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Pakistan wants deep defence ties with KSA

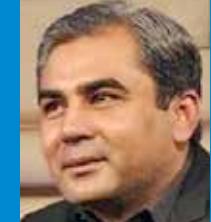
Detailed News On Page-08

Cultural ties with China growing

Detailed News On Page-03

Naqvi lauds immigration system of China

Detailed News On Page-08



Confidence building

Diplomatic channels active, contacts ongoing with Afghanistan: FO

FO spokesperson says Islamabad seeking concrete assurances from Afghan authorities to stop cross-border terrorism

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Thursday said that Pakistan's diplomatic channels with Afghanistan remain active with contacts continuing between the two neighbouring countries. Bilateral relations between Islamabad and Kabul have recently come under strain with the issue of cross-border terrorism at the centre of tensions. Pakistan has repeatedly called on the Afghan authorities to take verifiable measures to dismantle terrorist groups in Afghanistan and prevent use of its territory for terrorism. In October 2025, Pakistan closed several major border crossings following one of the deadliest military escalations between the two countries in recent years. Although a ceasefire was declared on October 19, trade across the border has not yet resumed. During a weekly press briefing today, Foreign Office spokesperson Tahir Hussain Andrabi emphasised that Pakistan does not interfere in Afghanistan's internal affairs. While expressing concerns over cross-border terrorism, the FO spokesperson said: "Incidents of terrorism emanating from Afghanistan are a primary concern for Pakistan. Our demand is that Afghan territory should not be used against Pakistan." Highlighting steps required to address these concerns, Andrabi said: "We need written, verifiable, and concrete assurances from Afghan authorities. Without these written commitments, the issue of terrorism cannot be resolved." The spokesperson added that resolving terrorism would pave the way for a significant improvement in bilateral relations. "Pakistan and Afghanistan do not have any other major bilateral disputes," he added. On Afghanistan's broader regional role, the spokesperson said that "Afghanistan has significant potential to become a regional hub". "Written assurances and practical steps

to end terrorism will bring improvement in border and bilateral matters. Ensuring an end to terrorism is also in Afghanistan's own interest," the FO spokesperson added. While commenting on Pakistan's stance regarding ongoing protests in Iran, the spokesperson said: "Pakistan does not comment on the internal situation in Iran, nor does it consider intervention appropriate. We strongly oppose any interference in the internal matters of any country, including Iran." Addressing the hostilities with Afghanistan two days ago, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Director-General Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry 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, TTP, 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 fulfil 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. Recalling the Doha agreement, the 2020 US-Taliban peace deal, he recalled that the Afghan Taliban had assured that terrorism would be eradicated from

Continued on Page 06

Feb 8 polls

TTAP delegation en route to Lahore for street mobilisation drive

"We have given a [protest] call for February 8, and we have started a movement," says Mahmood Achakzai

FAISAL SHEIKH

BUREAU REPORT

BANNU: At least two cops were injured in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Bannu as a police vehicle transporting prisoners to Hangu came under attack by "terrorists" on Thursday, sources said. Sources in Bannu police told Dawn that the vehicle, which belonged to Hangu police and was carrying prisoners for court appearances, came under fire at Domel Link Road. A source in the Bannu Central Jail's administration also confirmed this to Dawn, saying that the prisoners were being transported for court hearings as per routine. The vehicle was attacked on the way to the court, the source said. Sources in Bannu police said the vehicle's driver changed route and reached Karak following the incident. The sources said the two injured cops were being provided medical treatment at the district headquarters hospital in Karak, adding that Hangu District Police Officer Khanzai Mohmand also visited the injured personnel at the hospital.

Lahore-London flights from March 30

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) announced on Thursday that it would be resuming direct Lahore-London flights on March 30. According to a statement issued by the PIA spokesperson, the airline was enhancing its flights to the United Kingdom. "After the resumption of flights to Manchester and the announcement of flights from Islamabad to London from March 29, the airline has also finalised arrangements for the launch of a direct flight from Lahore to London from March 30," the spokesperson said. He added it would operate up to seven flights to the UK by the end of March.

PTI takes exception to being labelled as terrorists facilitator

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: The PTI on Thursday took strong exception to being labelled "terrorist facilitators", saying the party had always maintained that there should be no politics on the issue. The remarks from the party came during a press briefing held in Islamabad by party chairman Gohar Ali Khan, and party leaders Salman Akram Raja and Asad Qaiser. In his remarks, Gohar said, "The PTI's stance has always been that terrorism is a menace and it is a national responsibility to eliminate it from its roots.

Continued on Page 06



QUETTA: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, along with Deputy Prime Minister, Speaker National Assembly and others arrives in Quetta. — DNA

Pak, EU relations cemented

DNA

BRUSSELS: The Embassy of Pakistan in Brussels participated in an Erasmus-Plus Information Session, highlighting knowledge partnerships and people-to-people cooperation. The session was aimed at disseminating opportunities across key Erasmus+ actions, including Capacity Building in Higher Education, International Credit Mobility, Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters, and Jean Monnet Actions. It brought together academic stakeholders and policy practitioners to explore avenues for deepening collaboration between Pakistan and the European Union. In his welcome remarks, Chargé d'Affaires Muhammad Faisal Fayaz underscored

Continued on Page 06

Hyderabad, Sialkot join PSL

SPORTS DESK

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Super League (PSL) expanded to eight teams on Thursday as Hyderabad and Sialkot were officially confirmed as the league's seventh and eighth franchises, respectively, following the completion of the expansion auction ahead of the upcoming season. The OZ Developers, owned by Hamza Majeed, secured the ownership of the eighth PSL team with a bid of Rs1.85 billion and named it after Sialkot in the second round of the highly anticipated auction.

Continued on Page 06

Quetta sjourn

Firm in our resolve to eradicate terrorism, says PM Shehbaz

The Prime Minister said five Daanish Schools will be established in the province to provide quality education to deserving children

BUREAU REPORT

QUETTA: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has announced numerous development projects worth billions of rupees in education and infrastructure sectors in Balochistan. He was addressing the political leadership of Balochistan in Quetta today. The Prime Minister said five Daanish Schools will be established in the province to provide quality education to deserving children. Regarding infrastructure projects, he said Chaman-Karachi (N-25) highway, costing 300 billion rupees, will be constructed to facilitate the people of Balochistan. Shehbaz Sharif said funds are being provided to all provinces under the National Finance Commission award. He reiterated to move forward on path of development and prosperity of the country with collective efforts and mutual consultation.

Continued on Page 06

Terrorists using BYC's platform to woo Balochistan's youth

BUREAU REPORT

QUETTA: Balochistan Counter-Terrorism Department's (CTD) Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Aitzaz Goraya on Thursday said terrorists were using the platform of Balochistan Yakjehti Committee (BYC) to induct youth into their networks. Goraya made the remarks while addressing a joint press conference alongside Balochistan Additional Chief Secretary Hamza Shafiq at in Quetta, where he gave details

Continued on Page 06

Trump seeks 50 per cent hike in defence budget

This will allow us to build the 'Dream Military' that we have long been entitled to and, more importantly, that will keep us SAFE and SECURE, regardless of foe," the US president said

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said on Wednesday he wanted to increase the US defence budget by half next year to a giant \$1.5 trillion to deal with "troubled and dangerous times". Trump has frequently employed the US military – which is currently funded at record spending levels – since returning to office, including strikes on Yemeni rebels, Iranian nuclear sites and alleged drug-smuggling

boats, as well as a brazen special forces raid to abduct Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro. "I have determined that, for the Good of our Country, especially in these very troubled and dangerous times, our Military Budget for the year 2027 should not be \$1 Trillion Dollars, but rather \$1.5 Trillion Dollars," Trump said on Truth Social. "This will allow us to build the 'Dream Military' that we have long been entitled to and, more importantly, that will keep us SAFE and SECURE, regardless of foe," the US president said

Continued on Page 06

CDF given briefing on preparedness

The COAS & CDF also visited a High Care Center at CMH Lahore, lauding the efforts of the medical staff and administration in establishing a fully equipped, state-of-the-art healthcare facility

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), HJ, COAS & CDF, visited Lahore Garrison, where he was given a comprehensive briefing on the formation's operational preparedness, training standards and key initiatives to enhance combat efficiency. The COAS & CDF witnessed a specialized field training exercise showcasing the latest technologies, underscoring the Army's emphasis on innovation, adaptability to match the dynamic future battlefield. He also inspected sports and recreational facilities being provided to troops, highlighting their importance in maintaining physical fitness, morale, and overall well-being. The COAS & CDF also visited a High Care Center at CMH Lahore, lauding the efforts of the medical staff and

Continued on Page 06

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Ministries' performance reports to improve governance: Dr Tariq

Regarding the Joint Action Committee of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), the minister said an agreement has been reached on 38 points, adding that around 90 per cent of the committee's demands have already been addressed

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Dr Tariq Fazal Chaudhry on Thursday said the government is committed to improving the governance model in the country by reviewing the performance of all ministries. Addressing a press conference here, the minister said the purpose of these performance reports is to strengthen the system of self-accountability and ensure that ministers remain responsible for their duties. He said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is keen to establish an exemplary governance model in the country and has directed all ministries to present their performance before the public. He said improvements are visible in several sectors, including investment, the power sector, maritime affairs, mines and minerals, and foreign affairs. All-out efforts are also being made to cope with climate change challenges, he added. Regarding his own ministry, the minister said the Grievance Wing of the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs is functioning efficiently to address public complaints. The wing received between 20,000 and 30,000 written complaints during 2025, in addition to thousands of complaints

through telephone calls, and maintained a complaint disposal rate of 93 per cent. He said the Prime Minister's Grievance Wing under the ministry receives complaints from across the country and that these are regularly followed up on. People can lodge their complaints on the universal number 111-555-554 for redressal. He said the one-year performance report of the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs will be sent to the PM and also shared with the public through the media. Dr Tariq Fazal Chaudhry said the role of the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs is not limited to handling complaints and resolving issues. It also provides effective platforms for political and public representation, which help promote democracy, political stability, and transparency in the country. The minister said the PM has directed all ministers to inform the public about the targets set by their ministries for the next year and the progress achieved over the past year. He said the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs maintains strong and effective coordination with allied parties, and their suggestions and concerns are conveyed directly to the Prime Minister.

Regarding the Joint Action Committee of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), the minister said an agreement has been reached on 38 points, adding that around 90 per cent of the committee's demands have already been addressed. While terming dialogue another name for democracy, the minister said the government is ready to hold talks with the opposition on all matters, but Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) remains divided on the issue of dialogue. He said dialogue is the best way to address national issues, adding that the Prime Minister has repeatedly extended offers of talks to the opposition. Appreciating the efforts of the National Dialogue Committee, he said the committee would need to secure the confidence of PTI to move forward with negotiations with the government. He said PTI has given political authority to Mahmood Khan Achakzai, and the party leadership should formally grant him a clear mandate. He pointed out that there appear to be conflicting views within PTI regarding talks with the government. Dr Tariq Fazal Chaudhry said the opposition could also use the office of the Speaker of the National Assembly to initiate dialogue with the government. —APP

HEC, PNQAHE to launch joint quality assurance programmes

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan has agreed to collaborate with the Pakistan Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (PNQAHE) on joint initiatives aimed at strengthening quality assurance in higher education institutions. The decision was taken during a meeting held at HEC Islamabad on Thursday, chaired by Prof. Dr Zia-ul-Haq, Executive Director HEC. The meeting was attended by Dr Asiyah Bukhari, President PNQAHE, along with her team, including Air Commodore (R) Muhammad Ismail. From HEC, Nasir Shah, Director General, Quality Assurance, Dr Noor Amna Malik, Managing Director, NAHE and other officers were present. Dr Asiyah Bukhari congratulated Dr Zia-ul-Haq on assuming the office of Executive Director, HEC and expressed confidence in his leadership for the advancement of higher education in Pakistan. She presented PNQAHE's capacity-building proposals for higher education stakeholders, which were welcomed by the Executive Director, HEC. The responsibility for further coordination was assigned to QAA and NAHE. Dr Susan Karakhanian, former President of INQAHE also joined the meeting online as Advisor to PNQAHE. It was agreed that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between HEC and PNQAHE will be signed in near future.

PM laptop scheme brings smiles, opportunity to KP students

PESHAWAR: A sense of pride, confidence and renewed academic ambition is visible on the faces of students at the University of Peshawar as beneficiaries of the Prime Minister's Youth Laptop Scheme received laptops—an initiative they described as a gateway to knowledge and a symbol of hope for Pakistan's youth. Among them was Ms. Hira Khan Afzli, a third-semester student of International Relations, who hails from District Khyber, part of the former FATA region where access to educational resources has historically been limited. Receiving her laptop from Federal Minister Eng. Amir Muqam during a ceremony at the university, Hira Afzli termed the scheme a "life-changing support" for students from underdeveloped areas like erstwhile FATA. "For students like me, this is not just a device," she told APP. "It represents access to digital education, research opportunities and academic growth. For many

students from erstwhile FATA, pursuing higher education requires extraordinary struggle due to limited resources. Initiatives like this help bridge long-standing educational gaps and bring talented students into the academic mainstream." She added that investing in students is, in fact, an investment in Pakistan's future and bringing economic development. "When young people are empowered with such resources and confidence, they are better prepared to serve the nation with knowledge and purpose," she said, expressing gratitude to Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. "Thank you, Prime Minister. I am your vision. I am an empowered youth. I am Pakistan."

Another beneficiary, Muhammad Bilal Jawad, also a third-semester student of International Relations from Swabi district at UoP, shared similar sentiments and lauded the scheme. Calling the laptop a source of motivation, he said the

scheme has opened new avenues for learning and innovation. "This laptop is not merely a machine," he remarked. "It is an opportunity to connect with the world, conduct research more efficiently, and contribute positively to society. I am deeply thankful to the Prime Minister of Pakistan for taking such meaningful steps for students of the country." Bilal urged the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government to introduce similar initiatives, particularly for students from remote and underdeveloped regions. "Investing in education is investing in the nation's future," he emphasized. For Adil Shah, a seventh-semester student of English from Swat, the laptop symbolizes encouragement to excel. "This facility will greatly support my academic activities," he said. "It will help me access new sources of knowledge, complete assignments more effectively and further improve my learning process." —APP

China's Fudan University begins Int'l elite pioneer program

ISLAMABAD: The Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan has announced the opening of applications for the 2026 International Elite Pioneer Program at Fudan University, one of China's leading research universities, under an academic cooperation framework linked to China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The application window runs from December 25, 2025, to February 22, 2026, with enrollment expected in late August or September, subject to official admission notices from Fudan University, reports Gwadar Pro on Thursday. According to the HEC, the program is being implemented through collaboration between the Higher Education Commission, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Unit, and the Pakistan Study Centre at Fudan University, as part of the CPEC Consortium of Universities and Collaborative Initiatives. The initiative is designed to cultivate high-level international talent from Belt and Road partner countries, including Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Laos and Hungary, with plans for future expansion to additional countries. Under the program, Pakistani students can apply for English-taught master's and doctoral degree programs in a wide range of disciplines. Master's programs include finance, international business, big data, software engineering, journalism and Chinese politics, while doctoral fields cover physics, biology, environmental science, mathematics, public management and artificial intelligence, among others. Fudan University, based in Shanghai, is known for its strong disciplinary advantages in science and engineering, including computer science, information technology, advanced materials, microelectronics and environmental studies. —APP

Advisory committee to improve girls education in KP

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Commission on the Status of Women (KPCSW) has notified Provincial Girls Education Oversight and Advisory Committee, marking a significant step toward strengthening policy oversight, accountability, and coordinated action for advancing girls' education across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to a press release issued here on Thursday, the Committee has been constituted in line with provincial commitments under SDG-4 (Quality Education) and aims to ensure that girls' education remains central to governance, budgeting, and development planning. The Committee is mandated to provide strategic oversight and guidance on girls' education initiatives in the province, review enrollment, retention, transition, and completion trends at all levels, monitor policy commitments and budgetary allocations, identify implementation gaps related to infrastructure, teachers, safety, and learning outcomes, and strengthen coordination among government departments, civil society organizations, and development partners. Through this mandate, the Committee will function as a critical

accountability and advisory platform to translate policy commitments into measurable results for girls. Civil society organizations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have welcomed the notification of the committee as a timely and strategic intervention. The Rise and Shine Girls Education Leadership Network, appreciated the leadership and institutional commitment demonstrated by Dr. Sumera Shams, Chairperson of KPCSW, in placing girls' education at the forefront of provincial priorities. "Girls' education is not only a right but a powerful driver of women's empowerment, economic participation, and social transformation. Through this Committee, KPCSW aims to ensure that girls' education policies are not only formulated but effectively implemented, monitored, and improved through collective effort and accountability. The formation of this provincial advisory committee is a continuation of the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's commitment, which has allocated 70 percent of its education development budget towards girls' education from last 5 years and has undertaken several initiatives to improve gender parity in education," she stated. —APP



KARACHI: Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry with officials after inaugurating the ferry terminal at Karachi Port

NUST, Chinese medical college set to academic coop

ISLAMABAD: The National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), Pakistan and Chongqing Three Gorges Medical College, China have agreed to move toward formal academic collaboration following the participation of a NUST faculty member in an international medical technology program, the university said in a statement. The development emerged during the visit of Dr. Amer Sohail Kashif, an associate professor from the Department of Biomedical Engineering & Sciences (BMES), School of Mechanical & Manufacturing Engineering, NUST. Dr. Kashif represented the university in a 15-day International Advanced Medical Technology Training Program, hosted by the Chinese institution under Belt and Road Initiative, Gwadar Pro reported on Thursday. According to NUST, the fully sponsored program culminated in a proposal for a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the university and the host institution. —APP

President of the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce & Industry (RCCI), Mr. Usman Shaukat, has lauded the Green Crescent Trust (GCT) for its outstanding contribution to providing quality school education to underprivileged communities in Pakistan, particularly in rural and underserved areas of Sindh. He expressed these views while delivering the keynote address at a special event hosted in honour of Green Crescent Trust, aimed at mobilising support from Islamabad's business community for GCT's ongoing education campaign.

The event was attended by a large number of prominent philanthropists and donors from the federal capital, who announced generous contributions to support the enrolment of out-of-school children. The funds raised will enable GCT to provide quality education to nearly 5,000 students for one year. RCCI President emphasised the urgent need for a robust, transparent, and well-monitored mechanism developed with the active involvement of civil society—to ensure effective utilisation of the trillions of rupees allocated annually by federal and provincial governments for

Green Crescent Trust rendering exceptional services in education: Shaukat

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Railways has launched wide-ranging reforms aimed at transforming Pakistan Railways into a profitable and financially sustainable organization, with a strong emphasis on revitalizing freight operations and improving passenger services. An official in the Ministry told APP that freight opera-

tions are being prioritized as a major revenue driver. As part of these reforms, new freight wagons have been inducted and dedicated freight corridors are under development to enhance efficiency. Measures to improve cargo handling, reduce turnaround time, and develop strategic partnerships with major bulk clients are also underway. The official said several initiatives have been introduced, including online booking of freight trains, additional freight and cargo services, and outsourcing of freight wagons. These steps have yielded tangible results, with the average payload per freight train increasing from 1,800 tons in 2023 to 2,400 tons in 2024. —APP

Railways reform drive boost passenger services

SBP BANKING SERVICES CORPORATION

ITB No. GSD(Proc. II)/S&S-HOK/363850/2025

INVITATION TO e-BID

SBP Banking Services Corporation invites electronic bids from eligible Bidders registered with relevant tax authorities, who appear on the Active Taxpayers List of FBR, for the following services:

Package #	Procurement Title	Bid Security (Rs.)
Package 1	Security & Search Services for SBP BSC, Head Office, Karachi	Rs. 450,000/-
Package 2	Search Services for SBP BSC North Cluster Offices (Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Peshawar, D.I. Khan, Muzaffarabad)	Rs. 45,000/-
Package 3	Search Services for SBP BSC Central Cluster Offices (Lahore, Sialkot, Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Multan, Bahawalpur)	Rs. 55,000/-
Package 4	Search Services for SBP BSC South Cluster Offices (Karachi-I.I. Chundrigar Road, North Nizamabad, Hyderabad, Sukkur, Quetta)	Rs. 45,000/-

The interested bidder can participate in any or all of the packages mentioned above. Moreover, the evaluation and award of the contract for each package will be carried out separately.

Bidding documents as per regulations, containing detailed terms and conditions, specifications, and requirements, etc., are available for the registered bidders on E-PADS at www.eprocure.gov.pk. A pre-bid meeting for all packages will be held on **January 16, 2026, at 11:00 AM** via the Zoom Meeting Application. The Meeting ID & Password are given in the Bidding Documents. The prospective firms can also obtain the Meeting ID & Passcode through an email request at gsd.proc2@sbp.org.pk.

The electronic bids prepared in accordance with the instructions provided in the Bidding Documents must be submitted by using E-PADS on or before the bid submission deadline given below:

Package #	Package Title	Bid Submission Deadline	Bid Opening Schedule
Package 1	Security & Search Services for SBP BSC, Head Office, Karachi	26-01-2026 11:00 AM	26-01-2026 11:30 AM
Package 2	Search Services for SBP BSC North Cluster Offices	26-01-2026 11:00 AM	26-01-2026 11:40 AM
Package 3	Search Services for SBP BSC Central Cluster Offices	26-01-2026 11:00 AM	26-01-2026 11:50 AM
Package 4	Search Services for SBP BSC South Cluster Offices	26-01-2026 11:00 AM	26-01-2026 12:00 PM

All submitted bids will be opened as per the specified schedule above in the presence of representatives of firms who may choose to be present. Manual bids shall not be accepted.

Bid Security of the amount mentioned above against each package will be required to be submitted along with the Technical Bid of each package in the shape of Pay Order/Demand Draft/Deposit at Call or Bank Guarantee in favor of SBP BSC. In the case of a Bank Guarantee, it should be valid for a period of 28 days beyond the Bid Validity date. A scanned copy of the Bid Security is to be submitted through E-PADS, and the Bid Security in Original is to be dispatched to the following address, and the same must reach before the Bid submission deadline. Non-receipt of the original Bid Security before the Bid submission deadline will lead to rejection of the Bid.

Joint Director
Procurement Division-II, General Services Department
3rd Floor, BSC House, State Bank of Pakistan
I.I. Chundrigar Road, Karachi
Tel.: 021-3313-5306/8305
Email: gsd.proc2@sbp.org.pk

PID (K-2347/25)

National Days and Armed Forces Days**JANUARY**

Jan 01 / CUBA Revolution Day

Jan 01 / Palestine Palestine Revolution Day

Jan 01 / Sudan National Day

Jan 04 / Myanmar Independence Day

Jan 06 / Iraq Armed Forces Day

Jan 12 / Tanzania Armed Forces Day

Jan 14 / Uzbekistan Armed Forces Day

Jan 15 / Nigeria Armed Forces Day

Jan 20 / Mali Armed Forces Day

Jan 20 / Laos Armed Forces Day

Jan 25 / Thailand Armed Forces Day

Jan 26 / Australia National Day

Jan 26 / India Republic Day

Turkish Airlines.....8494949

**Emergency**

Rescue (Police).....15
 Bomb Disposal.....15
 Fire Services Rawalpindi/Islamabad.....1122 & 16
 Emergency Ambulance.....1122 & Rescue Services.....451122
 Motorway Police.....9266044
 Motorway Police.....9270601-20
 Women Police Stations Islamabad.....9222596
 Rawalpindi.....9270601-20

**Enquiry**

Edhi Ambulance.....115
 PIA Flight Info.....114
 PIA Cargo.....9280979
 Railway Inquiry.....117
 Railway Exchange.....9270831-5
 WASA Rawalpindi.....5555489
 CAA.....9281092

**Hospitals**

CMH.....561111
 MH.....561116
 Cantt Hospital.....9270907-11
 DHQ.....5556311-4
 RGH.....9290301-7
 Holy Family.....9290322-7
 PIMS.....9261170-79
 Polyclinic.....9218300-09
 Shifa International 4603666

**Departments**

CDA.....9221334-43
 CDA.....9208301-04
 Met Office.....9250360-6
 RDA.....5555864
 TMA.....5770886
 Cantonment Board 9270151-3

**Islamabad Metropolitan**

Corporation.....9209224
 Potohar Town.....9209224
 Rawal Town.....5773343

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Pakistan-China friendship exhibition cements cultural ties

Representing the Embassy of the People's Republic of China, Mr. Wang Shengjie, Head of the Political Press Section, praised the exhibition and recognized the contributions of the participating artists



SAIFULLAH ANSAR/DNA

ISLAMABAD: Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of Culture, Farah Naz Akbar, has reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to deepening relations with China, emphasizing that cultural cooperation remains a cornerstone of bilateral ties. She made these remarks while inaugurating the Pakistan-China Friendship Calligraphy and Paintings Exhibition, a vibrant showcase of artistic collaboration between the two nations. The exhibition, jointly curated by Dr. Shaista Haider and Ms. Wang Chunpin, brought together a diverse collec-

tion of calligraphy and paintings that celebrate the shared heritage and artistic traditions of Pakistan and China. Speaking at the ceremony, Farah Naz Akbar highlighted the enduring nature of the Pakistan-China friendship, describing it as "durable, trusted, and mutually beneficial." She noted that cultural relations between the two countries are strengthening day by day, and initiatives such as this exhibition serve to further cement the bond. "Such platforms not only highlight the creativity of our artists but also reflect the depth of our friendship with China," she said. "Cultural exchanges are vital in building bridges of

understanding and trust between nations, and Pakistan attaches great importance to its relations with China." Representing the Embassy of the People's Republic of China, Mr. Wang Shengjie, Head of the Political Press Section, praised the exhibition and recognized the contributions of the participating artists. He reiterated China's keen interest in enhancing bilateral relations with Pakistan, stressing that cultural cooperation is a meaningful step in that direction. "The embassy greatly values the works of these artists," he remarked. "Such initiatives enrich our cultural dialogue and will further enhance cooperation



between our two countries." Renowned Pakistani artist Jamal Shah also addressed the gathering, commending the exhibition as a testament to the creative synergy between Pakistani and Chinese artists. He underscored the role of art in fostering mutual respect and understanding, noting that cultural diplomacy often succeeds where political dialogue may face challenges. The event drew a distinguished audience, including the ambassadors of Sri Lanka and Vietnam, as well as Usman Shah, CEO of the Niphtyspere Institute. Their presence underscored the regional significance of cultural diplomacy and

the growing recognition of art as a vehicle for international cooperation. The exhibition featured a wide range of works, from traditional Chinese brush paintings to contemporary Pakistani calligraphy, symbolizing the harmony between ancient traditions and modern expressions. Visitors were captivated by the intricate details and thematic depth of the pieces, which reflected themes of friendship, peace, and shared aspirations. Organizers expressed hope that the exhibition would pave the way for more collaborative projects in the future, including artist exchanges, joint workshops, and

cultural festivals. Dr. Shaista Haider and Ms. Wang Chunpin, the curators, emphasized that the exhibition was not merely an artistic endeavor but a celebration of the enduring bond between Pakistan and China. As the event concluded, participants echoed the sentiment that cultural diplomacy remains a powerful tool in strengthening bilateral ties. The Pakistan-China Friendship Calligraphy and Paintings Exhibition stood as a vivid reminder that art transcends borders, and that the friendship between the two nations continues to flourish through creativity, trust, and mutual respect.

Govt open to dialogue, PTI divided over talks: Tariq

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhary, while terming dialogue another name for democracy, said on Thursday that the government is ready to hold talks with the opposition on all matters, but Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) remains divided on the issue of dialogue. Addressing a news conference here, he said dialogue is the best way to address national issues, adding that the Prime Minister has repeatedly extended offers of talks to the opposition. Appreciating the efforts of the National Dialogue Committee, he said the committee would need to secure the confidence of PTI to move forward with negotiations with the government. He said that PTI has given political attorney to Mahmood Khan Achakzai, and the

party leadership should formally grant him a clear mandate. He pointed out that there appear to be conflicting views within PTI regarding talks with the government. Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhary said the opposition could also use the office of the Speaker of the National Assembly to initiate dialogue with the government. He said PM Shehzad Sharif is keen on establishing an exemplary governance model in the country and has directed all ministries to present their performance of the past year before the public. He said all indicators show visible improvement and development. Foreign investment is pouring into the country, while the power sector has also shown significant progress. Regarding his own ministry, the minister said the Grievance Wing of the Ministry of

Parliamentary Affairs is functioning efficiently to address public complaints. The wing received between 20,000 and 30,000 written complaints during 2025, in addition to thousands of complaints through telephone calls, and maintained a complaint disposal rate of 93 per cent.

He said the PM Grievance Wing under the ministry receives complaints from across the country and that these are regularly followed up. People can lodge their complaints on the universal number 111-555-554 for redressal.

Regarding the Joint Action Committee of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), the minister said an agreement has been reached on 38 points. He said that around 90 per cent of the committee's demands have already been addressed. —DNA

NA health committee flags insulin shortages, reviews nursing reforms

ISLAMABAD, Jan 08 (APP): The National Assembly's Standing Committee on National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination on Thursday expressed serious concern over shortages of diabetes medicines and insulin, while also reviewing nursing sector reforms and the performance of the Health Services Academy (HSA). The meeting, chaired by Dr. Mahesh Kumar Malani, noted inconsistencies in the availability of specific medicine brands and stressed that complete details regarding shortages and discounted medicines provided to parliamentarians should be shared with the committee. Members questioned the quality of medicines offered to parliamentarians at a 30 per cent discount. Officials informed the committee that 16 samples had been collected from the parliamentarians' Dispensary and six from the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS), with testing reports to be shared in the next meeting. The minister assured the committee that relevant stakeholders would be called for a detailed discussion. The committee also sought clarification on whether a 69% discount granted under the pharmacy tender awarded to the Federal Government Hospital was being passed on to the general public. The Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (Drap) stated that inspections were being conducted in coordination with ICT inspectors, while procurement was carried out in line with PPRA rules. Lifestyle medicine and preventive healthcare were also discussed, with members proposing the inclusion of lifestyle education in medical curricula through the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council and provincial syllabi. The chair directed that the issue be placed on the agenda of the next meeting. Proposed amendments to the PMDC Act and issues faced by Pakistani medical students abroad were also flagged for future deliberations. —APP

PML-N's Abid Sheri apologizes to ECP

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Chaudhry Abid Sher Ali on Thursday tendered an unconditional apology to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in a case relating to violation of ballot secrecy during the Faislabad by-election. A three-member ECP bench, headed by Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja, heard the matter. Abid Sher Ali appeared before the Commission to respond to the proceeding. His counsel informed the bench that the PML-N leader had submitted a written apology, clarifying that Sher Ali had not uploaded the video on social media. The lawyer reiterated that the apology was unconditional. The Commission reserved its verdict, with the Chief Election Commissioner noting that a decision would be made on whether to accept the apology. He added that if the plea was not accepted, further proceedings would follow. —APP

PM to inaugurate Islamabad-Murree Expressway soon: Aleem

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Communications Abdul Aleem Khan on Thursday conducted a detailed inspection of the Islamabad-Murree Expressway and reviewed the completed beautification, expansion and other development works. He directed that mosques be constructed at rest areas on both sides of the Islamabad-Murree Expressway (IMDC) with separate prayer arrangements for women, said a press release. On the occasion, the Federal Minister was briefed that all major works on the Expressway (IMDC) have been completed and the project is ready for inauguration which will be carried out by the Prime Minister of Pakistan in near future. Expressing satisfaction over

the facilities provided at the Murree Expressway Rest Areas, Abdul Aleem Khan personally identified locations for the expansion of Mosques, construction of ablution areas and other allied facilities under his supervision. He directed the concerned officers to complete the remaining works on the Murree Expressway within a final deadline of one week, emphasizing that quality and long-lasting construction must be ensured at all costs. Abdul Aleem Khan stated that the National Highway Authority (NHA) has maintained high construction standards throughout the project while ensuring the provision of excellent lighting, green areas, service roads and other es-

ential facilities. The Minister further informed that a new Toll Plaza equipped with M-Tag has also become operational which will provide modern and improved services to tourists. He added that the removal of road cuts and encroachments has made travel on the Murree Expressway more safer. With the completion of the Murree Expressway, tourists visiting Murree from across the country will enjoy a beautiful, comfortable and pleasant travel environment. On this occasion, tourists also expressed their appreciation to Federal Minister Abdul Aleem Khan for making the Expressway modern, attractive and well-equipped with additional facilities. —APP

EOBI pensioners

No circular can restrict parliamentary law, rules FCCP

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Constitutional Court of Pakistan has held that no administrative circular can override or limit a law passed by Parliament or any of its schedules. The ruling came in a significant decision concerning the Employees' Old-Age Benefits Institution (EOBI), marking a major development in pension rights for thousands of workers. A three-member bench headed by Chief Justice Aminuddin Khan, and comprising Justice Syed Hasan Azhar Rizvi and Justice Arshad Hussain Shah, delivered the verdict while dismissing multiple appeals filed by EOBI. The Court emphasized that EOBI is a welfare institution and welfare laws must be interpreted in favor of employees. Denying a lifelong

pension due to a shortfall of a few months, it said, violates justice and constitutional principles. The bench declared the EOBI circular issued in 2022 ineffective, noting that administrative instructions cannot curtail statutory rights. It observed that the 2019 circular – which treated a six-month period as a full year – was lawful and the rights accrued under it could not later be withdrawn. Concluding the judgment, the Federal Constitutional Court ordered EOBI to grant monthly old-age pensions to all affected employees, calling it a vital legal development for workers nationwide. —APP

Imran reviews Bait-ul-Mal medical aid at NIRM

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Syed Imran Ahmed Shah on Thursday visited the National Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine (NIRM) to review the provision of medical financial assistance under Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal, as part of the government's efforts to ensure that deserving patients are not deprived of treatment due to poverty, through on-ground inspections and directions for improving transparency, efficiency and fast-track processing of cases. At NIRM, federal minister was received by Executive Director of NIRM, Dr. Shaista Habibullah. She briefed minister on the institute's overall performance, patient care facilities and the support extended through Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal's Individual Financial Assistance Programme. Minister Imran Ahmad Shah inspected various departments of NIRM and later visited the prosthetics laboratory, where he reviewed the process of assembling and provision of artificial limbs, orthoses, hearing aids and other assistive devices. Minister Imran Shah described NIRM's rehabilitation services as crucial for persons with disabilities and individuals with special needs. While speaking to the media, Imran Shah said that under the present government, Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal's Individual Financial Assistance Programme had been made more effective, transparent and expansive. He informed that from 2022 to 2025, approximately 2,267 deserving patients at NIRM had received treatment and rehabilitation support through Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal, with a total expenditure of about 278 million rupees. He further said that priority financial assistance at NIRM is being provided for major surgeries, artificial limbs, implants, hearing aids and speech and physical rehabilitation cases, adding that the maximum assistance limit under the programme had been enhanced from Rs1 million to Rs1.5 million. The federal minister stressed that the government's foremost priority is to ensure that no deserving individual should be deprived of life-saving surgery or prosthetic treatment because of financial hardship. He also noted that the medical financial assistance budget of Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal had been increased from Rs 227 million in the previous fiscal year to around Rs280 million in the current year, reflecting the government's strong commitment to social protection and healthcare. Minister Shah said that financial assistance is being provided only after proper case verification, medical assessment and hospital validation. He directed that a Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal facilitation desk be established at NIRM, along with improvements in online case tracking and the introduction of a fully computerized administrative system. He made it clear that no negligence would be tolerated and that Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal must resolve all medical assistance cases within one month, while emergency cases should be processed through an effective fast-track mechanism. On the occasion, the federal minister also appreciated the Ramadan relief initiatives undertaken by the Benazir Income Support Programme under the leadership of its secretary, Amir Ahmed Ali, terming them timely and positive measures. He said that the current government is advancing all social protection programmes in a coordinated and effective manner. Minister announced that he would continue reviewing Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal initiatives by visiting other hospitals and universities across the country. He also pledged to visit Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan in the near future to further strengthen social protection and medical assistance systems at the grassroots level. In conclusion, the federal minister Syed Imran Ahmed Shah commended the efforts of NIRM's management, doctors, medical staff and the Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal team, saying the collaboration between the Ministry of Health and Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal stood as a successful example of integrating rehabilitation healthcare with social protection into a cohesive and effective system. —DNA

Briefs

Kachehri Chowk remodelling project on track for May completion: Commissioner

RAWALPINDI: Commissioner Rawalpindi Engineer Aamir Khattak on Thursday reviewed progress on the Kachehri Chowk Remodelling Project, expressing satisfaction with the pace of work following a detailed site inspection. He instructed the project team to maintain the work pace to complete the project by May this year. The Commissioner chaired a review meeting at the project location where the Supervising Engineer Punjab Highways gave a comprehensive briefing on physical and financial advancement. Officials reported that overall construction has reached 42 percent completion. Among the major milestones achieved are full completion of the guide beam at Itikhar Janjua Underpass, completion of guide beam and piling works at both Kachehri Chowk Underpass and Jinnah Park Underpass, 90 per cent completion of the retaining wall, and rapid ongoing construction of the boundary wall. Engr Aamir Khattak directed the project team to sustain the current momentum, confirming that the scheme remains on schedule for completion by May 2026.—APP

Father, uncles held for Qatar-returned woman's murder in Wah

RAWALPINDI: The Wah Cantt Police, in a major breakthrough, have arrested three more accused for the murder of a Qatar-returned married woman, including her father and two uncles. A Rawalpindi Police spokesman said on Thursday that one of the main suspects had already been arrested, and further arrests were made following his disclosure. During interrogation, the suspect revealed that the victim's two uncles, in collusion with her husband, had allegedly planned the murder. The woman was brought back to Pakistan and killed on the instructions of her father and uncles, the spokesman added. City Police Officer (CPO) Syed Khafid Hamdani, he said, had taken notice of the incident and directed the Wah Cantt Police to ensure the arrest of all those involved. He said the case had been registered by the police, and raids were under way to arrest other suspects involved in the crime. Superintendent of Police (SP) Potohar Talha Wali said the arrested suspects would be presented before the court with a challan backed by solid evidence.—APP

HEC, PNQAHE to launch joint quality assurance programmes

ISLAMABAD: The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan has agreed to collaborate with the Pakistan Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (PNQAHE) on joint initiatives aimed at strengthening quality assurance in higher education institutions.

The decision was taken during a meeting held at HEC Islamabad on Thursday, chaired by Prof. Dr Zia-ul-Haq, Executive Director HEC. The meeting was attended by Dr Asiyah Bukhari, President PNQAHE, along with her team, including Air Commodore (R) Muhammad Ismail. From HEC, Nasir Shah, Director General, Quality Assurance, Dr Noor Amna Malik, Managing Director, NAHE and other officers were present. Dr Asiyah Bukhari congratulated Dr Zia-ul-Haq on assuming the office of Executive Director, HEC and expressed confidence in his leadership for the advancement of higher education in Pakistan. She presented PNQAHE's capacity-building proposals for higher education stakeholders, which were welcomed by the Executive Director, HEC. The responsibility for further coordination was assigned to QAA and NAHE. Dr Sussanna Karakhanian, former President of INQAAHE also joined the meeting online as Advisor to PNQAHE.—APP

Lahore-Sialkot-Kharian-Rawalpindi Motorway to cut travel distance

Officials said the complete Lahore-Sialkot-Kharian-Rawalpindi motorway corridor is expected to be operational within two and a half to three years, representing a significant addition to the national motorway network

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The government has pledged timely completion of the Lahore-Sialkot-Kharian-Rawalpindi motorway, a key northbound corridor to ensure faster, safer and more economical connectivity between Punjab's economic hubs and the federal capital. Developed under the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model, the project is planned as a modern, high-speed motorway designed to cut travel time, lower fuel use and reduce vehicle operating costs for commuters. The first segment of the corridor, the Lahore-Sialkot Motorway (M-11), was completed and opened to traffic in March 2020. The 89-kilometre, six-lane controlled access motorway originates near the Kala Shah Kaku Interchange and terminates at Samrial. Executed on a Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) basis, the

project operates under a 25-year concession agreement signed on February 28, 2017 between the National Highway Authority (NHA) and the concessionaire, according to official documents. Designed for a speed of 120 km/h, M-11 features seven interchanges, two fully equipped service areas—Ravi and Chenab—and a range of modern facilities including mosques, fuel stations, restaurants, trucker hotels, executive washrooms, parking areas and a trauma and rescue centre at Kala Shah Kaku. The second section, Sialkot-Kharian Motorway (M-12), covering 69 kilometres, was awarded in September 2021. Construction commenced in October 2022 but was temporarily stalled in February 2024 after achieving around 15 percent physical progress, due to multiple unforeseen issues. Following deliberations by the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), the project has

now been restructured as a six-lane motorway from the outset to ensure long-term capacity and viability. The revised financing structure has been approved by the P3A Board, while the Central Development Working Party (CDWP) has recommended the updated PC-I to the ECNEC for approval. The motorway will feature eight interchanges and two service areas. Similarly, the Kharian-Rawalpindi Motorway (M-13), with a total length of 117 kilometres, has been restructured in accordance with SIFC directives issued in March 2025 and upgraded from a four-lane to a six-lane controlled access facility. The project features two twin-tube tunnels, extensive service roads, rest and service areas on both sides of the motorway, and eight interchanges linking major urban centres including Sargodha, Lahore, Jhelum, Dina, Sohawa and Gujrat. The revised PC-I for M-13

has been submitted to the Planning Commission and recommended by CDWP for ECNEC approval. Upon administrative clearance, NHA will initiate the PPP-based procurement process. Officials said the complete Lahore-Sialkot-Kharian-Rawalpindi motorway corridor is expected to be operational within two and a half to three years, representing a significant addition to the national motorway network. Officials further noted that upgrading the Sialkot-Rawalpindi section to a six-lane motorway will reduce the Lahore-Islamabad travel distance by approximately 100 kilometres and shorten travel time from three-and-a-half hours to about two-and-a-half hours, resulting in substantial fuel savings, improved traffic flow and enhanced road safety. The government reiterated that the motorway corridor is being fast-tracked as a priority initiative, describing it as a game-changer for inter-city mobility and national connectivity.

Police conduct grand search, combing operations across federal capital

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police conducted grand search and combing operations in different areas of the federal capital under the supervision of zonal Superintendents of Police (SPs). A police spokesperson told media on Thursday that ladies police personnel also took part in the operation. During the search and combing activity, 327 individuals, 127 houses, 26 shops, and 12 guest houses were checked. Similarly, 83 motorcycles and 30 vehicles were inspected. The spokesperson added that 14 suspected persons and nine motorcycles were shifted to the respective police stations for further verification during the operation. He said the purpose of these operations is to curb criminal activities and ensure peace in residential and commercial areas. The Inspector General of Police (IGP) has already issued directions for grand search operations across the district to eliminate crime.—APP

Education must adapt as AI outpaces textbooks, says Musadik



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination Dr Musadik Malik on Thursday said that traditional textbook-based education is rapidly losing relevance as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, nanotechnology and cognitive sciences, he said these fields were not futuristic concepts but active forces already redefining life, work and education. He noted that AI tools such as ChatGPT had transformed how knowledge is created and used, forcing universities worldwide to rethink their approach.

"Just a few years ago, universities were trying to catch students using

has already happened," Dr Malik said, adding that most academic material is five to seven years behind real-world developments. "The speed at which technology is advancing means memorisation alone will not help you survive." Highlighting the rise of artificial intelligence, biotechnology, nanotechnology and cognitive sciences, he said these fields were not futuristic concepts but active forces already redefining life, work and education. He noted that AI tools such as ChatGPT had transformed how knowledge is created and used, forcing universities worldwide to rethink their approach.

"The goal is not laptops or degrees. The goal is to prepare you for a world where even your teachers may not fully understand what is coming next," he said. He emphasised that universities must cultivate understanding, decision-making ability and the courage to make mistakes, warning that institutions failing to do so risk

ChatGPT. Today, they are teaching prompt engineering," he remarked, calling it evidence of how quickly the rules of learning are changing. Dr Malik said the purpose of initiatives such as the Prime Minister's Youth Laptop Scheme was not merely to distribute devices but to empower students with skills, adaptability and critical thinking.

"The goal is not laptops or degrees. The goal is to

CDA reclaims 320 kanals of encroached land

DNA

ISLAMABAD: In line with the direction of Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, large-scale anti-encroachment operations have been successfully carried out against the land mafia in the Saidpur area to ensure the protection of Islamabad's important natural heritage, the National Park and to preserve its natural beauty. During these operations, the original boundaries of the National Park were identified through modern satellite geo-mapping and digital maps and illegal encroachments were removed. According to the CDA Enforcement Directorate, the National Park area is of vital importance for maintaining the environmental balance of the Federal Capital, protecting natural water reservoirs, ensuring the survival of wildlife and reducing urban pollution. However, in recent years, illegal settlements and encroachments in this sensitive area not only damaged the ecosystem but also created a situation contrary to national interests. In line with the vision of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Nagvi, and following the direction of Chairman CDA, the CDA Enforcement with the support of the Planning Wing, District Administration and Islamabad Police, initiated a phased operation in Saidpur and adjoining areas. On the instructions of the Chairman CDA, in the first phase, the original demarcation of the National Park, estate state land and encroached areas was clearly identified using satellite geo-mapping by the Planning Wing. As a result, 320 kanals of valuable state land were reclaimed from illegal occupation. The reclaimed land will be utilized during the upcoming spring season for large-scale tree plantation and environmental restoration projects, so that the natural beauty and eco-system of the area can be restored. It is noteworthy that this operation is the first major anti-encroachment campaign in the National Park area in the last ten years, clearly reflecting the protection of state land and the practical implementation of the government's environment-friendly policies. Strict procedures were followed during the operation to ensure transparency and accountability. In this regard, a formal inquiry has also been initiated against two CDA officials and one police official on suspicion of facilitating illegal encroachments, so that responsibility can be fixed and such incidents can be prevented in the future. On this occasion, senior officers of the Environment Wing said that these operations conducted through satellite geo-mapping are a model initiative for the protection of the National Park and the sustainable use of natural resources. They added that in the next phases, actions against remaining encroachments within the National Park boundaries and complete environmental restoration of the area will continue in a consistent manner.

Railways reform drive freight growth, boost passenger services

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Railways has launched wide-ranging reforms aimed at transforming Pakistan Railways into a profitable and financially sustainable organization, with a strong emphasis on revitalizing freight operations and improving passenger services. An official in the Ministry told APP that freight operations are being prioritized as a major revenue driver. As part of these reforms, new freight wagons have been inducted and dedicated freight corridors are under development to enhance efficiency. Measures to improve cargo handling, reduce turnaround time, and develop strategic partnerships with major bulk clients are also underway.

The official said several initiatives have been introduced, including online booking of freight trains, additional freight and cargo services, and outsourcing of freight wagons. These steps have yielded tangible results, with the average payload per freight train increasing from 1,800 tons in 2023 to 2,400 tons in 2024. On the passenger side, Pakistan Railways is now operating trains at full capacity. Coach composition has been increased from 15 to 19, and 10 new passenger trains have been introduced in recent months. Improved punctuality, better amenities, and rationalized fares have contributed to consistent growth in passenger revenue over the past five years.

To enhance on-board passenger facilitation, state-of-the-art dining cars and modern coaches have been introduced on Shalimar Express, Pak Business Express, and Islamabad Express. LED screens with preloaded programs and water

dispensers have been installed, while comprehensive janitorial services are now provided on all trains, he added. He said the enhanced services are also available on out-sourced trains, including Green Line, Pak Business, Shah Hussain, Subak Raftar, Subak Kharam, Rawal Express, and Islamabad Express. Premium dining cars are operational on Khyber Mail, Allama Iqbal Express, and Rehman Baba, while complimentary services such as high tea, bedding, newspapers, hygiene kits, and mineral water are being offered on seven premium trains. Train hostesses have also been introduced on Islamabad Express.

The official said significant improvements have also been made in off-board passenger facilitation. Escalators have been installed at Karachi and Lahore railway stations, while information desks and free Wi-Fi facilities now cover stations accounting for nearly 80 percent of total passenger footfall. Cleanliness agreements have been signed with provincial waste management companies in major cities to ensure hygienic platforms, washrooms, and surrounding areas, he said. He said the waiting halls have been upgraded at major stations, including Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, and Rawalpindi, while a new multi-story Train Dispatching Building has been completed at Lahore station, where a modern Computer-Based Interlocking system will soon be installed. Modern CIP lounges are operational at Karachi, Lahore, Faisalabad, and Rawalpindi stations, and extensive renovation work has been completed at Peshawar Cantt Station, he added.—APP

RCCI President stresses educating underprivileged communities

DNA

RAWALPINDI: President Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce & Industry (RCCI), Usman Shaukat has lauded the Green Crescent Trust (GCT) for its outstanding contribution to providing quality school education to underprivileged communities in Pakistan, particularly in rural and underserved areas of Sindh. He expressed these views while delivering the keynote address at a special event hosted in honour of Green Crescent Trust, aimed at mobilizing support from Islamabad's business community for GCT's ongoing education campaign. The event was attended by a large number of prominent philanthropists and donors from the federal capital, who announced generous contributions to support the enrollment of out-of-school children. The funds raised will enable GCT to provide quality education to nearly 5,000 students for one year. RCCI President emphasized the urgent need for a robust, transparent, and well-monitored

mechanism developed with the active involvement of civil society to ensure effective utilization of the trillions of rupees allocated annually by federal and provincial governments for public health and education. He noted that Pakistan spends approximately Rs 3.2 trillion every year on these sectors, underscoring the importance of strict oversight to ensure these funds truly benefit the most vulnerable segments of society. GCT Chief Executive Officer, Zahid Saeed (TI), in his presentation highlighted the severity of Pakistan's education crisis and outlined GCT's proven, scalable model. He shared that GCT has established 173 charitable schools over the past 31 years, educating more than 34,660 students with over 40 percent of them girls, and supporting 2,150 orphaned students. He also shared GCT's Vision 2030 to expand its network to 250 schools serving 100,000 students. Gen. (R) Amjad Khattak, Member GCT Management Committee appreciated the unwavering support of RCCI President Usman Shaukat for social causes, particularly his steadfast backing of Green Crescent Trust's noble mission.

Arab world's clear warning from Venezuela

WHAT unfolded in Venezuela over the weekend is not an isolated incident, nor should it be treated as such. It is a clear signal, one that deserves careful reading, not emotional reaction, and is a defining moment that exposes the fragile reality of the international order we inhabit today. On Saturday, the US carried out a direct military operation on Venezuelan soil, resulting in the arrest of President Nicolas Maduro and his transfer to America to face criminal charges. This was not the result of a multilateral decision, nor the conclusion of an international judicial process. It was a unilateral act, executed by force. The message is unmistakable: there are no absolute guarantees and state sovereignty is conditional when it clashes with the interests of powerful states. If the accusations against Maduro were legal in nature, a simple question must be asked: Why was the International Criminal Court not used? Why were formal complaints not submitted, evidence examined and due process followed? By bypassing international legal institutions, the US has effectively taken international justice into its own hands. In doing so, it has not only weakened Venezuela's sovereignty but also undermined the very system it claims to uphold. This sets a dangerous precedent. If one power can ignore international mechanisms without consequence, what prevents others from doing the same? The US is not the only global power. China, Russia, India, Pakistan and others all possess military strength and nuclear capability. If unilateral action becomes an accepted norm, who will restrain the next intervention carried out under the banner of "security" or "justice?" This is why Venezuela matters. Not because of sympathy for a regime or a leader but because the rules themselves are being rewritten. The UN met. Statements were delivered. Concerns were voiced. But beyond words, there was little action. This familiar pattern sends a clear message to the world: power overrides principle and accountability is selective. When international institutions fail to act decisively, they do not preserve stability; they erode it. Even warnings from UN bodies that such actions make the world less safe were met with indifference. This silence is not neutral; it is consequential. President Donald Trump has repeatedly stated that Greenland is vital to US national security. If security inter-

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ests justify unilateral action, it is reasonable to ask: Should the world expect similar logic to be applied elsewhere? This is not alarmism. It is the logical outcome of a world in which power replaces law. The uncomfortable question we must ask, honestly and without illusion, is this: Who is safe today? Despite this reality, we must be clear about one thing: we are not powerless. The Arab world possesses immense human capital; scientists, innovators, thinkers and leaders, many of whom have contributed significantly to global progress when given the opportunity. Our challenge has never been a lack of talent. There has been a lack of consistent structures that protect, empower and retain that talent.

Our most successful Arab economies were not built through dependence. They were built on our land, by our people, through vision, discipline and long-term planning. This is not theory; it is lived experience. True independence does not come from slogans. It comes from knowledge, institutions and the ability to make sovereign decisions without fear. So, what must be done? First, strengthen the Arab League in practice, not form. The Arab League must move beyond symbolism. It must evolve into a credible political, economic and security framework capable of protecting its members and deterring external pressure. A bloc that cannot protect its own sovereignty will not be respected by others. Second, keep Arab capital and strategic assets within the region. Recent global events have once again proven a simple truth: assets held abroad are vulnerable. The freezing and seizure of Russian private assets in Europe stand as a clear reminder that political decisions can freeze, seize or restrict access to foreign-held wealth overnight, regardless of legal ownership or prior assurances.

Economic sovereignty begins at home – through regional investment in food security, energy, industry and technology. This is not isolationism; it is prudence. Third, unity, vigilance and trusted leadership circles. Unity is not an emotional concept; it is a strategic necessity. Arab states must coordinate policies, close ranks and reinforce internal cohesion. At the same time, it is imperative to examine carefully those closest to decision-makers, retaining only those whose loyalty to national interests is unquestionable. History teaches us that internal weaknesses are often more destructive than external threats. Venezuela is not an exception. It is a warning. We are entering an era where international guarantees are fragile, institutions are weakened and power speaks louder than principle. Awareness today is not a luxury; it is a requirement for survival. Those who understand the direction of the world and prepare wisely will endure. Those who rely on assumptions that no longer hold may not be given another opportunity.

How Russia Is Recasting Its Foreign Policy

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



This engagement must be understood within a broader strategic framework. Russia's outreach to Latin America, Africa, and parts of Asia reflects a deliberate effort to deepen ties with countries often described collectively as the Global South. While these states differ widely in political systems and economic structures, many share a scepticism towards Western dominance in international institutions. Russia has sought to position itself as a counterweight, emphasising sovereignty, non-interference, and political pluralism in global affairs. The Venezuelan case also highlights how diplomatic recognition and political signalling have become tools of influence. At a time when Russia's relations with Europe remain deeply strained, visible engagement elsewhere serves to counter perceptions of isolation. It allows Moscow to demonstrate that it still commands

As the war in Ukraine grinds on with no clear resolution in sight, it has become tempting to view Russia's foreign policy almost exclusively through the prism of conflict. Yet focusing solely on the battlefield risks obscuring a quieter, more calculated process underway beyond Europe. In late 2025, Russia has continued to adjust its international posture through selective diplomacy and economic coordination, particularly in the Global South and the energy sector. These moves reveal not a state paralysed by war, but one seeking to preserve leverage, relevance, and room for manoeuvre in a changing global order. One notable development has been Moscow's swift response to political shifts in Venezuela. Russia was among the first countries to articulate a formal position, reaffirming its engagement with Caracas at a moment of uncertainty. The speed and clarity of the response were significant. In a crowded diplomatic landscape where many states hesitated or adopted cautious language, Russia's stance signalled continuity rather than ambiguity. Venezuela has long occupied a special place in Russia's external relations. Over the past two decades, the relationship has encompassed energy cooperation, arms sales, financial assistance, and political backing during periods of intense international pressure. By responding decisively to developments in Caracas, Moscow reinforced its image as a consistent partner, particularly to governments that see Western diplomacy as unpredictable or conditional.

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attention and retains partners willing to engage on their own terms. Yet this strategy is not without limits. Russia's economic capacity to sustain extensive overseas commitments has been constrained by sanctions and the demands of war. As a result, its diplomacy has become more selective, prioritising countries and regions where political alignment and strategic returns are judged to be highest. Latin America, where historical grievances against Western intervention persist, fits neatly into this calculus.

Alongside diplomacy, energy policy remains a central pillar of Russia's external strategy. Discussions among Russian officials about increasing oil production in line with OPEC+ quotas underscore the continued importance of hydrocarbons to Moscow's economic and geopolitical positioning. Despite efforts by Western states to reduce reliance on Russian energy, the country remains one of the world's leading producers, with significant influence over global supply dynamics. Aligning production decisions with OPEC+ partners reflects a pragmatic approach to a volatile market. Global energy prices have been shaped by conflict, supply disruptions, shifting demand patterns, and political uncertainty. For Russia, managing output within an agreed framework offers a degree of stability at a time when budgetary pressures remain acute. Energy revenues continue to play a crucial role in financing the state, particularly as defence spending stays elevated.

Beyond economics, cooperation within OPEC+ carries important diplomatic weight. The grouping has emerged as one of the few international platforms where Russia maintains regular, structured engagement with major powers outside the Western alliance system. Relations with key Middle Eastern producers, especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have taken on greater significance as Moscow seeks to diversify its diplomatic and economic partnerships. These relationships are not built on ideology, but on shared interests. Market stability, predictable pricing, and coordinated production serve the needs of both Russia and its OPEC+ partners. In this sense, energy cooperation functions as a form of quiet diplomacy, sustaining dialogue even as geopolitical tensions elsewhere intensify.

Russia's approach to energy also illustrates a broader shift in its foreign policy thinking. Rather than seeking dominance, Moscow appears increasingly focused on resilience. Maintaining a seat at the table, preserving

channels of influence, and avoiding exclusion from key decision-making forums have become central objectives. This is particularly evident in areas such as energy governance, where Russia can still exert influence despite political isolation in other domains. Taken together, Russia's actions in Venezuela and within OPEC+ point to a foreign policy that is adapting to constraint rather than retreating in defeat. The war in Ukraine has narrowed Moscow's options in Europe, but it has also accelerated a pivot towards regions where Western pressure is less decisive and political alignments more fluid. This shift does not amount to a wholesale abandonment of Europe as a long-term strategic concern. Instead, it reflects a recalibration of priorities driven by necessity.

For countries in the Global South, Russia presents itself as a partner advocating a more decentralised international system. Whether this message translates into lasting influence remains an open question. China's economic weight and growing diplomatic reach pose a clear challenge, and Russia's capacity to compete on investment and development remains limited. Nevertheless, Moscow's willingness to engage actively in political transitions and energy coordination suggests an enduring ambition to shape outcomes rather than merely react to them. Critics argue that Russia's strategy is ultimately defensive, designed to mask strategic setbacks rather than achieve new breakthroughs. There is some truth in this assessment. The resources available to Moscow are finite, and sustained confrontation with the West carries long-term costs. Yet it would be a mistake to dismiss these moves as purely symbolic. In a fragmented international system, influence is often exercised incrementally, through presence, consistency, and selective engagement.

As 2025 draws to a close, it is increasingly clear that Russia's foreign policy cannot be understood solely through the lens of war. Beyond Ukraine, Moscow is investing diplomatic capital in regions and sectors it believes will shape the next phase of global politics. Energy markets, South-South relations, and alternative diplomatic networks are becoming key pillars of this approach. The question is not whether Russia will re-emerge as a dominant global power, but whether it can sustain relevance in a world where power is increasingly dispersed. For now, Moscow appears determined to try. In doing so, it is reminding observers that even amid conflict, foreign policy is rarely fought on a single front.

The Elegance We Are Forgetting

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



Unfortunately, our condition stands in stark contrast. We live in a society where Urdu is effortlessly understood and comfortably spoken, yet many among us take pride not in fluency of thought but in fluency of English. A strange standard of superiority has taken root—where speaking English is seen as a marker of intellect and status, while speaking Urdu is sometimes treated as a sign of deficiency

GREAT nations take pride in their civilization, history, and language, and they never detach these elements from their personal existence or collective identity. These attributes are not merely cultural ornaments; they are the spiritual foundations upon which a nation's character rests. Around the world, especially in diplomatic circles, English has undoubtedly become a convenient medium of communication. It allows people of different regions to converse on equal footing. Yet, even within such environments, there are leaders, officials, and dignitaries who, despite having full command over English, choose to speak in their national languages. They do so without hesitation, without embarrassment, and often with visible dignity. Their confidence springs from a deep respect for their own heritage. Unfortunately, our condition stands in stark contrast. We live in a society where Urdu is effortlessly understood and comfortably spoken, yet many among us take pride not in fluency of thought but in fluency of English. A strange standard of superiority has taken root—where speaking English is seen as a marker of intellect and status, while speaking Urdu is sometimes treated as a sign of deficiency. In gatherings, in workplaces, and particularly in elite social circles, one notices that even those who think naturally in Urdu consciously switch to English to appear distinguished. This behavior has given rise to an awkward hybrid known popularly as "Gulabi Urdu," in which English words are sprinkled unnecessarily, as if plain Urdu were inadequate for dignified expression. During my years in journalism, I was fortunate to work with teachers and senior colleagues who helped purify my language and refine my expression. Their guidance became a treasure that still accompanies me in every sentence I write. I vividly recall an early lesson from my Chief Editor

Mujeeb-ur-Rehman Shami, who once reviewed a piece of mine containing the word "Mizbhanana" (Slaughterhouse). He looked at it attentively and said, "You have added 'Khana' unnecessarily. The word is complete even without it." It was a small correction, yet its impact was lasting. It taught me that precision in language is not achieved through excess but through clarity. That one moment remains etched in my memory.

On another occasion, I witnessed a gentle but profound lesson from most respected teacher Irfan Siddiqui. Someone at an event used the term "Body language" while speaking in Urdu. Mr. Siddiqui smiled and said that he could not understand why we insert English terms when perfectly expressive Urdu equivalents exist. A journalist present asked him what Urdu word could be used instead. With his characteristic grace, he replied,

"You may use the term 'Bad'an Boli' for that."

From that day onward, I began employing "Bad'an Boli" whenever needed, and it felt as though I had reconnected with a forgotten part of the language.

There were many others in my journalistic journey—Qudratullah Chaudhry, Abdullah Tariq Suhail, Athar Masud, Tauseef Ahmed Khan, Tahir Majeed, Naveed Chaudhry, Imran Mir, Naem Iqbal, Chaudhry Khadim Hussain, Esar Rana, Naem Mustafa, Najam Wali Khan, Zahid Rafique, Akhtar Hayat, Allama Saeed Azhar, and several more—whose companionship enriched my Urdu.

They corrected my expressions, refined my usage, and strengthened my connection with the language.

Over ten years, I learned from them not only words but attitudes, not only grammar but respect for the elegance and depth of Urdu.

Today, however, the culture of learning and teaching is gradually fading. Senior writers and journalists who nurtured newcomers with patience and affection are diminishing in number.

The new generation, equipped with screens, shortcuts, and the influence of globalized media, tends to rely more on English expressions even while thinking in Urdu. The assault of foreign words is slowly diluting the originality of our language. The erosion is subtle but real, and if not addressed, it may eventually alter the very character of our linguistic identity.

Yet all is not lost. Languages survive not through force but through love, usage, and conscious preservation. Urdu has within it a beauty, rhythm, and expressive power that needs no foreign ornament to stand tall. It is a language that carries centuries of poetry, scholarship, and cultural elegance. It is a language that binds our collective memory. But for it to endure in its true essence, we must revive the habits of careful expression, of learning from elders, and of resisting unnecessary linguistic invasions.

We must not be apologetic when speaking Urdu. We must let it flow with the same confidence with which other nations speak their own languages. The world respects those who respect themselves. When we carry Urdu with dignity, it enhances our stature rather than limiting it.

Let us remember that languages are not mere tools of communication—they are vessels of identity. If we allow Urdu to weaken, we weaken a part of ourselves.

The responsibility lies with each of us to nurture the language that has nurtured us. Let us speak it with pride, write it with care, and guard it from being overshadowed by borrowed expressions.

Preservation begins with small choices—choosing Urdu where it belongs, refining its purity, and valuing the legacy carried in every word. In protecting our language, we are not protecting a relic; we are protecting a living spirit that shapes our national soul.

Briefs

CDF given briefing...

FROM PAGE 01
administration in establishing a fully equipped, state-of-the-art healthcare facility. During his address with the officers, the COAS & CDF emphasized upon Pakistan Army's zero-tolerance policy towards any threat to national security, reaffirming the institution's unwavering resolve to confront multifaceted challenges with focus, professionalism, and determination. Reiterating Army's core mission, he noted that the Pakistan Armed Forces remain steadfast in safeguarding the country's sovereignty, territorial integrity and internal stability, while fostering a culture of excellence, discipline, and selfless national service. Earlier, upon his arrival at Lahore Garrison, the COAS & CDF was received by Commander Lahore Corps.

Firm in our resolve to eradicate...

FROM PAGE 01
The Prime Minister highlighted that on the demand of the then Chief Minister of Balochistan, Punjab took a lead to annually divert financial resources from its own share of NFC to Balochistan. He said so far, 175 billion rupees have been provided by the Punjab Government during the last 16 years. The Prime Minister further said that 400 million dollars received from the World Bank are also being spent for the rehabilitation of the flood-affected areas of Balochistan. Talking about counter-terrorism efforts in Balochistan, Shehbaz Sharif lauded the armed forces, law enforcement agencies, and Balochistan police for their sacrifices in the fight against this menace. He said Fitna al-Khawarij gets support from foreign countries. He reaffirmed nation's unflinching resolve in fighting terrorism till its complete elimination. Appreciating Sarfaraz Ahmed Bugti and his cabinet, he said after a long time, there is a government in Balochistan, which is making serious and sincere efforts for the development of the province.

Terrorists using BYC's platform...

FROM PAGE 01
about a terrorist arrested during an operation in Panjgur. According to Goraya, the CTD, police and law enforcement agencies arrested a man, Sajid Ahmad alias Shahwai, who was a resident of Turbat during the operation. He said the man had received a Master's degree in Sociology from the International Islamic University in Islamabad, then worked on contract at Zubaidah Jalal Government College for three years, before teaching at the University of Turbat. The CTD DIG said Sajid had "remained with BYC and was in constant communication with its leadership". "One thing that has surfaced prominently is the role of the BYC. Every man or child who is facilitating or [is involved in] what they call a sharing network or intelligence network [...] they are somehow linked to the BYC," the CTD DIG said.

Trump seeks 50 per cent hike...

FROM PAGE 01
SECURE, regardless of foe," the US president said. Trump said the increase is possible due to revenue from the sweeping tariffs he has imposed on friend and foe alike. The United States is already by far the world's biggest military spender, and a hike to \$1.5 trillion would push Washington's financial outlay on its armed forces even farther ahead of its rivals China and Russia, though it could also spark an arms race with such countries. Trump slams defence companies Trump's announcement on boosting the US military budget comes after Nato allies committed last year to increase their defence spending to five per cent of GDP by 2035 in response to pressure from the US president.

Australia get over the line in Sydney for 4-1 Ashes triumph

Australia seal Ashes 4-1 with gritty five wicket win at Sydney as Carey and Green finish chase, Starc shines, England fight bravely on final day despite injuries and nervous moments

SYDNEY: Australia had a few nervous moments but safely chased down their 160-run victory target before tea on the final day of the fifth Ashes Test on Thursday for a five-wicket victory and a 4-1 series triumph. Seamer Josh Tongue led England's battling rearguard with 3-42 but Alex Carey and Green finished chase, Starc shines, England fight bravely on final day despite injuries and nervous moments



seven balls. "I was trying to act cool, but the whole test match I found it really hard to control my emotions," the 39-year-old admitted. Labuschagne had been dropped on 20 off Tongue when Bethell failed to hold onto the ball despite an acrobatic leap at backward point. He was unable to make the most of his reprieve, however, running himself out for 37 with 39 runs still required for victory.

Carey, who made 16 not out, and Green, who finished unbeaten on 22, nearly reprised Labuschagne's exit with a classic

mix-up after an overthrow but eventually made their ground to secure the victory.

"It was a great game to be involved in with the test match going to the fifth day and have a bit of drama in the end," said Stokes, who exhorted his players from the slips on Thursday. "It's a tough one to take knowing that we can play better than that. But I've got to give full credit to (Australia). They've been just incredible for five test matches." England had resumed on 302-8 but Mitchell Starc struck a major blow to their hopes of setting Australia a testing target when he

had Bethell caught behind for 154. Bethell's superb maiden Test century offered plenty of promise for the future and was essentially the difference between an innings defeat for England and Australia batting again. Starc (3-72) returned to remove Tongue for six to end the innings on 342, the left-arm quick later awarded Player of the Series honours for his tally of 31 wickets over the five Tests. "The body is still holding together and this is a great group to be a part of," the 35-year-old said. "I am a little tired but got the job done." — Agencies

NBA: Deni Avdija leads Blazers to victory over Rockets



PORTLAND: Deni Avdija delivered a stellar performance, leading the Portland Trail Blazers to a 103-102 victory over the Houston Rockets here at Moda Center on Wednesday. Avdija scored a career-high 41 points, showcasing his scoring prowess and playing a pivotal role in securing Portland's fourth consecutive win. His performance came in a dramatic finish, as the Rockets' Tari Eason's potential game-winning tip-in was ruled to have come after the buzzer during a review, giving Portland the win.

Avdija's efforts were complemented by Shaedon Sharpe's 20 points, as the Trail Blazers withstood a strong performance from Kevin Durant, who matched his season-high of 37 points. The Rockets also received contributions from Amen Thompson, who recorded a double-double with 24 points, 12 rebounds, and six assists.

Despite a dominating 57-38 rebounding advantage, including 24 offensive boards, Houston could not secure the victory. Portland held a slim lead for most of the game, with Avdija scoring 18 of his points in the first half, which ended with Portland leading 57-47. With 48.9 seconds remaining, Avdija made a key inside basket to extend the lead to 103-99. However, Durant made two free throws after being fouled, bringing Houston within one. A tense final sequence saw Eason intercept a pass but ultimately miss the game-winner, and Portland secured the victory. — APP

37th ZAB Cricket Tournament held in Larkana, Shah Latif Team win final match

LARKANA: The 37th Shahid Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Cricket Tournament was held at Walid Mohalla Pakistan Cricket Board Ground, in which 126 teams from Sindh and Balochistan participated. The final was played between Larkana's Shah Abdul Latif and Sukkur's Sindh Stars team. Batting first, Shah Latif Larkana scored 228 runs, setting a target of 229 runs for Sukkur Sindh Stars to win the final. In response, the Sindh Stars team could only manage 130 runs and lost by 98 runs. From Shah Latif, Mohsin played a brilliant innings of 83 runs and was awarded Man of the Match, while Raja Bhutto, Zohaib, and Babu took two wickets each. The president of District Association Larkana Cricket Team, Kazim Ali Abbasi, former senator Saifur Ali Abbasi, and Rafi Ali Abbasi presented trophies and cash prizes to the winning team's captain, Wasim Abbasi, and the runner-up team's captain, Lala Tanveer. — APP

Barcelona blitz Athletic Bilbao 5-0 to book place in Super Cup final

Barcelona broke the deadlock in the 22nd minute. A sweeping move from side to side ended with Raphinha finding Bardhaji on the right, whose cutback was met by Lopez before being laid off for Ferran Torres to finish calmly for 1-0

JEDDAH: It did not look like the easiest opening 20 minutes for Barcelona in Jeddah during their encounter with Athletic Bilbao. Yet in a breathtaking 16-minute spell, the Catalans turned uncertainty into complete control, racing into a four-goal lead before the interval. More than 50,000 fans packed the Al-Ittihad Stadium in Jeddah to witness the spectacle, although the likes of Marcus Rashford and Lamine Yamal were rested, allowing opportunities for youngsters like Rooney Bardhaji and Ferran Lopez.

Lopez would emerge as one of the standout performers of the night. While his threat inside the box was evident, it was his creativity that truly shone in front of the Jeddah crowd. Barcelona broke the deadlock in the 22nd minute. A sweeping move from side to side ended with Raphinha finding Bardhaji on the right, whose cutback was met by Lopez before being laid off for Ferran Torres to finish calmly for 1-0

res to finish calmly for 1-0. Just eight minutes later, an exquisite backheel from Pedri released Raphinha down the left flank once again, with his low cross this time finding Lopez to double Barcelona's advantage. Lopez contributed to his third goal of the night minutes later, this time slipping Bardhaji down the right. The Kuwaiti-born winger skipped past Adama Traore before striking at goal, with Unai Simon mishandling the ball as it trickled over the line. The Blaugrana showed no signs of slowing down. Raphinha finally got on the score sheet in emphatic fashion with a belter into the top corner in the 38th minute. To the surprise of many, neither side made any changes at the break. That decision quickly proved costly for Bilbao, as Raphinha struck again early in the second half, once more exploiting space down the flanks to extend the lead to 5-0.

With the contest beyond reach, Athletic head coach Ernesto Valverde rang the changes, making five substitutions to give minutes to his squad. Barcelona, meanwhile, eased off to conserve energy ahead of Sunday's final.

To the delight of the crowd, both Rashford and Yamal were introduced, with Yamal receiving a warm standing ovation upon his entrance in the 72nd minute. The emphatic victory marks Barcelona's second consecutive five-goal display in the Spanish Super Cup, following last year's 5-2 triumph over Real Madrid in the final. The second semi-final takes place on Thursday, as Real Madrid face Atletico Madrid, with the winner set to meet Barcelona in Sunday's final. — DNA

Man City title bid damaged by Brighton draw despite Haaland's 150th goal

The Norway striker's 26th goal in all competitions this term ended his three-game drought but it was hardly his best performances as several chances were squandered

MANCHESTER: Manchester City's Premier League title challenge suffered a potentially fatal blow as Brighton hit back to earn a 1-1 draw on Wednesday. Erling Haaland put City ahead with a first half penalty at the Etihad Stadium, but the striker's 150th goal for the club wasn't enough to earn a vital victory. Hampered by mounting injury problems, City were well below their best and Kaoru Mitoma made them pay with a second half equaliser. Pep Guardiola's second-placed side are five points behind leaders Arsenal, who host champions Liverpool in their game in hand on Thursday. A victory for the Gunners would open up a massive eight-point lead in the title race. City have come back from similar deficits to take the title in the Guardiola era, but on current form they look destined to finish behind Arsenal. After damaging draws against Sunderland and Chelsea, City have gone three games without a victory while Arsenal are on a three-match winning streak.

Even Haaland's 150th goal in 173 matches in all competitions since joining from Borussia Dortmund in 2022 wasn't enough to inspire sloppy City. The Norway striker's 26th goal in all competitions this term ended his three-game drought but it was hardly his best performances as several chances were squandered. City have a lengthy list of absences, with Josko Gvardiol and Ruben

Dias joining John Stones on the sidelines after suffering injuries at the weekend. Omar Marmoush, Rayan Ait-Nouri, Savinio, Oscar Bobb and Mateo Kovacic are also missing through fitness problems and international duty. City are reportedly close to signing Bournemouth winger Antoine Semenyo and have also been linked with Crystal Palace defender Marc Guehi. But before new recruits can arrive to help

ease his woes, Guardiola was forced to hand a debut to teenage centre-back Max Almeyne. Alleyne, 20, partnered Abdulkadir Khusanov at the heart of a makeshift defence that struggled to impress from the moment. Gianluigi Donnarumma nearly gifted Brighton an early lead when he almost let the ball roll into his own net. Moments later, Donnarumma made a fine save to keep out Pascal Gross's header before Ferdi Kadioglu shot straight at the Italian after racing through on goal.

City were labouring, yet they still took the lead in the 41st minute. Jeremy Doku's penalty appeal was initially rejected after his run was halted by Diego Gomez's clear trip, but VAR overturned the decision and Haaland fired home for his latest landmark goal. City midfielder Tijani Reijnders had a shot cleared off the line by Gomez on the stroke of half-time. Bernardo Silva hit the outside of the post the post to double City's advantage soon after the interval. But Guardiola's men lost the lead in sloppy fashion after 60 minutes. Mitoma took possession 20 yards from goal and advanced unhindered by City midfielder Nico Gonzalez, giving him time and space to lash a superb low strike past Donnarumma. Guardiola responded by sending on Rodri for the chastened Gonzalez, but Gomez should have put Brighton ahead when he contrived to miscue Mitoma's pass from virtually on the goal-line. Not only were City creaky at the back, they were profligate in attack as well.

Haaland's header was cleared off the line by Kadioglu before the City star failed to beat Bart Verbruggen from 12 yards.

As if that wasn't bad enough for Guardiola, Rayan Cherki wasted two chances to save the day with a pair of woeful misses in the closing moments. — Agencies

Diplomatic channels active, contacts...

FROM PAGE 01
the Afghan soil. However, he lamented, the neighbouring country remains a strong hold of Fitna al-Khawarij and Fitna al-Hindustan.

Hyderabad, Sialkot join PSL

FROM PAGE 01
The base price for the eighth PSL team was set at Rs1.70 billion after the FKS Group acquired the ownership of the first franchise up for sale for Rs1.75 billion. In the first round, all nine qualified bidders competed fiercely, placing massive bids for the new team. The FKS group owned by Fawad Sarwar emerged as the winner by offering Rs1.75 billion, successfully leading the auction and taking the helm of one of the two new franchises.

Pak, EU relations cemented

FROM PAGE 01
Erasmus+ as a cornerstone of the Pakistan-EU knowledge partnership. He emphasized the need for optimal utilization of all Erasmus+ instruments, particularly International Credit Mobility and Jean Monnet Actions, to further academic excellence, policy dialogue, and people-to-people connectivity. Muhammad Faisal Fayyaz Erasmus+ offers transformative opportunities for our students, faculty, and institutions. He added that by fully leveraging these programs, Pakistan and the EU can advance shared goals in education, research, and informed policymaking, while fostering enduring institutional linkages. The Information Session provided detailed guidance on eligibility, application processes, and best practices, encouraging Pakistani higher education institutions to expand participation and build sustainable partnerships with European counterparts.

PTI takes exception to being...

FROM PAGE 01
"Our stance has always been that there should be no politics on terrorism. In fact, we need a singular stance and narrative on terrorism," he said, adding that the party and its leadership had always condemned terrorism. "To say that the PTI and its government in KP is uncooperative is inappropriate and far from the truth," he said, highlighting that a grand jirga was held on the matter in the province. "Terrorists do not have a religion, nationality or boundaries. They do not differ between men and women. They attack our mosques, Eidgahs and we condemn each and every attack," he said. He said that at this time it was "inappropriate and dangerous" to ask why the PTI was not targeted by terrorists. "We believe that any time someone comes under a terrorist attack, the whole of the country is targeted," he said.

TTAP delegation en route...

FROM PAGE 01
the opposition alliance alleged were stolen from them via rigging and results manipulation. "We have not come here to conquer anyone, abuse or throw stones. We have come to save the constitution, we have come to eradicate oppression," Achakzai said while speaking to the media. "Whoever wants the rule of the Pakistani constitution and peace should be with us," the politician said, adding that the country was heading towards failure. "Relations with neighbours are deteriorating; the government itself knows that it has lost," he noted. "We have given a [protest] call for February 8, and we have started a movement," the TTAP chief said, highlighting that "we are moving forward peacefully and within the constitutional limits".



Briefs

Turkiye ready to help end conflict in Syria's Aleppo

ANKARA: Turkiye is following developments in Syria's Aleppo hour-by-hour and is ready to provide support to end conflict there, Turkish Parliament Speaker Numan Kurtulmus said on Thursday. Fierce fighting in the northern Syrian city between government forces and Kurdish fighters drove thousands of civilians from their homes on Wednesday, with Washington reported to be mediating a de-escalation.—APP

Iran unrest persists, top judge warns protesters

DUBAI: Iran's top judge warned protesters on there would be "no leniency for those who help the enemy against the Islamic Republic," while accusing Israel and the US of pursuing hybrid methods to disrupt the country. The current protests, the biggest wave of dissent in three years, began last month in Tehran's Grand Bazaar by shopkeepers condemning the currency's free fall. Unrest has since spread nationwide amid deepening distress over economic hardships, including rocketing inflation driven by mismanagement and Western sanctions, and curbs on political and social freedoms. "Following announcements by Israel and the US president, there is no excuse for those coming to the streets for riots and unrest," chief justice Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, the head of Iran's judiciary, was quoted as saying by state media. "From now on, there will be no leniency for whoever helps the enemy against the Islamic Republic and the calm of the people," Ejei said. Iranian authorities have not given a death toll for protesters, but have said at least two members of the security services have died and more than a dozen have been injured. Iran's western provinces have witnessed the most violent protests.—APP

Rupee gains 01 paisa against US Dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Thursday appreciated by 01 paisa against the US Dollar in interbank trading and closed at Rs 280.05 compared to the previous day's closing at Rs 280.06. According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs 280.8 and Rs 282.75, respectively. The price of the Euro decreased by Rs 0.15 to close at Rs 327.01 from the previous day's close of Rs 327.16, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese Yen remained unchanged and closed at Rs 1.78, whereas the exchange rate of the British Pound witnessed a decrease of Rs 1.30 and closed at Rs 376.50 compared to the previous day's Rs 377.80. The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham remained stagnant at Rs 76.24, and the Saudi Riyal came down by 01 paisa and closed at Rs 74.68.—APP

Gold prices fall by Rs 600 per tola

ISLAMABAD: Gold prices declined in the local market on Thursday, as the price of 24-karat gold per tola fell by Rs 600 to settle at Rs 466,162, while the price of 10 grams of 24-karat gold dropped by Rs 515 to Rs 399,658, according to the All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association. Likewise, the price of 10 grams of 22-karat gold decreased by Rs 472 to Rs 366,366, whereas silver prices also registered a decrease, with 24-karat silver per tola went down by Rs 236 to stand at Rs 8,125 and 10 grams of silver fell by Rs 203 to Rs 6,965. In the international market, gold prices decreased by \$6 to \$4,438 per ounce, while silver by \$2.36 to \$76.50 per ounce, the association reported.—APP

UN warns Israel of intensifying racial discrimination against Palestinians

The report concludes there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Israeli policies of separation, segregation and subordination are designed to maintain the oppression and domination of Palestinians, and intended to be permanent

NEW YORK CITY: A report by the UN Human Rights Office published on Wednesday details the "asphyxiating impact" of Israeli laws, policies and practices on nearly every aspect of Palestinian life in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. It warns that Israel is violating obligations under international law that require states to prohibit and eradicate racial segregation and apartheid. The report describes systemic discrimination against Palestinians in the territory as a "long-standing concern," but notes that the conditions have sharply deteriorated since at least December 2022. It presents extensive examples showing how the daily lives of Palestinians have become increasingly constrained and insecure. "Israeli authorities treat Israeli settlers and Palestinians residing in the West Bank under two distinct bodies of law and policies, resulting in unequal treatment on a range of critical issues, including movement and access to resources such as land and water," it states. "Palestinians continue to be subjected to large-scale confiscation of land and deprivation of access to resources. This has had the effect of dispossessing them of their lands and homes, alongside other forms of systemic discrimination, including criminal prosecution in military courts

during which their due process and fair trial rights are systematically violated." The report concludes there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Israeli policies of separation, segregation and subordination are designed to maintain the oppression and domination of Palestinians, and intended to be permanent. "Acts committed with the intention to maintain such a policy amount to a violation of Article 3 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which prohibits racial segregation and apartheid," it warns. "Since Oct. 7, 2023, the government of Israel further expanded the use of unlawful force, arbitrary detention and torture, repression of civil society and undue restrictions on media freedoms, severe movement restrictions, settlement expansion and related violations in the occupied West Bank, which has marked an unprecedented deterioration of the human rights situation there." The report adds that this deterioration is compounded by the continuation and escalation of settler violence, which is often carried out with the "acquiescence, support and participation" of Israeli security forces. The system of military justice applied to Palestinians provides little or no human rights

protections, in stark contrast to Israeli civil law, which affords far greater protections to settlers. "The military legal system is a significant tool in controlling Palestinians in the occupied West Bank," according to the report. It documents patterns of "unlawful killings" and other forms of "state and settler violence," citing numerous cases in which lethal force was deliberately used when unwarranted, in a discriminatory manner and with apparent intent to kill. On Jan. 28, 2025, security forces shot 10-year-old Saddam Hussein Rajab in the abdomen. He died from his injuries on Feb. 7. Video footage showed the boy standing empty-handed at the entrance of a building in Tulkarem when he was shot. Israeli forces initially claimed the boy "was messing with the ground" in a suspicious manner, before announcing an investigation. On Feb. 9, 2025, security forces killed 23-year-old Sondos Shalabi, who was eight months pregnant. They said she had been shot because she was "looking suspiciously at the ground" but acknowledged she was unarmed and no explosive devices were found nearby. The UN report adds that "discriminatory movement restrictions" severely undermine the human rights of Palestinians by infringing on the right to work, blocking access

to land, and causing widespread financial hardship. It also notes that roads built exclusively for Israeli settlers, connecting settlements, have resulted in the fragmentation of Palestinian communities. In addition, thousands of Palestinians have been evicted from their homes across the West Bank. The report said this might amount to unlawful transfer, which is a war crime. Palestinians are further deprived of their natural resources. The report describes how Israeli authorities confiscate and demolish Palestinian water infrastructure while diverting flows to settlements. This forces the Palestinian Authority to purchase large quantities of water from an Israeli government company that extracts water from the occupied West Bank. "There is a systematic asphyxiating of the rights of Palestinians in the West Bank," said the UN's human rights chief, Volker Turk. "Whether accessing water, school, rushing to hospital, visiting family or friends, or harvesting olives, every aspect of life for Palestinians in the West Bank is controlled and curtailed by Israel's discriminatory laws, policies and practices. This is a particularly severe form of racial discrimination and segregation that resembles the kind of apartheid system we have seen before. "Every negative trend documented in the report has not only continued but accelerated. And every day this is allowed to continue, the consequences worsen for Palestinians." Impunity for violations remains widespread, the report found, including violence committed by Israeli security forces and settlers. Of more than 1,500 killings of Palestinians recorded between Jan. 1, 2017, and Sep. 30, 2025, Israeli authorities opened just 112 investigations, resulting in only one conviction. Meanwhile thousands of Palestinians remain arbitrarily detained by Israeli authorities, most of them under "administrative detention" without charge or trial. Illegal settlement expansions continue unabated; Israeli authorities and settlers have appropriated tens of thousands of hectares of Palestinian land, largely for settlements and outposts that are deemed illegal under international law. The report cites the recent approval by Israel's Security Cabinet of 19 new settlements, a move that Israeli officials have said is intended to block the possibility of establishing a Palestinian state. "The Israeli authorities must repeal all laws, policies and practices that perpetuate systemic discrimination against Palestinians based on race, religion or ethnic origin," Turk said. He called on Israel to end its unlawful presence in occupied Palestinian territory, dismantle all settlements, evacuate settlers, and respect the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.—Agencies



OTTAWA: High Commissioner Muhammad Saleem receiving the medallion portrait of Quaid-e-Azam from renowned artist Khalil Najmi.

Millions of Indian girls out of school as efforts to keep them enrolled falter

NEW DELHI: Priyanka Sau was sure that after completing secondary school she would enroll in a computer course in her hometown in Uttar Pradesh. But neither the course nor her graduation could materialize as two years ago her father lost his job at a brick kiln and the family moved to Delhi in search of work. The 15-year-old now works as a cleaner in a housing complex, supplementing her parents' income and helping support her three younger sisters. Her marriage arrangement has been finalized, too. "Very soon it will be formalized," she told. "For me, there was no option but to follow my parents to Delhi and start earning to make a living ... I miss my school and dream to enroll in a computer course to get modern skills." Priyanka is one of the 6.57 million Indian children who dropped out from school between 2019 and 2025, according to data presented in parliament in December by Women and Child Development Minister Savitri Thakur. Nearly 3 million of the whole dropout group were adolescent girls, with the highest rates recorded in the most populous states. In Uttar Pradesh, girls accounted for more than half of nearly 100,000 school dropouts in the 2025–26 academic year alone. Dr. Kriti Bharati, founder of Saarthi Trust, which works for child rights and rescues victims of child marriage, said the government data was "alarming" and required immediate intervention. "The education department should go deep into it. They should find out where these thousands of girls who dropped out have gone ... The schoolteachers, when they come to know that some girls or kids have dropped, they should find out why they are dropping out. This is their social responsibility," she said. "A developed society is called developed not because it has better roads or it can send missions to the moon. It has to ensure education for its people, it has to ensure proper care for its poor citizens." The government data showed that social protection systems were failing to adapt to local realities, as dropout rates rise due to pressures such as domestic responsibilities, work, early marriage and poverty. According to Dr. Bharati, the main reasons forcing girls to leave school were child marriage and labor migration, which has increased since the COVID pandemic. "Poor people move from one place to another. After COVID, many things have changed as far as jobs are concerned. People are moving for jobs outside their villages," she said. "The third reason is child labor – these girls become a source of income for their family. They supplement the income." For Dr. Purushottam Praharaj, director of India Child Protection, the main reasons enabling the increase in dropout rates, especially among girls, were systemic: inadequate infrastructure and legal guarantees. The Right to Education Act makes free and compulsory education a fundamental right only for children aged 6 to 14, while access-wise, secondary schools in rural areas are often far, especially in India's poorer, eastern states. "All girls below 18 should be given free and compulsory education and proper infrastructure. If the schools are not located nearby, then hostel facilities should be provided," Dr. Praharaj said. "There is a safety issue and concern among the parents to send their girls to a different location to school ... Residential schools need to be built for these girls so that they can go there. If you can ensure continuous education for them, girls will not get married before 18."—Agencies

Italian firm bullish on China's winter sports market

HARBIN: For Shen Yumei, her first trip to Harbin, capital of northeast China's Heilongjiang Province, for an exhibition was a pleasant surprise, revealing the vibrancy of the local winter sports market. Shen serves as Marketing Director for China of Italy-based winter sports equipment manufacturer TechnoAlpin. The company commands over 60 percent of the global market share in snowmakers and ice resurfacers, and its products are widely used in major international events, including the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games, and the upcoming 2026 tournament in Milan-Cortina. The three-day 2026 Harbin International Ice and Snow Economy Expo opened here on Monday, attracting hundreds of ice-snow equipment enterprises from across the globe. The expo floor featured an array of products, from industrial-grade unmanned snowplows and snowmobiles to carbon fiber skis and outdoor winter apparel. "We hope to expand our market in Heilongjiang through this expo," said Shen. TechnoAlpin entered the Chinese market in 2000 and established its presence in Zhangjiakou City, Hebei Province, in 2018. The Zhangjiakou branch, covering 18,000 square meters, integrates R&D, assembly, logistics and warehousing, and commenced operations in 2020. Shen attributed the company's bullish outlook on China to the vigorous development of winter sports in the country. "Recent international events like Beijing 2022 have fueled an ice-snow boom in China, leading to the construction of more ski slopes and ice rinks in many regions. We will continue to focus our efforts here," she added. Shen explained that the company remains committed to the post-Olympic Chinese market, with plans to establish its fourth global equipment center in China. "In the future, large-scale professional ski resorts and ice rinks in China will require professional equipment and consulting services. The demand for experiencing ice-snow sports through technology like snowmakers and ski simulators continues to grow. These are the market opportunities we aim to tap, potentially using the Chinese market as a base to reach Southeast Asia, Japan and South Korea," she explained.—APP

Chinese FM to visit four African nations

BEIJING: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi will visit Ethiopia, Somalia, Tanzania and Lesotho upon invitation from Jan. 7 to 12, the foreign ministry announced on Wednesday. Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, will attend the launching ceremony of the China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges at the African Union (AU) headquarters, according to the announcement. The year 2026 marks the 70th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between China and Africa. Wang's visit to the four African nations and his attendance at the launching ceremony of the China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges serve to continue the fine tradition of China's foreign minister choosing Africa for the first overseas visit each year over the past 36 years. Mao Ning, a spokesperson for the ministry, said at a press briefing on Wednesday. Ethiopia, Somalia, Tanzania and Lesotho are all China's strategic partners, and the purpose of Wang's visit is to deepen political mutual trust with all parties, she said. The visit is also aimed at promoting the implementation of the outcomes of the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, strengthening mutual learning between China and Africa as two major civilizations, and injecting new impetus into building an all-weather China-Africa community with a shared future for the new era, Mao said.—APP

MoU signed to enhance digital transformation projects in Oman

MUSCAT: The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) today with Future Cities, a subsidiary of Omantel Group. The agreement aims to strengthen cooperation in several advanced technical fields supporting digital transformation projects in the Sultanate of Oman. Under this MoU, the areas of cooperation include cleaning and processing data to ensure high quality and developing solutions based on AI technologies. The MoU was signed by Dr. Khalifa Abdullah Al Barwani, CEO of the NCSI, and Eng. Abdullah Rashid Al Badi, CEO of Future Cities. The CEO of the NCSI emphasized that this MoU is part of the Centre's efforts to strengthen partnerships with national entities in the fields of AI and data quality improvement. He noted that this cooperation will allow the NCSI to leverage innovative solutions to develop and analyze statistical data, thereby enhancing the Centre's ability to provide accurate indicators for decision-makers. On his part, the CEO of Future Cities stated that this MoU represents a major step in expanding the company's role as a technical partner for government institutions. He clarified that the collaboration will utilize the company's capabilities in data cleaning and Internet of Things (IoT) technologies to bolster the national data ecosystem.—APP

Kyrgyzstan commissions 63 agricultural enterprises

BISHKEK: By the end of 2025, as part of the development of Kyrgyzstan's agro-industrial complex, 63 agricultural processing and trade and logistics infrastructure facilities were commissioned across the country. The Ministry of Agriculture reported that these include trade and logistics centers, grain processing plants, fruit and vegetable production facilities, dairy production facilities, meat production facilities, fish production facilities, wool production facilities, vegetable oil production facilities, as well as organic production facilities. The implementation of these projects has created 2,707 jobs, contributing to regional development, increasing employment, and strengthening the production potential of the country's agro-industrial complex. Furthermore, in January–November 2025, the share of food processing enterprises in the republic's total industrial output was 17.4%. According to preliminary estimates, over the first 11 months of 2025, agro-industrial enterprises produced food products worth 94.2 billion soums at current prices. The physical volume index was 127.8%. It is noted that as part of the implementation of the Kyrgyz Republic Development Program through 2030.—APP

Russia slams Western peacekeeping plan for Ukraine

In addition to the unrelenting pummelling of Dnipropetrovsk, Russia pressed on with its ground assault on the region, claiming to have taken another village there

MOSCOW: Russia on Thursday slammed a plan for European peacekeepers to be deployed to Ukraine as "dangerous" and dubbed Kyiv and its allies an "axis of war," dousing hopes the plan could be a step toward ending the almost four-year-war. US President Donald Trump has been pushing the warring sides to strike a deal to halt the conflict, running shuttle diplomacy between Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky and Russia's Vladimir Putin in a bid to get an agreement across the line. An initial 28-point plan which largely adhered to Moscow's demands was criticized by Kyiv and Europe, and now Russia has slammed the attempts to beef-up protections for Ukraine should an elusive deal be reached. Ukraine's allies said they had agreed key security guarantees for Kyiv at a summit in Paris earlier this week, including a peacekeeping force. But in its first comments since the summit, Moscow said the statements were far away from anything the Kremlin could accept to end its assault. "The new militarist declarations of the so-called Coalition of the Willing and the Kyiv regime together form a genuine 'axis of war,'" Russia's foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said in a statement. She called the plans drafted by Kyiv's allies "dangerous" and "destructive. The remarks come as Russian strikes

plunged hundreds of thousands in Ukraine into darkness, leaving families without heat in below-freezing temperatures – attacks that Zelensky said showed Russia was still set on war. European leaders and US envoys announced earlier this week that post-war guarantees for Ukraine would include a US-led monitoring mechanism and a European multinational force to be deployed when the fighting stops. But Moscow has repeatedly warned that it would not accept any NATO members sending peacekeeping troops to Ukraine. "All such units and facilities will be considered legitimate military targets for the Russian Armed Forces," Zakharova said Thursday, repeating a threat previously uttered by Putin. Zelensky also said Thursday that a bilateral agreement between Kyiv and Washington for US security guarantees was "essentially ready for finalization at the highest level with the President of the United States" following talks between envoys in Paris this week. Kyiv says legally-binding assurances that its allies would come to its defense are essential to convince Russia not to re-attack if a ceasefire is reached. But specific details on the guarantees, the European force, and how it would engage have not been made public. Zelensky said earlier this week he was yet to receive an "unequivocal" answer of what they would do if

Russia does attack again after a deal. Zelensky has also said that the most difficult questions in any settlement – territorial control of the eastern Donbas region and the fate of the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant – were still unresolved. Ukraine was meanwhile scrambling to restore heating and water to hundreds of thousands of households after a new barrage targeted energy facilities in its Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhia regions. "This is truly a national level emergency," Borys Filatov, mayor of Dnipropetrovsk's capital Dnipro, said on Telegram. He announced power was "gradually returning to the hospitals" after the blackouts forced them to run on generators. The city authorities also extended school holidays for children. About 600,000 households in the region remained cut off from power in Dnipropetrovsk, Ukrainian energy company DTEK said. In a post on social media, Zelensky said the attacks "clearly don't indicate that Moscow is reconsidering its priorities." In addition to the unrelenting pummelling of Dnipropetrovsk, Russia pressed on with its ground assault on the region, claiming to have taken another village there. It is not one of the five Ukrainian regions that Moscow claims to have annexed.—DNA

Briefs

US says to dictate Venezuela decisions, oil sales

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump's administration said Wednesday it will dictate decisions to Venezuela's interim leaders and control the country's oil sales "indefinitely" after toppling Nicolas Maduro. The United States could effectively run Venezuela and tap into its oil reserves for years, Trump later told the New York Times. The American leader's assertion of US dominance over the oil-rich South American country comes despite its interim leader Delcy Rodriguez saying there is no foreign power governing Caracas. "There is a stain on our relations such as had never occurred in our history," Rodriguez said about the US attack to depose her predecessor.

US special forces snatched president Maduro and his wife on Saturday in a lightning raid and whisked them to New York to face trial on drug and weapons charges, underscoring what Trump has called the "Donroe Doctrine" of US dominance over its backyard. "We obviously have maximum leverage over the interim authorities in Venezuela right now" following the capture operation, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt told a briefing. - APP

Dhaka-Karachi direct flights to resume on January 29

"We are relaunching Dhaka-Karachi route with two weekly flights," says Bangladesh airline manager

NEWS DESK

KARACHI: Bangladesh and Pakistan are to resume direct flights after more than a decade, Dhaka's national airline said on Thursday, as ties warm and regional power balances shift. Bangladesh national airline is scheduled to fly its first Dhaka-Karachi flight on January 29 and will be operated twice weekly, the first regular flights since 2012. "We are relaunching the Dhaka-Karachi route with two weekly flights," airline manager Bosra Islam told AFP on Thursday.

"The resumption of direct flights will significantly improve connectivity between Bangladesh and Pakistan, supporting business travel, tourism, and family reunions," the country's national airline said in a statement. Travellers between Bangladesh and Pakistan must currently use connecting flights through Gulf hubs such as Dubai and Doha. Bangladesh has been in political turmoil since a student-led revolt overthrew Sheikh Hasina in August 2024, ending her autocratic 15-year rule. Relations between Bangladesh and Hasina's old ally India turned frosty after her ouster, while ties with Pakistan have warmed. Cargo ships resumed sailing from Karachi to Bangladesh's key port of Chittagong in November 2024.

'No meeting scheduled between PTI delegation, NA Speaker'

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly Secretariat Thursday clarified that no meeting between any delegation of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and the Speaker of National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq was scheduled for January 8 (Thursday). According to Spokesperson of National Assembly said that Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq is currently not present in Islamabad. The spokesperson urged the media to verify information with the National Assembly Secretariat before publishing any news related to the Speaker. It was further said that the spokesperson of the National Assembly remains available at all times to the media for information regarding the Speaker's official engagements and for confirmation of authentic news. - APP

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia vow to strengthen military coop

Chief of the Air Staff reiterated his unwavering commitment to enhancing existing ties in the realm of military-to-military cooperation through bilateral and multilateral exercises



DNA

RIYADH: Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force, called on HRH Lieutenant General Turki bin Bander bin Abdulaziz, Commander of the Royal Saudi Air Force, and General Fayiad bin Hameed Al-Ruwaili, Chief of the General Staff of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, during his official visit to KSA. On his arrival, the Air Chief was accorded a historic wel-

come, as a smartly turned-out contingent of Royal Saudi Air Force presented him Guard of Honour. During the meetings, bilateral cooperation, regional security dynamics and future defence collaboration were discussed. Both sides expressed satisfaction with the existing cooperation and agreed to further strengthen engagement through training, operational collaboration and exchange of professional expertise. The Defence Agreement between Pakistan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was highlighted as a powerful affirmation of mutual trust, strategic

alignment and enduring brotherly ties. Both sides agreed to broaden the horizon of collaboration by exploring new avenues of defence cooperation. The Air Chief highlighted the historic, time-tested and fraternal relations between Pakistan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, founded on shared religious values, mutual respect and strategic alignment. Chief of the Air Staff reiterated his unwavering commitment to enhancing existing ties in the realm of military-to-military cooperation through bilateral and multilateral exercises. He underscored the profound transformation of PAF's operational prowess, adaptability and combat effectiveness. The Saudi defence leadership praised the robust bond of fraternity between the two brotherly nations and commended the close, enduring cooperation that exists between their respective Air Forces. The Saudi military leadership also praised the professionalism, operational excellence and combat readiness of Pakistan Air Force, while acknowledging its growing indigenous capacity in the aviation and aerospace industry. Acknowledging the growing significance of Multi-Domain Operations in addressing the complexities of modern warfare, the military leadership of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia conveyed strong interest in leveraging Pakistan Air Force's rich operational experience through enhanced joint training and operational collaboration. They also appreciated Pakistan's constructive role and efforts in promoting regional peace, stability and security, while expressing keen interest in further expanding cooperation across diverse areas of mutual interest.

The visit of Chief of the Air Staff to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia underscores the depth and vitality of the enduring strategic partnership between the two countries. It serves as a clear testament to the unwavering commitment of both nations to further consolidate their strategic ties through enhanced cooperation in the defence and aviation sectors.

Pakistan, US resolve to further strengthen bilateral cooperation in security

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and the United States have reaffirmed the commitment to further strengthen their bilateral cooperation across various fields, with special focus on economic and security. The pledge came during a meeting between Pakistan's Ambassador to the U.S., Rizwan Saeed Sheikh, and the Chairman of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee, Congressman Brian Mast, in Washington, according to a press statement issued by the Foreign Office on Thursday. Both sides expressed a shared resolve to enhance the multifaceted partnership, underscoring its importance for mutual and regional stability.

During the meeting, the two sides exchanged New Year greetings and reaffirmed the commitment to work together to further strengthen bilateral relations.

The ambassador thanked Chairman Mast for his leadership, efforts, and consistent support in promoting Pak-US relations. Referring to U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio's commitment to transform bilateral ties into a long-term, sustainable partnership based on economic cooperation, Rizwan Sheikh said 2026 should be declared a year of action. He emphasized the need for a high-level economic dialogue between the two countries to commence at the earliest.

Stressing the importance of initiating a comprehensive and immediate dialogue in the fields of energy, defense, minerals, information technology, and artificial intelligence, the ambassador said Pakistan, with its low-cost and high-quality capabilities, has the potential to meet the growing needs of the American market. Surgical instruments and products manufactured in Pakistan are renowned worldwide for their quality, he said adding that a favourable trade environment and due attention will lead to a guaranteed increase in textile and other Pakistani exports. Furthermore, he informed that the continuous use of footballs manufactured in Sialkot in the last five FIFA World Cup matches is a testament to Pakistan's capabilities in the sports goods sector. Meanwhile, exchanging views on the regional situation, Ambassador Rizwan Saeed pointed out that terrorism emanating from Afghanistan poses serious threats to Pakistan's security situation and regional and international peace. Due to the activities of terrorists taking refuge in Afghanistan, terrorist incidents in Pakistan increased by 40% in 2024 and by a further 25% in 2025, he said and expressed serious concern over the continued illicit and aggressive use of weapons left behind at the time of withdrawal from Afghanistan. The ambassador of Pakistan also invited Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Brian Mast, to visit Pakistan, saying that this visit will further strengthen parliamentary and public ties.

Naqvi Praises China's Fast Track Immigration System

ISLAMABAD: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi visited the Passport Bureau of the Beijing Municipal Public Security Department, where he was welcomed by Director General Sun Yuhua upon arrival on Thursday. During the visit, Minister Naqvi inspected various sections of the Entry-Exit Administration Bureau and reviewed China's passport production and immigration management systems. Officials briefed him in detail on the country's immigration policies and the complete process—from passport application to printing.

He was also informed about procedures concerning the arrival, stay, and departure of foreign nationals in China. The bureau briefed the minister on its "one-window" facilitation system, which ensures swift passport and immigration processing. Minister Naqvi lauded the operational efficiency of China's Entry-Exit Administration, describing its speed and effectiveness as "commendable." He noted that Pakistan is also modernizing its passport and immigration systems to make them faster and foolproof. He added that new security features would soon be introduced in Pakistani passports to curb forgery, and that Pakistan's modernized entry-exit control system has been developed along the lines of the Beijing model. Officials briefed the minister that passports in China are delivered to applicants within 24 hours of online submission. The bureau operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week to facilitate citizens. Multilingual guidance systems have simplified complex documentation procedures for foreign nationals, while digital tracking and real-time updates keep applicants informed of their application status. Federal Interior Secretary Khurram Agha, DG National Cyber Crimes Investigation Agency Syed Khurram Ali, IG Islamabad Police Ali Nasir Rizvi, and Islamabad Chief Commissioner Muhammad Ali Randhawa were also present on the occasion. - APP

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Bangladesh air chief calls on COAS, discusses regional security

DNA



RAWALPINDI: Air Chief Marshal Hasan Mahmood Khan, Chief of Air Staff, Bangladesh Air Force, called on Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), HJ, COAS & CDF, at General Headquarters (GHQ), Rawalpindi. During the meeting, matters of mutual interest, regional security dynamics and avenues for enhancing bilateral defence and military cooperation were discussed. Both sides underscored the importance of strengthening professional collaboration, training exchanges and defence ties between the Armed Forces of Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The visiting dignitary lauded the professionalism of Pakistan Armed Forces and appreciated their contributions towards regional peace and stability. The COAS & CDF reiterated Pakistan's commitment to fostering enduring defence relations with Bangladesh. The meeting concluded reflecting the longstanding and strong bonds between the two brotherly countries.

Govt to fully 'deregulate sugar sector by June 2026'

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has pledged to the International Monetary Fund that it will completely liberalise its sugar industry by the end of June 2026, bringing an end to long-standing state oversight of pricing, output, and trade. The move aims to hand the entire sugar economy, from farms to mills and markets, over to market forces, similar to recent steps taken in the wheat sector. Under the plan, the government will abolish price controls on sugar and sugarcane, remove restrictions on setting up new sugar mills and lift limits on imports and exports. A long-standing ban on issuing licences for new sugar mills will also be withdrawn, opening the sector to fresh investment. Officials said zoning restrictions on sugarcane cultivation will be removed, giving farmers complete freedom to grow cane wherever they choose. The government will also end controls on how sugarcane is used or sold. Farmers will be free to sell their crop to any mill of their choice or use it for making jaggery (Gur).

US embassy warns law violation can cost student visas

DNA

WASHINGTON: The US embassy in India warned on Thursday that arrests or violations of US laws can lead to student visa revocation, deportation and future ineligibility for US visas. In a post on X, the embassy's account @USAndIndia said: "Breaking US laws can have serious consequences for your student visa." "If you are arrested or violate any laws, your visa may be revoked, you may be deported, and you could be ineligible for future US visas. Follow the rules and don't jeopardise your travel. A US visa is a privilege, not a right," it added. The warning follows other recent messaging by the US embassy in New Delhi on visa compliance. In December, the embassy said it would deny tourist visa applications if consular officers believe the trip is primarily aimed at giving birth in the United States to secure US citizenship for a child.

Aurangzeb, Visa Leaders Discuss Digital Payments Inclusion

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb on Thursday held a meeting with Visa delegation led by Tareq Mahmood, Regional President for Central Europe, Middle East and Africa (CEMEA) and discussed advancing digital payments, financial inclusion, and ongoing economic reforms.

The minister welcomed the delegation and appreciated Visa's continued engagement with Pakistan's financial sector. The discussion focused on Pakistan's improving macroeconomic indicators, ongoing stabilization efforts, and the government's priorities for achieving sustainable and inclusive economic growth, said a news release. Aurangzeb briefed the delegation on progress made under IMF-supported program, external validation from international credit rating agencies, and the government's reform agenda covering taxation, energy, state-owned enterprises, public debt management, and privatization, including recent steps taken to accelerate the privatization process. Both sides exchanged views on the acceleration of Pakistan's digital transformation, with particular emphasis on digital infrastructure, payment systems, and the digitization of government payments, it added. Aurangzeb highlighted that digitalization is being led at the highest level by the Prime Minister to ensure coordinated, cross-government implementation. He outlined ongoing initiatives including the establishment of the Pakistan Digital Authority, reforms in payment rails under the State Bank of Pakistan, and efforts to digitize government receipts and expenditures to enhance transparency, efficiency, and service delivery. - Agencies

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