goal: Dealing a blow to the Cuban government. Severing Cuba from Venezuela could have disastrous consequences for its leaders, who on Saturday called for the international community to stand up to "state terrorism." On Saturday, Trump said the ailing Cuban economy will be further battered by Maduro's ouster. "It's going down," Trump said of Cuba. "It's going down for the count." Many observers say Cuba, an island of about 10 million people, exerted a remarkable degree of influence over Venezuela, an oil-rich nation with three times as many people. At the same time, Cubans have long been tormented by constant blackouts and shortages of basic foods. And after the attack, they woke to the once-unimaginable possibility of an even grimmer future. "I can't talk. I have no words," 75-year-old Berta Luz Sierra Molina said as she sobbed and placed a hand over her face. Even though 63-year-old Regina Mendez is too old to join the Cuban military, she said that "we have to stand strong." "Give me a rifle, and I'll go fight," Mendez said. Maduro's government was shipping an average of 35,000 barrels of oil daily over the last three months, about a quarter of total demand, said Jorge Pi ón, a Cuban energy expert at the University of Texas at Austin Energy Institute. APP

## Sri Lanka targets 3m tourists to aid cyclone recovery

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka is targeting 3 million tourist arrivals in 2026, a top official said on Monday, after a record 2.36 million last year, as the country seeks to boost revenue and support recovery from Cyclone Ditwah. Famous for its pristine beaches, ancient temples and Ceylon Tea, tourism is Sri Lanka's second-largest foreign exchange earner with \$3.2 billion in revenues in 2025. The tourist arrival target, which is an ambitious 27 percent increase over the previous year, will help Sri Lankans recover from Cyclone Ditwah, which hit the island nation at the end of November killing 645 people, said Vijitha Herath, minister of foreign affairs and tourism. Torrential rains and hundreds of landslides damaged over 110,000 houses as well as key roads, railroads, and bridges causing \$4.1 billion in damage according to World Bank estimates.

# Pakistan-China joint oceanographic cruise launched



KARACHI: Pakistan Navy, through National Hydrographic Office (NHO), is facilitating a Pakistan-China Joint Oceanographic Cruise being conducted by National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) in collaboration with China's Second Institute of Oceanography (SIO). Pakistan Navy's survey vessel, PNS BEHR MASAH, has been deployed in support of this scientific mission, underscoring Pakistan Navy's commitment to promote maritime awareness and facilitate marine scientific research in Pakistan. The Joint Oceanographic Cruise represents a significant scientific collaboration between Pakistan and China, aimed at enhanced understanding of the marine environment in Pakistani waters. The research outcomes are expected to increase awareness of coastal and offshore marine dynamics, enabling better assessment of environmental patterns and supporting informed maritime planning and policymaking. This Pakistan-China Joint Oceanographic Cruise exemplifies a continued cooperative partnership between the two countries and contributes to broader regional understanding of oceanographic conditions in the North Arabian Sea. DNA

## Secretaries visit Sialkot Chamber to review export challenges

SIALKOT: Federal Secretaries Jawad Paul, Secretary of Commerce and Secretary Food Security, Amir Mohyuddin visited Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and industries (SCCI), while the Additional Secretary Industries joined the meeting online. According to a spokesperson, Muhammad Murad Arshad, Senior Vice President (SVP) Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) warmly welcomed the distinguished guests to the Chamber. The meeting focused on understanding and discussing key issues faced by Sialkot's export industries, with particular emphasis on the recent decline in exports. The federal secretaries assured the business community of the Government's support and emphasized the importance of coordinated efforts to enhance competitiveness, improve ease of doing business and grow exports of Pakistan. APP

## Five-star Khan Suleiman Pasha hotel inaugurated in Syria's Old Damascus

DAMASCUS: Syria's Minister of Tourism, Mazen al-Salhani, on Monday inaugurated the five-star Khan Suleiman Pasha Hotel in Damascus Old City following a meticulous restoration of the historic building. The hotel features 25 guest rooms and two suites, blending traditional Damascene architectural elements such as stone arches and inner courtyards with modern amenities to offer guests an experience that combines authenticity and contemporary comfort. In a statement to SANA at the ceremony, which was attended by Ministers of Economy, Communications as well as several ambassadors, al-Salhani said the project falls within a national vision to support heritage-based tourism, not only as a means of preservation but as an active component of the tourism and economic cycle. He added that UNESCO committees praised the implementation standards, particularly the use of traditional restoration materials such as lime-based mortar instead of cement, which preserves the integrity and authenticity of the stone structure. APP

## Syria, UAE partner to boost emergency health preparedness

DAMASCUS: Syria's Ministry of Health signed a memorandum of understanding on Monday with the UAE-based Jaheziya Foundation to launch a joint medical preparedness initiative aimed at strengthening Syria's ability to respond to emergencies and disasters. The Ministry said the program, titled "Jaheziya Syria," is designed to improve the readiness of Syria's healthcare system through standardized training and capacity-building for medical staff in both public and private hospitals. The initiative will follow international standards and modern scientific methodologies to enhance coordinated medical responses during crises. The project will begin with a three-month pilot phase, during which 200 healthcare workers are expected to receive specialized training. The longer-term plan spans five years and focuses on sustainable capacity-building within Syria's health sector. According to representatives from Jaheziya, the initiative prioritizes human capital as the first line of defense in emergencies. Training will target doctors, nurses, emergency and ambulance teams, civil defense personnel, as well as medical and administrative leadership. The initiative is part of the Health Ministry's broader efforts to strengthen public health outcomes and develop Syria's national healthcare system. APP

**Briefs**

**Flash floods in Indonesia's North Sulawesi kill 14**

JAKARTA: At least 14 people were killed after being swept away by flash floods in Indonesia's North Sulawesi, an official said on Tuesday, as the search for the missing continued. Heavy rain early on Monday triggered flash floods on the island of Siau, located in the region of Siau Tagulandang Biaro, said Nuridiin Gumeleeng, a spokesperson for the local rescue agency. Sixteen rescuers have been deployed to search for four people who remain missing on Tuesday, Gumeleeng said, adding that 18 people had been injured so far. At least 444 people have been evacuated to local schools and churches after the flash floods, the country disaster mitigation agency spokesperson Abdul Muham said in a statement. Indonesia's weather agency has warned that the islands of Java, Sulawesi, Maluku and Papua are expected to experience peak wet-season conditions during January and February this year, increasing the risk of flooding. - APP

**At least 31 dead as migrant boat sinks off Gambia**

BANJUL: At least 31 people drowned when an overloaded boat carrying undocumented migrants capsized on New Year's Eve off the coast of Gambia, the government said on Monday, hiking the previous toll.

"Many others (are) missing and feared dead," the government said in an update.

Thousands of people, most of them young, have tried to reach Europe from west Africa, mainly via the Spanish Canary Islands, on overcrowded and often dilapidated boats due to restrictions on visas and tightened border security. Migrant boats have been forced to leave from further south, notably from The Gambia and Guinea, adding to the journey - and dangers - at sea, after Senegal, Mauritania and Morocco increased maritime patrols.

In the latest such tragedy, a boat loaded with more than 200 people made a distress call overnight December 31 to January 1 near the North Bank region. The Gambian Navy launched a hunt for survivors after midnight, involving several vessels and a fishing boat. The stricken vessel was later found on a sandbank. "Fifteen bodies are confirmed to be recovered from the Gambia and 16 in Senegal," said the government in its update, hiking the previous toll of at least 7 dead. - APP

**US cuts broad recommendation for four childhood vaccines**

WASHINGTON: The United States ended on Monday its longstanding guidance that all children receive vaccines against flu and three other diseases, a sweeping change that advances one of Health Secretary Robert F Kennedy Jr's long-term goals. Public health experts warn the latest rollback could lead to preventable hospitalizations and deaths. The action, which removes the recommendation for rotavirus, influenza, meningococcal disease, and hepatitis A, and states that parents should consult healthcare providers under what it calls shared clinical-decision-making, was approved by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Acting Director Jim O'Neill without the agency's usual outside expert review. It advances Kennedy's campaign to pare back childhood vaccinations.

Last month, President Donald Trump urged the US to "align with other developed nations" by reducing the number of shots for children. Trump said the new schedule was "rooted in the Gold Standard of Science" and aligns the United States with other developed nations. - APP

*Thailand ambassador says*  
**Connectivity is the new key: tourism bridges trust**

ASNAR MAHMOOD BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: H.E. Rongyudhi Virabut, the Ambassador of Thailand to Pakistan, recently gave an exclusive interview to Daily Islamabad POST, Centreline, and Diplomatic News Agency.

Reflecting on his diplomatic experience in Pakistan, he shared that having just reached his one-year anniversary on December 1, 2025, he can say without reservation that Pakistan is truly a "Land of Friendliness and Opportunity."

Despite the distance, the initial feeling of being far from home vanished instantly as he discovered that Thailand and Pakistan share a profound cultural DNA—from the warmth and generosity of the people to their deep, ancient histories. The Pakistani spirit embraced him, making him feel at home from the very beginning. His mission, however, does not permit him to simply enjoy the hospitality without giving back in meaningful ways.

He sees Pakistan as a nation of immense, untapped potential—a strategic hub with resilient and dynamic people. With this vision, he is fully committed to advancing Thailand-Pakistan relations and unlocking the shared strengths of the two countries to the fullest.

Their ties, he emphasized, must go beyond traditional friendship and evolve into a sustainable partnership for development. He calls this a "Prosperity Partnership," focused on delivering tangible, results-driven achievements that citizens can truly see and feel, creating a breakthrough in bilateral relations for generations to come.

When asked about promising areas of cooperation, Ambassador Virabut highlighted two core dimensions: Government-to-Government (G2G) economic dynamism and People-to-People (P2P) connectivity. On the G2G front, trade and investment are decisive. Despite global fluctuations, two-way trade rebounded to USD 1.6 billion last year, but the goal is to double this volume through "Win-Win Trade"—combining Pakistan's textiles and IT strengths with Thailand's automotive and food processing expertise.

A particular game-changer is the Halal industry. Thailand, as one of the world's leading Halal food producers—the "Kitchen of the World"—is ready to collaborate with Pakistan's vast Muslim market. Advancing mutual recognition of Halal certification can unlock billions in food and cosmetics trade, creating a universal language of trust and quality. New investment collaborations in these high-value sectors are both feasible and



imperative, with further potential in defense and beyond. On the P2P side, tourism is the most powerful connector. At present, the two nations know each other but are not yet close; they connect but are not fully connected.

Tourism helps bridge this gap, but the aim is genuine familiarity and trust that positions them as first destinations for each other. The Royal Thai Embassy is committed to expanding tourism and cultural initiatives—through food, music, and art—so that cooperation is not only economic but also deeply people-to-people.

On the Pakistan-Thailand Free Trade Agreement (FTA), the Ambassador described it as not just a technical document but a Strategic Gateway to a new era of economic prosperity for Pakistan. He views the FTA as having decisive importance and is resolutely committed to pushing it to completion swiftly. The perception that the FTA creates a disadvantage must be changed into the understanding that it is the "Key to Global Competitiveness" for Pakistan, specifically by reducing the cost of imported raw materials and boosting domestic production efficiency. Crucially, the FTA will act as a "Talent Multiplier," particularly

in the digital and services sectors.

By including provisions for the mobility of digital professionals, Pakistan's strength as a leading global freelancer hub can be leveraged, creating up to \$20 billion in added economic value. Coordinating with ministries and think tanks, the Embassy is building unwavering confidence. The final conclusion of the FTA will send the clearest signal to global investors: "Pakistan is ready for a New Era of Prosperity." On tourism and connectivity, Ambassador Virabut emphasized that "Connectivity is the New Key in Diplomacy." People-to-people relations built "from heart to heart" are inherently more durable than state-level interactions.

Clear targets have been set: doubling the number of Pakistani tourists to Thailand to 100,000 per year and expanding tourists from Thailand interested in Buddhist sites in Pakistan's Gandhara region to 10,000 per year.

The priority is breaking logistical barriers. With current flight frequency and capacity at maximum, a virtual meeting was held in February 2026, and formal negotiations are being pushed to secure a decisive increase in air frequency and capacity, bringing more flights and accessible ticket prices.

Efforts are underway to make visiting Thailand easier for Pakistani tourists, with the e-visa system as one mechanism. Concurrently, perfect Halal Tourism programs are being designed in Thai provinces like Krabi and Ayutthaya, while Thailand is promoted as a Global Medical Hub for Pakistani patients. Tourism, through these decisive actions, becomes a genuine "Bridge of Trust." Regarding investment, Thai investors are practical: they commit where policy is clear, not just where potential is high. The Embassy's approach is to work with the Pakistani government to dramatically improve the Ease of Doing Business (EODB) ranking, which serves as the "compass" for global investors. The FTA's conclusion is also the ultimate trigger point, providing legal certainty and investment protection. Beyond that, new S-curve avenues are being explored: joint R&D in the defense industry, expansion of the Halal food processing sector, and infrastructure projects. Strategically, Thai companies view Pakistan as a vital Strategic Gateway to Central Asia and the wider Middle East, positioning the partnership as a regional economic accelerator.

- To be continued



**Machado vows to return to her country**



**NEWS DESK**

NEW YORK: Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado said on Monday she plans to return home "as soon as possible," and slammed the interim president in Caracas. In her first public comments since a social media post over the weekend, when the US military forcibly removed and kidnapped President Nicolas Maduro, the Nobel Peace Prize winner vowed to return to her country. She had left Venezuela last month to travel to Norway to accept the award, and hasn't returned since. "I'm planning to go back to Venezuela as soon as possible," Machado told broadcaster Sean Hannity on Fox News, speaking from an undisclosed location. Machado openly rejected the country's interim president, Delcy Rodriguez, saying she is "one of the main architects of torture, persecution, corruption, and narcotrafficking". Rodriguez, who has signalled her willingness to cooperate with Washington, was Venezuela's vice president under Maduro. Machado said Rodriguez is "rejected" by the Venezuelan people, and voters were on the opposition's side. "Free and fair elections, we will win by over 90 per cent of the votes, I have no doubt about it," Machado said. Machado also vowed to "turn Venezuela into the energy hub of the Americas" and "dismantle all these criminal structures" that have harmed her countrymen, promising to "bring millions of Venezuelans that have been forced to flee our country back home".

**European leaders voice support for Denmark**

DNA

BRUSSELS: A group of European leaders on Tuesday underlined their support for Denmark after US President Donald Trump again voiced designs on its autonomous Arctic territory of Greenland. The leaders of France, Britain, Germany, Italy, Poland and Spain as well as Denmark said that sovereignty, territorial integrity and the inviolability of borders were "universal principles, and we will not stop defending them". Washington's military intervention in Venezuela has reignited fears about Trump's designs on Greenland, which has untapped rare earth deposits and could be a vital player as polar ice melts, opening up new shipping routes. Greenland is on the shortest route for missiles between Russia and the United States, and Washington already has a military base there. With the situation in Venezuela more pressing, Trump quipped on Sunday that "we'll worry about Greenland in about two months". The European leaders' joint statement

said: "Arctic security remains a key priority for Europe and it is critical for international and transatlantic security. "NATO has made clear that the Arctic region is a priority and European allies are stepping up. "We and many other allies have increased our presence, activities and investments, to keep the Arctic safe and to deter adversaries." They stressed that Denmark – including Greenland – was part of NATO.

"Security in the Arctic must therefore be achieved collectively, in conjunction with NATO allies including the United States, by upholding the principles of the UN Charter, including sovereignty, territorial integrity and the inviolability of borders," the leaders said. "These are universal principles, and we will not stop defending them." The statement was signed by British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez.

**CIA concludes 'regime loyalists' best suited to lead Venezuela after Maduro**

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: A classified CIA assessment presented to US President Donald Trump concluded senior Maduro loyalists, including Vice President Delcy Rodriguez, were best positioned to maintain stability if the Venezuelan leader lost power, two sources briefed on the matter said. Trump was briefed on the report and it was shared with a small group of his senior national security team, the sources said. The assessment was one reason why Trump decided to back Nicolas Maduro's vice president, Delcy Rodriguez, the sources said. The White House declined to confirm the report. "President Trump is routinely briefed on domestic political dynamics all over the world. The president and his national security team are making realistic decisions to finally ensure Venezuela aligns with the interests of the United States, and becomes a better country for the Venezuelan people," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said in response to a query. Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado said Monday she plans to return home "as soon as possible,"

and slammed the interim president in Caracas. US Attorney General Pam Bondi arrives to brief members of Congress on the situation in Venezuela, on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, US, January 5, 2026. US Attorney General Pam Bondi arrives to brief members of Congress on the situation in Venezuela, on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, US, January 5, 2026. - Reuters

In her first public comments since a social media post over the weekend, when the US military forcibly removed president Nicolas Maduro from power, the Nobel Peace Prize winner vowed to return to her country. "I'm planning to go back to Venezuela as soon as possible," Machado told broadcaster Sean Hannity on Fox News, speaking from an undisclosed location. Machado openly rejected the country's interim president Delcy Rodriguez, saying she is "one of the main architects of torture, persecution, corruption, and narcotrafficking". Rodriguez, who has signalled her willingness to cooperate with Washington, was Venezuela's vice president under Maduro. Machado said Rodriguez is "rejected" by the Venezuelan people, and voters were on the opposition's side. "Free and fair elections, we will win by over 90% of the votes, I have no doubt about it," Machado said.

**Pakistan warns unilateral action in Venezuela risks 'unpredictable outcomes'**

NEW YORK: Pakistan on Monday expressed profound concerns over the evolving situation in Venezuela, saying that unilateral military action contravenes the sacrosanct principles of the United Nations Charter and the doctrine of sovereign immunity. Addressing the United Nations Security Council's (UNSC) emergency meeting on the situation in Venezuela, Pakistan's acting Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Usman Jadoon, said that such actions set dangerous precedents that risk eroding the foundations of the global legal framework. The US attacked Venezuela and captured its long-serving President Maduro in an overnight operation on January 3. Addressing a press conference following the attack, US President Donald Trump had announced: "This was one of the most stunning, effective and powerful displays of American might and competence in American history." He further said that Washington would run the oil-rich country until a transition takes place. Earlier today, the 15-member UNSC met at UN headquarters in New York just hours before Maduro was due to appear in a Manhattan federal court on drug charges, including narco-terrorism conspiracy. - DNA

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