



Islamabad POST

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Certain forces working against Sindh rights

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Briefs**Shehzad, Qatar Amir discuss Middle East**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehzad Sharif received a telephone call from His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Amir of the State of Qatar, this evening. During their warm and cordial conversation, the two leaders expressed satisfaction at the current trajectory of bilateral relations between Pakistan and Qatar and reaffirmed their shared resolve to further strengthen these time-tested fraternal bonds. Recent developments in the Middle East were also discussed. The Prime Minister appreciated Qatar's constructive and proactive role in promoting peace, dialogue, and mediation across the region, and acknowledged its meaningful efforts to defuse tensions through diplomatic solutions. He assured the Qatari leadership that Pakistan would also continue to play a positive role in maintaining regional peace and stability. Both leaders agreed to remain in close contact in the days ahead.

Certain forces trying to undermine Sindh rights

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on Wednesday said that certain forces were attempting to undermine Sindh's rights and seize its resources under the pretext of poor governance. Addressing a ceremony held in connection with the inauguration of a new campus of NED University in Tharparkar, Bilawal said that a campaign is being run to portray the provincial government as inactive. He warned that certain forces were using this false narrative to justify seizing Sindh's resources and to roll back powers granted under the 18th Constitutional Amendment.

"It is being said that the PPP has done nothing and that powers should be handed over to Islamabad," said Bilawal. Referring to the establishment of the NED University campus in Tharparkar, Bilawal said that his party loves the people of Sindh and has brought about a major change in the district.

Qatar says taking steps to avoid any eventuality

NEWS DESK

DOHA: Qatar said on Wednesday precautionary measures had been taken at the US-run Al Udeid Air Base, including the departure of some personnel, because of rising regional tensions, according to its International Media Office. The office said the steps were part of broader efforts to safeguard the security of citizens and residents and to protect critical infrastructure and military facilities, adding that any further developments would be announced through official channels. The development came as the US-based Wall Street Journal and CBS reported that the American military was evacuating some personnel from the air base as a precaution.

Trump family owns business **Pak signs accord on dollar-linked stablecoin**

PVARA says MoU would enable "dialogue and technical understanding around emerging digital payment architectures"

CENTRELINE REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan said on Wednesday it had signed an agreement with a firm connected to World Liberty Financial, the main crypto business of US President Donald Trump's family, to explore using World Liberty's stablecoin for cross-border payments. The Pakistan Virtual Asset Regulatory Authority (PVARA) said in a statement that a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with SC Financial Technologies, a little-known company it described as an "affiliated entity" of World Liberty, would enable "dialogue and technical understanding around emerging digital payment architectures". The announcement of the memorandum came during a visit to Pakistan by Zach Witkoff, son of US special envoy Steve Witkoff and co-founder and chief executive of World Liberty. Witkoff also met senior Pakistani stakeholders to discuss how countries are approaching secure, compliant, and transparent digital payment infrastructure, including innovations in cross-border settlement and foreign exchange processes.

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Relations with CARs Uzbekistan, Kazakh Presidents to visit Pakistan next month

The upcoming visits are being viewed as a significant diplomatic development, as Pakistan enjoys cordial relations with both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and has long sought to deepen its engagement with Central Asia

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan and Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of Kazakhstan are expected to visit Pakistan in February 2026, with Pakistani sources confirming that preparations are already underway to receive both leaders. The upcoming visits are being viewed as a significant diplomatic development, as Pakistan enjoys cordial relations with both

Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and has long sought to deepen its engagement with Central Asia. Officials in Islamabad believe the visits will provide an opportunity to strengthen cooperation in areas such as trade, energy, connectivity, and cultural exchange, while also reinforcing Pakistan's role as a bridge between South Asia and Central Asia.

The visit of the two Central Asian presidents is expected to highlight the importance of trilateral cooperation and regional stability, with discussions likely to focus on expanding economic corridors, enhancing transport links, and promoting peace and prosperity across the region.

Pakistani authorities are optimistic that the visits will cement long-term ties and open new avenues of collaboration, underscoring the strategic importance of Pakistan's partnership with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan at a time when regional connectivity and economic integration are becoming increasingly vital.

Gilani emphasises faster Italy visa processing

The acting president said that an MoU between Pakistan and Italy was already in process to increase the number of skilled workers under the labour migration programme

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Acting President Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani on Wednesday met Italian Ambassador Marilina Armellin here, wherein he emphasised the need for faster visa processing for Pakistanis travelling to Italy and looked forward to an increased quota of skilled workers. The acting president said that an MoU between Pakistan and Italy was already in process to increase the number of skilled workers under the labour migration programme. The meeting focused on further strengthening Pakistan-Italy relations and expanding cooperation in key areas. Acting President Gilani said that Pakistan and Italy enjoyed over 75 years of diplomatic relations, rooted in a long-standing friendship and cooperation at important international fora. He expressed appreciation for Italy's support in multilateral platforms and thanked the Italian government for hosting more

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehzad Sharif, Deputy Prime Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Defence Forces, SAPM Syed Tariq Fatemi and Chairman Pakistan Virtual Assets Regulatory Authority Bilal Bin Saqib witnessing the signing ceremony. — DNA

Pakistan appoints envoys

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has announced a series of postings and transfers among senior diplomats. Imran Ahmad Siddiqi has been designated as Pakistan's Ambassador to Kabul, while Ubaid Nizamani will take charge in Germany. Salman Sharif has been posted to Italy, and CP Usman Tipu has been proposed for the London mission. Hasmain Yousaf is set to assume responsibilities in Cuba.

In the headquarters, Ambassador Ayesha Ali has taken over as Additional Secretary for Europe, Sajid Karim has been appointed Director General South Asia, and Bilal Chaudhry will serve as Director General China. These appointments reflect Islamabad's efforts to strengthen its diplomatic presence

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Report in 14 days Govt to formulate new policy to address visa hurdles

Federal Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar to lead six-member committee; panel to submit report to cabinet in 14 days

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Amid directives for strict screening of passengers coupled with prevailing visa hurdles, the federal government has decided to formulate a new policy to address the existing issues and difficulties faced in obtaining a visa. For this purpose, the federal cabinet has formed a cabinet committee on the visa clearance regime. Federal Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar has been appointed as the head of the six-member committee. The committee will prepare recommendations to make the visa process easy, transparent and secure. It will submit its report to the federal cabinet within 14 days.

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Pak dismisses Indian NSA's remarks as 'unsurprising'

"Such rhetoric is hardly surprising coming from camouflaged hate-mongers," says FO Spokesperson Andrabi

FIAZ CHAUDHRY

ISLAMABAD: Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Wednesday dismissed the recent remarks by India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, saying the rhetoric reflected New Delhi's hate-mongering driven by "imagined historical vendettas"

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Minister inaugurates E-Transfer policy system

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Elementary and Secondary Education, Arshad Ayub Khan Wednesday formally inaugurated the E-Transfer Policy System. The ceremony was attended by Secretary Elementary and Secondary Education Muhammad Khalid, Special Secretary Elementary and Secondary Education Masood Ahmed, Chief Planning Education Officer Zainullah and other officials. Speaking on the occasion, the provincial minister said that the provincial government has taken a historic step by successfully introducing the E-Transfer Policy System across the province ensuring teachers' preferences and merit-based transfers. He stated that although the e-transfer policy process had been initiated twice in the past adding that shortcomings have now been fully addressed. The minister expressed confidence that the e-transfer system will continue successfully in the province. He told that further improvements will be made to promote the education sector more effectively.—APP

Nutrition stabilization centre opened at Swabi

PESHAWAR: With the collaboration of the Benazir Income Support Programme and the World Health Organization, a Nutrition Stabilization Center was inaugurated at Bacha Khan Medical Complex, Swabi. Chairperson BISP, Senator Rubina Khalid, attended the ceremony as the chief guest and officially inaugurated the center. Provincial Minister for Health Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Khaliqu-Rahman, and WHO representative Dr. Luo Dapeng were also present on the occasion. While speaking to the media, Chairperson Benazir Income Support Programme Senator Rubina Khalid said that BISP's Nashonuma Programme is a comprehensive and effective initiative for promoting the health and nutrition of mothers and children. She explained that under this programme, quality health and nutrition-related services are provided to mothers and children from birth up to the age of two years, because the first two years of a child's life are extremely important and decisive for physical, mental, and cognitive development.—APP

Gas suffocation claims another life in Abbottabad

ABBOTTABAD: A 73-year-old man lost his life due to gas suffocation after gas accumulated inside a room of a house near Narian Iqbal Plaza, raising serious concerns over repeated fatal incidents linked to gas leakage in the city. According to Rescue 1122 Abbottabad, the Rescue Control Room received information about the incident and immediately dispatched a medical team to the site. However, Muhammad Ramzan, 73, had already succumbed to gas suffocation by the time the rescuers arrived. The rescue medical team shifted the body to Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Hospital for further legal formalities.—APP

ICCI hosts German envoy, discuss bilateral coop

German Ambassador, ICCI President agree to act as bridge between German investors, Pakistani enterprises

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Pakistan, Ina Lepel accompanied by Ms. Janine Rohwer, Counsellor Political and Economic Affairs and Climate Change visited the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) and held an interactive session with the business community of Islamabad, reaffirming Germany's strong commitment to further strengthening bilateral economic relations with Pakistan. Addressing the gathering, Ambassador Ina Lepel reiterated Germany's readiness to enhance cooperation with Pakistan in key areas including climate change, health and social protection, private sector development, and the upgradation of vocational and technical education institutions. She emphasized that these collaborative efforts would contribute significantly to sustainable economic growth and deeper economic ties between the two countries. The Ambassador noted that vast untapped potential exists for cooperation between Pakistan and Germany and expressed her keen interest in exploring new avenues of collaboration in close coordination with Pakistan's business community. Highlighting the critical role of the private sector, she stressed that businesses from both countries can play a pivotal role in expanding trade and investment relations. She assured the business community of the German Embassy's full support, particularly in strengthening business-to-business (B2B) linkages and identifying promising sectors for cooperation. Ambassador Lepel also acknowledged the importance of trade fairs and exhibitions as effective tools for promoting trade, investment, and mutual understanding between nations. She appreciated ICCI's proactive initiatives, especially its efforts to support women-led enter-



prises and promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Earlier, in his welcome address, President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Sardar Tahir Mahmood highlighted that Pakistan-Germany relations are deeply rooted in mutual respect and long-standing cooperation across diplomatic, economic, and cultural domains. He noted that Germany is one of the largest economies in the European Union and a key economic partner for Pakistan, particularly in sectors such as machinery, engineering, automotive, and chemicals. He further pointed out that Pakistan's exports to Germany—especially textiles, leather goods, sports goods, footwear, and medical instruments reflect strong complementarities between the two markets.

The ICCI President added that the Chamber represents a vibrant and diverse business community comprising SMEs, exporters, startups, and industrial stakeholders. He

expressed firm belief that enhanced engagement between German and Pakistani businesses could unlock new opportunities for trade expansion, technology transfer, and investment cooperation. Reaffirming ICCI's commitment, he stated that the Chamber stands ready to act as a bridge between German investors and Pakistani enterprises to facilitate meaningful and mutually beneficial collaboration.

Speaking on the occasion, Chairman ICCI Committee on Diplomatic Affairs, Zafar Bakhtawari, assured the Ambassador of ICCI's full support to the German Embassy in promoting bilateral trade and investment. He underlined the need for direct flights between Pakistan and Germany to enhance people-to-people and business-to-business linkages. He also proposed convening a grand session on Pakistan-Germany multilateral relations at the ICCI auditorium.

Two dead, one critically injured as landslide strikes Gumbat area

KOHAT: A tragic landslide on Wednesday struck the mountainous Village, Qamar in Tehsil, Gumbat leaving two persons dead and one critically injured, the Rescue 1122 officials said. The incident occurred when a large section of a hillside collapsed, burying seven individuals under the debris, they added. The Rescue 1122 teams swiftly launched an emergency operation and managed to retrieve four victims from the rubble. "Two individuals are pronounced dead on the spot, while another sustains serious injuries and has been shifted to a nearby medical facility," they confirmed. The efforts were underway to locate and recover the remaining three individuals feared trapped beneath the landslide, they said, adding the authorities had cordoned off the area and urged the residents to avoid the site due to unstable terrain. The district administration has initiated an inquiry into the cause of the landslide and is assessing potential risks in surrounding areas to prevent further incidents.

Rector Comsats offers faculty development scholarships

ISLAMABAD: Prof. Dr. Raheel Qamar, Rector, COMSATS University Islamabad (CUI), is part of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan's delegation of Vice Chancellors participating in SARCHE 2026 – the South Asian Regional Conference on Higher Education, being held in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The conference has brought together over 30 international delegates, including senior representatives from Malaysia, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the United Kingdom and several other countries, as well as senior officials from the World Bank, to deliberate on the current state of higher education in the region and to chart future pathways with an emphasis on regional cooperation. On the sidelines of the conference, Prof. Dr. Raheel Qamar held separate meetings with Prof. Md. Shahinul Alam, Vice Chancellor, Bangladesh Medical University (BMU), and Prof. Dr. Saleh-Hasan-Naqib, Vice Chancellor, University of Rajshahi. The meetings focused on enhancing regional collaboration in research, strengthen-

ing academic partnerships, and promoting faculty and student exchanges between leading institutions of Pakistan and Bangladesh. During these interactions, Prof. Qamar extended COMSATS University Islamabad's standing offer of ten postgraduate scholarships per university for faculty members of both Bangladesh Medical University and the University of Rajshahi. It was also agreed that CUI's commercialized biomedical products, KytoStat and KytoCraft, will be provided to Bangladeshi Medical University for testing and evaluation in the Bangladeshi environment. This collaboration is expected to contribute to improved healthcare outcomes while delivering meaningful socio-economic benefits as a goodwill initiative from Pakistan. The discussions further emphasized new models of research collaboration, particularly the use of Artificial Intelligence to map research gaps, optimize resource utilization, and jointly address region-specific socio-economic and healthcare challenges. Both sides expressed strong interest in developing

Delimitation of Lalamusa proposed

JAMIL TAHIR

LALAMUSA: The district administration has formally unveiled a new proposed delimitation of the Lalamusa Municipal Committee, signifying a substantive reconfiguration of the city's municipal boundaries. The revised delimitation has been formulated on the basis of mauzas, replacing the previously employed census block-wise framework. Under this newly proposed

arrangement, several peripheral villages that have, in practical terms, already become part of Lalamusa's urban continuum have now been incorporated within the municipal limits. As per the proposal, the Lalamusa Municipal Committee will comprise a total of eight mauzas, namely Budho Kallas, Kairi, Dhamra, Old Lalamusa, Qazi Karan Shah, Syeda Gol, Thikriyan, and Verowal. In effect, all land falling within the jurisdiction of these mauzas, as reflected

in the official revenue record, will be deemed part of the Municipal Committee of Lalamusa upon final approval of the delimitation. The district administration has duly published the proposed delimitation for public scrutiny and has invited objections and suggestions from stakeholders within the prescribed timeframe. Following the completion of this consultative process, the delimitation will be accorded final approval and notified accordingly.

Special awards ceremony for KP journalists to be held

OUR CORRESPONDENT

QUETTA: The Balochistan International Think Tank will host a special awards ceremony for journalists from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at Governor House, Peshawar, on January 21, 2026. Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, will be the chief guest and will distribute the awards.

In a statement, Owais Jadir, Chairman of the Balochistan International Think Tank,

said that the ceremony—organized jointly by the Balochistan International Think Tank and Friends of University Society Pakistan with support from Peshawar Press Club—will honour 17 outstanding journalists from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for their exceptional work in the field. The journalists will be presented with awards named after Quaid-e-Azam, Nelson Mandela, Allama Iqbal, Nasir Usmani, and BB Shaheed. He noted that the awards are part of the

Heroes of Earth Chapter Pakistan International Civil Awards. KP journalists continue to perform their duties under extremely challenging and dangerous conditions, and their efforts deserve recognition at every level. Jadir emphasized that federal and provincial governments should actively support journalists in the province to address issues such as security and economic challenges, and to ensure that journalists can continue their work with dignity.



Islamabad: High Commissioner of Australia Timothy Kane called on Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq at Parliament House.

CM Balochistan, SAPM discuss coop for SMEs uplift

He assured that, with the support of the federal government, Balochistan will extend full cooperation for SME development in all sectors

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Industries and Production Haroon Akhtar Khan on Wednesday held an important meeting with Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti and discussed enhanced cooperation between the federal and provincial governments for the promotion and development of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

Welcoming the Chief Minister to the Ministry of Industries and Production, Haroon Akhtar emphasized that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's vision is centered on empowering SMEs and women entrepreneurs as key drivers of inclusive and sustainable economic growth, said a news release. He noted that, in line with the prime minister's directives, all provinces must work together to strengthen Pakistan's micro, small, and

medium enterprise sector. The SAPM highlighted that provinces play a crucial role in SME development, adding that Balochistan possesses immense potential, abundant opportunities, and a hardworking workforce capable of contributing significantly to the national economy. He announced the establishment of the SME Task Force with the Government of Balochistan to ensure coordinated efforts and effective implementation of SME-related initiatives. The special assistant further said that the task force will focus on agriculture-based SMEs, livestock development, youth empowerment, and the promotion of women-led businesses, which form an integral part of the broader SME development strategy. Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti reaffirmed that the Government of Balochistan is fully committed to the promotion of SMEs across the

province. He expressed the desire that the people of the Balochistan expand their businesses and compete effectively in the market. He assured that, with the support of the federal government, Balochistan will extend full cooperation for SME development in all sectors. The chief minister noted that the growth of SMEs in Balochistan will strengthen both the regional and national economy, adding that Balochistan has an important role to play in Pakistan's SME landscape and that local entrepreneurs will be fully encouraged and supported. Haroon Akhtar also appreciated the efforts and commitment of the chief minister toward the promotion of SMEs in Balochistan, reiterating the federal government's resolve to work closely with the province to translate policy into tangible economic outcomes.—APP

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

JANUARY

Jan 01 / CUBA Revolution Day

Jan 01 / Palestine Palestine Revolution Day

Jan 01 / Sudan National Day

Jan 04 / Myanmar Independence Day

Jan 06 / Iraq Armed Forces Day

Jan 12 / Tanzania Armed Forces Day

Jan 14 / Uzbekistan Armed Forces Day

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



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 Bomb Disposal.....15
 Fire Services Rawalpindi/Islamabad.....1122 & 16
 Emergency Ambulance.....1122 & Rescue Services.....4451122
 Motorway Police.....9266044
 Motorway Police.....9270601-20
 Women Police Stations Islamabad.....9222596
 Rawalpindi.....9270601-20



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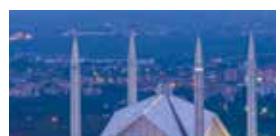
Hospitals

CMH.....5611111
 MH.....561116
 Cantt Hospital.....9270907-11
 DHQ.....5556311-4
 RGH.....9290301-7
 Holy Family.....9290322-7
 PIMS.....9261170-79
 Polyclinic.....9218300-09
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Departments

CDA.....9221334-43
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 TMA.....5770886
 Cantonment Board 9270151-3



Islamabad Metropolitan

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



Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480



RCCI, Uzbekistan explore joint ventures, trade expansion

President RCCI, Usman Shaukat, recalled and briefed the Deputy Minister about RCCI's recent Business Opportunity Conference held in Tashkent in November, which marked an important step toward deepening economic engagement between the two countries

DNA

RAWALPINDI: A meeting and interactive session was held between the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce & Industry (RCCI) and Mr. Shohrukh Gulamov, Deputy Minister of Investment, Industry and Trade of the Republic of Uzbekistan, in Islamabad aimed at strengthening bilateral economic cooperation and exploring new avenues of trade and investment. President RCCI, Mr. Usman Shaukat, along with Senior Vice President Mr. Khalid Farooq Qazi, participated in the meeting. Former RCCI President Dr. Shumail Daud was also present on the occasion. During the interaction, both sides discussed matters related to close cooperation between Pakistan and Uzbekistan, with particular emphasis on the scope of joint ventures, enhancement of trade and investment ties, and collaboration in key sectors, including the pharmaceutical industry. President RCCI, Usman Shaukat, recalled and briefed the Deputy Minister about RCCI's recent Business Opportunity Conference held in Tashkent in November, which marked an important step toward deepening economic engagement between the two countries. He highlighted the subsequent meetings with Uzbek Chambers of Commerce, ministerial-level engagements, and the visit to the Export Pharmaceutical Park, which opened

new prospects for collaboration, especially in the pharma sector. Mr. Usman Shaukat emphasized that RCCI remains committed to facilitating B2B linkages, encouraging investment partnerships, and translating diplomatic goodwill into tangible economic outcomes. He noted that sustained inter-

action between chambers and government institutions would play a vital role in unlocking the full potential of bilateral trade. Mr. Shohrukh Gulamov appreciated RCCI's proactive role in promoting Pakistan-Uzbekistan economic relations and expressed interest in further strengthening coopera-

tion through joint ventures, trade facilitation, and sector-specific collaboration. The meeting concluded with a shared resolve to continue engagements and work closely to promote mutually beneficial trade and investment opportunities between Pakistan and Uzbekistan.

Bakhtawari provides financial assistance to gas blast victims

ISLAMABAD: Sharing the grief of the families affected by the tragic gas cylinder explosion in G-7, the Clean and Green Islamabad Movement expressed heartfelt sympathy, condolences, and practical support. The movement stood by the affected families in this difficult time, offered moral support, and provided relief cheques, stating that while financial assistance can never compensate for the loss of precious lives, it is a small gesture of solidarity and practical support to help the affected households cope with this painful tragedy. In this regard, Chairman of the Clean and Green Islamabad Movement, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, visited the affected house in G-7 Islamabad. He extended heartfelt condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in the tragic incident, expressed solidarity

with the bereaved families, and offered special prayers for the speedy recovery of the injured. Speaking on the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said that the incident was extremely heartbreaking and had plunged not only the affected families but the entire city into deep sorrow. He stated that the untimely demise of groom Sherry Hanif, bride Mehak, Joraa Bibi, Sanbal, Naeem, and Waseem was an irreparable loss that could not be expressed in words. While talking to the bereaved families, he said that they were not alone in this time of grief and prayed that Almighty Allah grant them patience and strength. He also prayed for the early recovery of those injured in the incident, including Kashif, Salma, Mukhtaran Bibi, Aamir, Farzana, Maryam, Rita, Aryan, Ejaz, Aina, and the minor daughter

of Sanbal, and said that the entire nation was praying for their health and well-being. Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari further provided relief cheques to the affected families and emphasized that strict implementation of safety measures, proper usage of gas cylinders, and quality checks were essential to prevent such tragic incidents in the future so that no other family would have to endure such a painful loss. On the occasion, ICCI Executive Members Roheel Anwar Butt and Malik Mohsin Khalid, former ICCI Vice Presidents Nisar Mirza and Nasir Qureshi were also present. The delegation expressed deep sorrow and condolences to the affected families. Former Federal Minister J. Salik was also present at the site and shared his condolences with the bereaved families.—APP

Pakistani agriculture graduates complete training

ISLAMABAD: A batch of 100 Pakistani agricultural graduates under Batch II of the Prime Minister's Initiative for Capacity Building of 1,000 Agricultural Graduates has formally completed a six-month specialized training program in crop breeding and genomics in China. A certificate-awarding ceremony was held at the Southwest University of Science and Technology in Mianyang, Sichuan Province, according to Gwadar Pro. The graduating cohort, part of Batch II of the flagship program, arrived in China in July 2025 to undergo advanced, hands-on training aimed at strengthening Pakistan's agricultural research and innovation capacity. The program focused on modern crop improvement technologies and climate-smart agricultural practices. The six-month training covered a wide range of advanced subjects, including modern agricultural practices, precision agriculture tools and sensors,

genome-editing techniques such as CRISPR-Cas9, advanced breeding and molecular biotechnology, smart agriculture and automation, as well as big data and artificial intelligence applications in crop improvement. One of the participants, Muhammad Hamid Khan, described the experience as transformative. "This journey has been a deep dive into the world of crop breeding and genomics. It has not only enhanced my technical expertise but also inspired me to contribute meaningfully to Pakistan's food security," he wrote, expressing gratitude to his mentors and the host university. Khalil Hashmi, Ambassador of Pakistan to China, in his remarks at the ceremony congratulated the agri professionals, appreciated the role played by SWUST, and advised the "graduates to deploy the skill set acquired towards enhancing agricultural productivity in Pakistan". He also highlighted the vital significance of

agriculture for Pakistan's economy and the need for our two countries to build on our complementarities to jointly foster food security.

The Prime Minister's Initiative for Capacity Building of 1,000 Agricultural Graduates is being implemented in multiple batches across various Chinese universities and institutions.

While the Batch II cohort completed its training at SWUST, other participants

have completed or are currently completing their programs at institutions in different provinces across China.

The initiative is jointly implemented by Pakistan's Ministry of National Food Security and Research, the Higher Education Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Pakistan's Embassy in Beijing, in collaboration with Chinese partner institutions.

It aims to modernize Pakistan's agriculture sector through technology transfer, research exposure, and human resource development.—APP

1 day left as over 150,000 Vehicles get M-Tag

DNA

ISLAMABAD: With only one day remaining before the January 15 deadline, authorities said more than 150,000 vehicles have been issued M-Tags from 16 centers across Islamabad, while 2,965 vehicles were tagged in the last 24 hours. The campaign for mandatory M-Tag installation on vehicles is continuing in the capital city as the deadline set by the interior minister enters its final day. Officials have urged vehicle owners to complete the process by January 15 to avoid action after the cut-off date. According to the Islamabad administration, a total of more than 150,000 vehicles have been issued M-Tags so far through 16 designated centers operating across the city. The pace of registrations remained steady over the past day, with 2,965 vehicles receiving M-Tags during the last 24 hours. Deputy Commissioner Islamabad confirmed that the grace period for M-Tag installation will end on January 15. He said that

no further extension is under consideration and that enforcement will begin immediately after the deadline expires. He stated that from January 16 onwards, action will be taken against vehicles entering or moving within the city without a valid M-Tag. The enforcement drive will focus on ensuring compliance with the policy, which has been introduced to manage vehicle movement and improve monitoring at entry and exit points. To support enforcement, the administration has installed M-Tag readers at 12 entry points and checkpoints across Islamabad. These readers will identify vehicles without M-Tags as they enter the city. Irfan Memon, said the system is ready and will be fully operational once the deadline passes. Officials explained that vehicles without M-Tags will be stopped at checkpoints, and further steps will be taken under the relevant rules. They added that the aim is to ensure that all vehicles moving in the capital are properly registered under the system. The district administration has once again appealed to citizens to complete

the process before the deadline. The deputy commissioner requested vehicle owners to visit the nearest M-Tag center and get their vehicles tagged by January 15 to avoid inconvenience. Authorities said the required documents are minimal and the process has been kept simple to facilitate the public. Additional staff has been deployed at several centers to manage the expected rush on the final day. Residents have been advised not to wait until the last hours, as higher turnout could lead to delays. Officials said that completing registration on time will help ensure smooth travel within the city after enforcement begins. The administration reiterated that the campaign is part of a wider effort to regulate traffic flow and maintain records of vehicles entering Islamabad. Citizens were urged to cooperate with the authorities and comply with the deadline to prevent disruption to their daily travel. With one day remaining, officials stressed that January 15 is the final date for M-Tag installation, and action against non-compliant vehicles will start without delay after the deadline.

Nation honours Arfa Karim Randhawa

ISLAMABAD: The nation paid tribute to Arfa Karim Randhawa, the world's youngest Microsoft Certified Professional, as her 14th death anniversary was observed today (Wednesday), remembering her remarkable achievements and lasting contribution to the field of information technology. Arfa Karim Randhawa was born on February 2, 1995, in a small village near Faisalabad. She made history in 2004 by becoming the world's youngest Microsoft Certified Professional (MCP) at the age of just nine, media reports said. Her exceptional achievement brought her instant recognition in the global IT community, and she remained a source of inspiration throughout her short but remarkable life. In recognition of her extraordinary talent, Microsoft founder Bill Gates invited her to visit the company's headquarters in the United States when she was only ten years old.

Arfa Karim received numerous national and international awards for her brilliance in the field of Information Technology. In 2005, she was awarded the Fatima Jinnah Gold Medal in Science and Technology by the then prime minister of Pakistan and also received the Salaam Pakistan Youth Award the same year. She was later honored with the Pride of Performance award.

To commemorate her legacy, a state-of-the-art software technology park in Lahore has been named after her. Arfa Karim passed away in Lahore on January 14, 2012, at the age of sixteen, following an epileptic attack.—APP

Early detection key to preventing gastric cancer

ISLAMABAD: A medical surgeon on Wednesday called for greater public awareness, urging people to seek immediate medical attention and proper check-ups at the first sign of symptoms, as poor dietary habits continue to fuel the rise in gastric (stomach) cancer cases. While speaking to a local news channel, Dr. Sohail, a GIS surgeon said that gastric cancer often spreads silently and may go unnoticed in its early stages. He explained that early symptoms include feeling full after eating a small amount of food, heartburn, persistent stomach pain, difficulty in swallowing, ongoing indigestion and sudden, unexplained weight loss. He further warned that the presence of black stools or blood in vomit or blood in the urine are serious signs that should not be ignored. Dr. Sohail urged people to seek timely medical treatment and undergo proper check-ups if digestive problems persist, stressing that early diagnosis can significantly improve treatment outcomes.

ISNET-INSTP conclude landmark hybrid training

ISLAMABAD: The Inter Islamic Network on Space Sciences and Technology (ISNET), in collaboration with the Inter Islamic Network on Space Technology Parks (INSTP), successfully concluded a two-day hybrid training program titled "Guidelines for Space Technology Parks in Emerging Economies". The program was hosted at RESOLVE, SUPARCO Karachi, and stands out as one of the first structured capacity-building initiatives in Pakistan, and across the OIC region, focused specifically on space technology parks. At a time when emerging economies are seeking to translate scientific research into economic growth, such targeted training programs have become the need of the hour. This initiative addressed a critical gap by focusing on the policy, governance, and commercialization frameworks required to establish and sustain science and technology parks aligned with the space sector. The inaugural session featured remarks from senior leadership, including the Coordinator General COMSTECH, the Secretary General INSTP, and the Director General SPARC-K, SUPARCO. Speakers underscored the strategic role of well-planned technology parks in accelerating innovation, strengthening university-industry linkages, attracting investment, and enabling the commercialization of space technologies. This first-of-its-kind hybrid program brought together a diverse group of participants from Pakistan and abroad, including policymakers, researchers, academia, industry professionals, and innovation ecosystem leaders. International experts from the International Association of Science Parks and Areas of Innovation (IASP) and the South Khorasan Province Technology Market (Iran) delivered in-depth sessions on global best practices, governance models, policy and regulatory enablers, and regional cooperation opportunities. Over the two days, participants engaged in focused discussions and practical learning covering strategic planning and governance of technology parks, intellectual property management and technology transfer, startup development and research commercialization, public-private partnerships, and sustainable funding mechanisms. A dedicated session on RESOLVE showcased a successful academia-industry collaboration model within Pakistan's space and innovation landscape. The structured program, combining expert-led virtual sessions with on-ground engagement, fostered meaningful dialogue and hands-on learning, equipping participants with practical insights essential for planning, managing, and scaling space technology parks. It also strengthened collaboration among academia, industry, and government stakeholders, contributing to the development of resilient, innovation-driven space ecosystems across emerging economies and OIC Member States. This initiative reflects ISNET's shared commitment to capacity building, knowledge exchange, and advancing space science and technology for sustainable socio-economic development.—DNA

Devolution vital for effective governance: Gilani

ISLAMABAD: Acting President and Chairman of the Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani on Wednesday underscored that devolution was not a threat to national cohesion but one of its strongest safeguards, stressing that a confident federation empowered its constituent units while remaining united by shared constitutional values. Addressing the concluding session of Islamabad Devolution Summit, Acting President Gilani said authority exercised closer to the people deepened democratic participation, addressed grievances at an early stage and strengthened trust in democratic institutions. He said the two-day forum brought together parliamentarians, constitutional experts, public administrators, economists, and representatives of civil society to engage in serious and structured reflection on one of the most consequential questions confronting Pakistan today: how to make devolution durable, functional, and truly responsive to the needs of our citizens. He reaffirmed the Senate's commitment to advancing cooperative federalism, provincial equity and effective devolution, describing the upper house as a guardian of constitutional balance and a forum for dialogue among federating units. Reflecting on Pakistan's constitutional evolution, the acting president recalled that devolution had been central to his political journey, particularly during his tenure as prime minister when the 18th Constitutional Amendment was enacted through rare political consensus. The amendment, he said, fundamentally rebalanced the federation by restoring parliamentary supremacy, strengthening provincial autonomy and constitutionally entrenching decentralisation. He noted that the abolition of the Concurrent Legislative List and the transfer of key subjects — including education, health, agriculture, labour and social welfare — to the provinces marked a decisive shift from centralised control to shared governance. To manage this transition, an implementation commission was constituted under Article 270AA to supervise and coordinate the transfer of subjects and institutions, underscoring that devolution was a continuous constitutional process rather than a one-time legislative act. Yousaf Raza Gilani emphasised that constitutional authority without fiscal capacity remained incomplete, pointing to the Seventh National Finance Commission Award as an essential companion to the 18th Amendment. By revising the vertical and horizontal distribution of resources, he said, the award aligned responsibilities with revenues, a cornerstone of effective federalism. The acting president observed that devolution in Pakistan had often been cyclical rather than durable, cautioning that it could not succeed if diluted or treated as a discretionary policy choice instead of a binding constitutional obligation.—DNA

Briefs

Traffic advisory for diversion plan on major routes

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) issued a special traffic advisory for motorists, announcing temporary diversions on key routes between 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. in the federal capital. An ITP spokesperson told on Wednesday that diversions will be placed on Club Road, Murree Road and the Islamabad Expressway during the specified hours to manage traffic flow. Motorists have been advised to use Srinagar Highway and the inner service roads as alternative routes to avoid congestion. The spokesperson further urged citizens to travel with an additional buffer time of 20-25 minutes to avoid inconvenience. He said that ITP officers will remain deployed on all affected roads to facilitate the public and ensure smooth traffic movement. For further guidance, citizens may contact the ITP helpline 1915 or the Pucar-15 emergency line, the spokesperson added.—APP

IRSA releases 34,900 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Wednesday released 34,900 cusecs of water from various rim stations with inflow of 38,200 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in the River Indus at Tarbela Dam stood at 1,492.00 feet which was 90.00 feet higher than the dead level of 1,402.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam were recorded as 17,900 cusecs each. The water level in the Jhelum River at Mangla Dam was 1,200.45 feet, which was 150.45 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded as 3,400 cusecs and 100 cusecs, respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 34,200, 12,200, 2,200, and 4,400 cusecs, respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 9,600 cusecs of water was released at Nowshera, and 7,300 cusecs were released from River Chenab at Marala.—APP

Traffic advisory for diversions on Srinagar Highway

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) issued a traffic advisory for motorists, announcing temporary diversions on Srinagar Highway from Serena to G-10 between 2:30 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. to ensure smooth traffic flow. An ITP spokesperson told on Wednesday that in view of the expected congestion during these hours, diversions will remain in place and motorists may experience delays on the main corridor. He advised citizens to use Jinnah Avenue, Faisal Avenue, and the inner service roads as alternative routes to avoid inconvenience.—APP

Meeting reviews timelines to complete Autism center within year

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Ishaq Dar on Wednesday chaired the first advisory board meeting on establishing a Centre of Excellence for Autism in Islamabad with a capacity of 300 students. The initiative will provide world-class care, inclusion, and support for children and their families. The committee reviewed timelines to complete the Centre within one year, in line with the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's directions. Discussions included specialised architecture, staffing, HR frameworks, and service design, with emphasis on trained professionals and practitioners with hands-on experience in autism care. The deputy prime minister endorsed a comprehensive, national approach including background screening for those working with children to structured learning tools and evidence-based methods for early diagnosis and intervention.—APP

PIDE seminar unveils urgent need for urban reform

The seminar, held at A.R. Kemal Hall, explored the complex interplay between urbanization, infrastructure development, and governance, with a particular focus on how the growing urban population is outpacing the expansion of vital services and infrastructure

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) hosted a timely and insightful seminar titled "Infrastructure Imbalances Amid Rapid Urbanization in Pakistan" today, bringing together leading experts to discuss the challenges and opportunities posed by rapid urban growth in Pakistan. The seminar, held at A.R. Kemal Hall, explored the complex interplay between urbanization, infrastructure development, and governance, with a particular focus on how the growing urban population is outpacing the expansion of vital services and infrastructure.

Dr. M. Shafaat Nawaz, RASTA Fellow and Fulbright PhD from the University of Illinois Chicago, opened the discussion with a thought-provoking presentation that re-framed Pakistan's urbanization narrative. Dr. Nawaz challenged the conventional perception that Pakistan's urbanization is a gradual process, suggesting that the nation may already be highly urbanized, with 88% of the population living in urbanized areas according to a recent study by the World Bank. He highlighted the mismatch between the urban reality and the official urbanization statistics, which suggest only 39% of the population is urban. This discrepancy has led to significant infrastructural imbalances, exacerbating issues such as housing shortages, water scarcity, traffic congestion, and waste accumulation.

Ms. Fauzia Rizwan, Director of The Urban Solutions Pvt Ltd, and Ms. Risham Amjad, Consultant at the Asian Development Bank, further elaborated on these challenges, emphasizing the need for a unified approach to urban planning that addresses not only the physical infrastructure but also social infrastructure, such as healthcare and education.



Key discussions revolved around Pakistan's secondary cities, which are often overlooked despite their increasing urbanization. These cities, which host a large portion of the country's urban population, have received less policy attention compared to megacities like Karachi and Lahore. The panelists called for a redefinition of urban areas to align with the actual realities on the ground, noting that such reclassification could significantly boost local government revenues through property taxes, thus enabling better infrastructure and services for these rapidly growing areas.

Another pressing issue discussed was

the country's critical shortage of housing units, with an estimated 9 million housing units needed. The shortage is not just about the number of units but also about affordability and accessibility, particularly for vulnerable populations. Over 50% of urban residents are living in informal settlements or below-standard housing conditions, a stark reminder of the urban-rural divide that still exists in Pakistan. The seminar also highlighted the role of municipal governments, which are critically underfunded and unable to meet the growing demand for urban services. The lack of adequate water supply, waste management, and sewage systems was identified as a major impediment to the quality of life in urban areas, contributing to public health crises such as air pollution, which is responsible for over 200,000 premature deaths annually in Pakistan.

Mr. Bilal Aftab, Staff Economist at PIDE, moderated the session and concluded with a call for integrated policy reforms. He stressed the importance of aligning fiscal resources with urban realities, ensuring that infrastructure investments are not just concentrated in megacities but also spread across secondary and smaller cities, where the need for development is equally urgent. The seminar concluded with an interactive Q&A session, where participants discussed potential solutions to these infrastructural challenges, including the need for stronger urban governance, redefined urban boundaries, and a more balanced approach to development across Pakistan's cities.

PIDE remains committed to fostering meaningful dialogues on urban development and will continue to lead discussions on policy-relevant issues affecting Pakistan's cities.

'Parwaz Card 2026' to advance professional independence

ISLAMABAD: Chairperson of the CM Punjab Task Force on Skills Development and MPA Adnan Afzal Chatha Wednesday said that under the CM Punjab vision, the "Parwaz Card 2026" will transform youth opportunities by offering secure, skill-based certification and financial independence to approximately 45,000 individuals in first phase. While speaking to a private news channel, he explained that Punjab government, under the CM's vision has declared 2026 as the year for youth and launched a transparent online system to streamline access to international employment opportunities, ensuring the process is fair, efficient and accessible. He said loans will be given to those with an employment letter and applicants must be permanent Punjab residents with valid CNIC, meet age criteria, not be loan defaulters and, where required have active tax status and a verified foreign job offer. 'Parwaz Card' Registration Portal will reduce reliance on middlemen, protect applicants from fraud and promote safe and legal overseas employment, he added. He further stated that the government will support those without resources and dissuade people from attempting to go abroad through illegal channels. He said the initial loan amount is Rs 10 lakh and repayment will be deducted at less than 30% of the salary of those who go abroad, adding that the government will provide skills training, certify them and help them secure legal placements with overseas companies.—APP

Car sales increase by 41.73% during 1HFY 2026

ISLAMABAD: The sale of cars in the country witnessed an increase of 41.73 during the first half of the current fiscal year 2025-26 as compared to the corresponding half of last year. During the July-December 2025-26, as many as 65,910 cars were sold against the sale of 46,502 units, showing growth of 41.73 percent, said Pakistan Automobile Manufacturing Association (PAMA). Among sale of cars, Toyota Corolla and Toyota Yaris cars sale also grew by 73.57 percent from 9,633 units to 16,720 units while the sale of Honda cars witnessed a surge of 58.71 percent from 6,404 units during last year to 10,164 units during current year.—APP

Musadik calls for exports led economic reset

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination Dr Musadik Malik on Wednesday called for a fundamental shift in Pakistan's economic model, saying that sustainable prosperity was only possible through higher productivity, an exports-led growth strategy and a stronger role for the private sector. Addressing the inaugural session of the Pakistan Policy Dialogue titled "Correcting Course: Pakistan's Economic Reset" in Islamabad, the minister said the state should focus on becoming a facilitator for economic activity. "The only path to prosperity passes through increased productivity," Dr Malik said, adding that the private sector must play a central role in driving economic growth while the government should create an enabling environment rather than directly managing commercial enterprises. He said that sustainable and environment-friendly economic growth had become an urgent national necessity, stressing that economic recovery could no longer rely on assets and power alone but must be built on education, skills and productivity. The minister said privatisation was not an ideological project but a mechanism to correct market distortions, and argued that an export-oriented growth model was the only viable guarantee for long-term economic stability. Dr Malik said the government's reform efforts had begun to show improvement in key economic indicators, but emphasised that lasting prosperity would depend on giving talent and capability the opportunity to move forward. He added that Pakistan's path to prosperity was now linked not just to capital and resources, but to access to opportunities and improvements in governance and systems. The Pakistan Policy Dialogue, organised by the Policy Research and Advisory Council, brought together senior government officials, economists, and policy experts to discuss reforms aimed at correcting the country's economic course and laying the foundations for sustainable growth.—APP

Severe flour shortage grips country

ISLAMABAD: A deepening flour shortage is tightening its grip across Pakistan as wheat scarcity, movement restrictions, and unequal distribution policies push prices beyond the reach of the majority. With open market arrivals shrinking and government rate flour vanishing from shelves, economists, traders, and consumers are urging immediate government action to stabilise supplies and prevent a food security crisis. Business leader and former Islamabad Chamber of Commerce president Shahid Rashed Butt stated that wheat prices have surged to between Rs 2,900 and Rs 3,150 per 40 kilograms, placing a severe strain on flour mills and raising the risk of supply disruptions. He said many mills are operating under loss-making conditions, while others have already halted production. Open market wheat arrivals have dropped sharply, while subsidised government wheat is reaching only a limited number of mills. Flour prices have risen again across several cities in Punjab by Rs 50 to Rs 70 per 15-kilogram bag. In Quetta, prices jumped by about Rs 1,000 per 50-kilogram bag within a month. Mr Butt said most mills rely heavily on food department wheat, but unequal allocation has distorted the market. Mills receiving subsidised wheat at Rs 2,900 per bag enjoy a clear retail advantage, while those forced to buy from the open market at Rs 3,000 to Rs 3,150 per bag face mounting losses. As a result, nearly

half of the flour mills have suspended operations, reducing supply and intensifying shortages. Punjab authorities have also imposed permit-based restrictions on interprovincial movement of wheat and flour, further disrupting supply chains. The system has been criticised by millers as inconsistent and discriminatory, creating artificial bottlenecks at provincial borders. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa faces particularly acute stress, with available stocks sufficient for only about 27 days and nearly 80 percent of mills shut due to a lack of wheat. Mr Butt called for strict accountability within food distribution systems, equitable allocation of wheat to all operational mills, and an immediate lifting of interprovincial movement restrictions. Policy gaps and new requirements have widened shortages at the retail level. Poultry and livestock feed mills consumed more than 1.6 million tonnes of wheat within four months after harvest, diverting significant volumes away from human consumption. For the masses struggling with high inflation, the impact is severe. Flour provides roughly 72 percent of daily caloric intake, and rising prices are forcing families to cut consumption or shift to lower-quality substitutes. The government must intervene urgently through stock releases, policy correction, and fair distribution, Mr Butt said, warning that delays could turn the current shortage into a full-scale food security emergency.—APP

Pak, Kyrgyzstan agree to hold Kyrgyz Cultural Days in Islamabad

DNA



delegation. The meeting also noted that Pakistan is planning to host Nowruz celebrations, to which several countries having diplomatic relations with Pakistan, including Kyrgyzstan, will be invited. Ambassador Kylychbek Sultan said he would coordinate with the Kyrgyz government and confirm participation by the end of this month so that the necessary arrangements could be finalised in time. He also informed that the Kyrgyz delegation plans to visit Lahore. The federal minister suggested that after holding cultural events in Islamabad, the delegation could proceed to Lahore for further engagements. It was further shared that Ms. Ambreen Zahara, Joint Secretary (A&C), National Heritage and Culture Division, has been nominated as the focal person from the Pakistani side, while the Kyrgyz side will also nominate its focal person for coordination. The ambassador was also requested to arrange a coordination meeting with the Kyrgyz Honorary Consul General in Lahore. The meeting concluded with the exchange of souvenirs between the two sides, reaffirming their commitment to further strengthening cultural ties between Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Huzaifa reveals PML-N secures PPP support for key reforms

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State and SAPM Huzaifa Rehman on Wednesday said that PML-N has convinced its allied party PPP to support key constitutional and financial reforms, including the 18th Amendment, stressing that dialogue is essential and differences of opinion are a natural part of democratic governance. In an interview with a private news channel, Rehman stated that the PPP remains a key allied partner, emphasizing that the unity between the two parties will continue. He confirmed that the PPP has been convinced to support both the NFC Award and the 18th Amendment, noting that this collaboration will further strengthen the federal government and its institutions. Huzaifa Rehman added that, regardless of which political party may come to power in the future, the federal government will continue to uphold the rights of defence personnel and pensioners.

He stressed that this political consensus is crucial for Pakistan's future, particularly in terms of economic stability and growth, and will provide tangible benefits to the country's economy. Responding to a query regarding Maulana Fazl-Ur-Rehman, JUI-F leader, the Minister said that any reservations held by the JUI-F leader will be addressed.

Responding to a query about the opposition leader, Huzaifa Rehman disclosed that PTI's own party members had initially not supported

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Pakistan's economic crossroads

ANSAR BHATTI

PAKISTAN'S economy is once again under the spotlight after Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb openly acknowledged that several firms have exited the country due to mounting challenges, including high taxation and soaring energy costs. His candid admission underscores the gravity of the situation, as policymakers grapple with the dual reality of losing established investors while simultaneously welcoming new entrants. Aurangzeb's statement reflects a troubling trend: many of the companies leaving Pakistan are European firms. Their departure signals a lack of confidence in the country's investment climate, particularly among businesses that prioritize transparent governance, predictable taxation, and efficient judicial systems. For Pakistan, the loss of European investors is not merely about capital flight; it represents a shrinking footprint of firms that often bring advanced technology, management practices, and access to global markets. The finance minister stressed that the government is "fully aware of the challenges facing the economy." Yet awareness alone may not be enough. With taxation at historically high levels, energy prices continuing to rise, and bureaucratic red tape choking efficiency, the environment for doing business remains deeply unattractive. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), corruption in Pakistan drains nearly 200 billion rupees every month a staggering figure that further erodes investor confidence. Despite the exodus of European firms, Aurangzeb highlighted that 20 new foreign investors have entered the Pakistani market in the past 18 months. These include global giants such as Google, Saudi Aramco, Wafi Energy, and Turkish Petroleum. On the surface, this influx appears to be a positive development, suggesting that Pakistan retains appeal for certain investors. However, a closer look reveals a more nuanced reality. None of these new entrants hail from Europe. Instead, they come from countries with which Pakistan enjoys deep-rooted political and strategic ties Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and other friendly nations. Their investments are less a reflection of Pakistan's economic attractiveness and more a product of longstanding diplomatic relationships. In other words, these companies are not entering Pakistan because the investment climate is favorable; they are doing so because of bilateral friendship and geopolitical alignment. This distinction is critical. While the government may tout the arrival of new investors as a success story, the underlying reasons suggest that Pakistan's broader investment environment remains weak. Without structural reforms, the country risks becoming dependent on politically motivated investments rather than creating a genuinely competitive and open market. The finance minister's admission also shines a light on deeper systemic issues. Pakistan's judiciary is widely perceived to be in disarray, with delays and inefficiencies

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cies undermining the rule of law. Red tape at the highest levels of government continues to frustrate businesses, slowing down approvals and complicating routine operations. These governance challenges compound the difficulties posed by high taxes and energy costs, creating a hostile environment for investors. The IMF's corruption estimate of 200 billion rupees per month is particularly damning. Such pervasive corruption not only deters foreign investors but also stifles domestic entrepreneurship. For businesses, the cost of navigating corruption and inefficiency often outweighs the potential benefits of operating in Pakistan. Pakistan's powerful establishment is also wary of the economic situation. Yet, as observers note, it is partially to blame for the current state of affairs. Years of policy inconsistency, overreach into civilian domains, and a lack of coherent economic vision have contributed to the malaise. While the establishment now appears focused on selling military hardware to generate revenue, this is a long and arduous process that cannot provide immediate relief to the economy.

Military exports may fetch money in the long run, but they are not a substitute for broad-based economic reforms. Pakistan's urgent need is to attract sustainable investment, both foreign and domestic, to stabilize its economy and create jobs. The situation calls for immediate fixes. Pakistan cannot afford to rely solely on friendly nations for politically motivated investments. Instead, it must create an environment where investors from across the globe – including Europe – feel confident in bringing capital. This requires tackling corruption head-on, reforming the judiciary, streamlining bureaucratic processes, and rationalizing taxation. Energy costs, another major deterrent, must also be addressed. Without affordable and reliable energy, industrial growth will remain stunted, and investors will continue to look elsewhere. Pakistan's policymakers must prioritize energy reforms, including investment in renewable sources and efficiency improvements, to reduce costs and enhance competitiveness.

Aurangzeb's candid acknowledgment is both sobering and necessary. By admitting that firms are leaving, he has opened the door to a more honest conversation about Pakistan's economic challenges. Yet the government must go beyond acknowledgment and take decisive action. The arrival of 20 new investors is welcome, but it should not mask the deeper structural issues that continue to drive others away. Pakistan stands at a crossroads. It can either continue to rely on politically motivated investments from friendly nations, or it can undertake the difficult reforms needed to attract global capital on merit. The choice will determine whether the country remains trapped in cycles of crisis or moves toward sustainable growth. The departure of European firms and the arrival of investors from friendly nations highlight the paradox of Pakistan's investment climate. While the government may celebrate new entrants, the reality is that the broader environment remains hostile to business. High taxes, expensive energy, corruption, judicial inefficiency, and bureaucratic red tape all combine to deter serious investors. Pakistan's establishment may seek to generate revenue through military exports, but this is no substitute for immediate reforms. The country needs urgent fixes, reforms that will restore confidence, attract investment, and lay the foundation for long-term growth. Without them, Pakistan risks losing not only investors but also the opportunity to build a resilient and prosperous economy.

The Doctrine of Putin and Direction of Russia

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



The concept of a privileged sphere of interest is therefore central. Russia's leadership asserts a special responsibility for, and entitlement to influence over, neighbouring countries that were once part of the Soviet Union. This is justified through arguments about shared history, economic interdependence, and the protection of Russian-speaking communities. It also reflects strategic calculation. Control, or at least strong influence, over nearby territories provides military depth, buffers against perceived threats, and leverage in dealings with other major powers

FOR more than two decades, Vladimir Putin has been the central figure shaping Russia's political life and foreign policy outlook. Yet to speak of a single, neatly defined "Putin Doctrine" risks oversimplifying a system that has evolved over time, responding to domestic pressures, regional shifts, and changing global conditions. What can be identified, however, is a coherent set of ideas and practices that together form the guiding logic of contemporary Russian statecraft. This doctrine is not set out in one official text, but emerges from speeches, policy decisions, military actions, and the structure of power within Russia itself. At its core lies a belief that Russia is not merely another nation-state, but a distinct civilisation with its own historical mission. Putin has repeatedly argued that Russia represents a cultural and political world separate from that of the liberal West. This conviction draws heavily on interpretations of Russian history that stress continuity between the Tsarist Empire, the Soviet Union, and the present Russian Federation. The trauma of the Soviet collapse in 1991 occupies a central place in this worldview. Putin has described it as a major catastrophe of the twentieth century, not only because a superpower disappeared, but because millions of ethnic Russians found themselves outside Russia's borders, and the state lost both status and strategic depth.

This reading of history flows a second principle: the restoration of Russia's strength and authority. The chaotic years of the 1990s, marked by economic hardship, regional fragmentation, and the rise of oligarchic power, are portrayed in official discourse as a period of humiliation imposed by internal weakness and external pressure. Putin's domestic project has therefore focused on rebuilding a strong central state. Political power has been steadily concentrated in the presidency, independent centres of influence have been brought to heel, and loyalty to the state has been framed as a moral duty. Stability, order, and continuity are presented as higher values than pluralism or rapid political change.

This domestic consolidation is inseparable from Russia's external posture. The doctrine that has emerged under Putin treats the international system as inherently competitive. Rather than a community of states bound primarily by shared rules, it is seen as an arena where major powers pursue their interests, test one another's resolve, and seek advantageous positions. In this view, Western talk of universal values often masks geopolitical ambition. NATO enlargement, European Union expansion, and Western involvement in post-Soviet states are interpreted not as benign developments, but as encroachments into a space Russia regards as vital to its own security.

The concept of a privileged sphere of interest is therefore central. Russia's leadership asserts a special responsibility

for, and entitlement to influence over, neighbouring countries that were once part of the Soviet Union. This is justified through arguments about shared history, economic interdependence, and the protection of Russian-speaking communities. It also reflects strategic calculation. Control, or at least strong influence, over nearby territories provides military depth, buffers against perceived threats, and leverage in dealings with other major powers.

This outlook helps explain Moscow's willingness to use force, or the threat of it, in pursuit of political objectives. The conflicts in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine since 2014, and on a larger scale from 2022 onwards, illustrate a readiness to challenge existing borders when the Kremlin judges its interests to be at stake. Such actions are framed domestically as defensive, necessary responses to Western-backed moves that would otherwise leave Russia exposed. International law, while invoked when useful, is treated as subordinate to what the leadership defines as historical justice and strategic necessity.

Another defining feature of Putin's doctrine is the emphasis on sovereignty, interpreted in a strict and expansive sense. Sovereignty does not only mean protection from foreign military intervention, but also insulation from external influence over domestic politics, media, and civil society. Laws targeting foreign funding, restrictions on non-governmental organisations, and controls over information flows are justified as measures to defend Russia's political independence. The popular uprisings that have occurred in parts of the post-Soviet space are portrayed not as genuine expressions of public discontent, but as operations orchestrated from abroad. Preventing similar movements at home has become a priority, reinforcing the fusion between internal security policy and foreign policy. Economic policy under this doctrine is similarly shaped by geopolitical considerations. While Russia remains integrated into global markets, especially as an energy supplier, there has been a steady effort to reduce vulnerability to external pressure. Since the mid-2010s, the state has increased its role in key sectors, built up financial reserves, and promoted domestic production in areas ranging from agriculture to technology. Economic resilience is not pursued primarily for prosperity alone, but as a strategic asset, enabling Russia to withstand sanctions and sustain long-term confrontation with unfriendly powers.

Culturally and ideologically, the Putin doctrine presents Russia as a guardian of traditional values. The Kremlin aligns itself with the Orthodox Church, emphasises conservative social norms, and criticises what it depicts as Western moral decline. This narrative serves several functions. It strengthens ties between the state and influential domestic institutions, offers a sense of purpose

that goes beyond material concerns, and provides an ideological counterpoint to liberal democracy. Abroad, it allows Russia to position itself as an alternative centre of attraction for those who are sceptical of Western cultural influence. Yet the doctrine is not solely backward-looking or defensive. It also aspires to shape a more plural international order. Russian officials frequently speak of a world no longer dominated by a single power, but organised around several major centres. In this vision, countries such as China, India, and others across Asia, the Middle East, and the Global South are natural partners in limiting Western predominance. Russia's growing engagement with non-Western states, its participation in groupings such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and its diplomatic activism in Africa and the Middle East reflect this ambition.

However, the gap between rhetoric and reality is striking. While the Kremlin calls for respect and equality among nations, its own behaviour in its neighbourhood has often been coercive. While it denounces Western interference, it has not hesitated to involve itself in the internal affairs of other states. This tension highlights a central feature of the Putin doctrine: it is less a universal philosophy than a strategy tailored to maximise Russia's room for manoeuvre. Over time, this approach has become more rigid. The longer Putin has remained in power, the more closely the state's identity has been bound to his personal authority. Political opposition is increasingly portrayed not simply as disagreement, but as betrayal. Foreign policy setbacks are blamed on hostile conspiracies. Compromise is often framed as weakness. Such narratives can mobilise support in the short term, especially in a society marked by memories of instability. But they also narrow the range of acceptable policy choices. For Britain and its European partners, understanding this doctrine is essential. It suggests that tensions with Russia are not merely the product of misunderstanding or temporary disputes, but of deeply rooted assumptions about power, security, and history. Dialogue remains necessary, particularly to manage risks and prevent escalation. Yet expectations of a rapid transformation in Russia's outlook are unrealistic so long as the current system and its guiding beliefs remain in place. The doctrine of Putin's Russia is therefore best seen not as a fixed blueprint, but as an evolving framework. It blends a sense of grievance with ambition, appeals to tradition with modern instruments of power, and defensive rhetoric with assertive action. It has reshaped Russia's relationship with its neighbours, with the West, and with the wider world. Whether it will endure beyond Putin himself is an open question. What is clear is that it has already left a deep imprint on European security and on the global balance of power, one that will continue to be felt for years to come.

Pakistan-Oman Navies: Committed to Cooperation for Maritime Security

Muhammad Akram Khan Faridi

The visit of the Pakistani flotilla to Oman underscores Pakistan's commitment to maritime security at both regional and global levels. The two countries cooperate to safeguard sea lines of communication, counter piracy and smuggling, and work jointly during natural disasters and humanitarian assistance operations. This cooperation is vital for regional peace, stability, and prosperity. Overall, the visit plays an important role in strengthening bilateral relations, enhancing maritime security, and promoting peace in the region.

PAKISTAN Navy Flotilla comprising of PNS RAH NAWARD (Sail Ship), PNS MADAGAR and Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA) ship PMSS KASHMIR visited Port Sultan Qaboos, Muscat, Oman. Upon arrival at the port, the ships were warmly welcomed by Omani officers and officials. During the visit, Mission Commander, Commodore Amir Iqbal, along with the Commanding Officers held meetings with naval leadership of Oman. Mission Commander called on Acting Commander of Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), DG Ops and Plans, Commander Maritime Security Centre, Commander Saeed Bin Sultan Naval Base and Commandant Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy. During these interactions, matters of mutual interest, Navy-to-Navy engagements, and cooperation in maritime security were discussed. RNO Officers and Midshipmen also visited onboard ships and discussed topics of mutual maritime interest with PN officers. Pakistan Navy Ships were opened for visitors; wherein, large number of Pakistani community and students from Pakistan School, Muscat visited onboard. Following the port call, PN and PMSA ships conducted a Passage Exercise with Royal Oman Navy ship KHASAB. The exercise at sea aimed to enhance interoperability between the two navies and promote shared learning through bilateral conduct of naval exercises. Pakistan and Oman are maritime neighbours and frequent visits of dignitaries, port calls by ships and joint exercises are a regular feature. The visit of PN and PMSA ships will further strengthen bilateral relations between the two navies. Pakistan and Oman share centuries-old historical, cultural, and maritime ties. Trade routes across the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean have long connected the two nations. In the contemporary era, these relations are further strengthened through maritime cooperation, par-

ticularly through visits by Pakistan Navy flotillas to Oman. Such visits reflect Pakistan's naval diplomacy and its commitment to regional peace. A Pakistan Navy flotilla typically comprises several warships, auxiliary vessels, and, at times, naval air assets. The purpose of visits to Oman is to promote bilateral naval cooperation, enhance interoperability and professional capabilities between the two navies, and contribute to peace and stability in the region. Oman's strategic geographical significance especially its proximity to the Strait of Hormuz, adds further importance to this cooperation. During flotilla visits, a range of professional and training activities is conducted, including joint naval exercises, Passage Exercises (PASSEX), search and rescue drills, communications training, and discussions on maritime security matters. These activities enhance the operational capabilities of both navies and foster mutual trust. Such visits also serve as a means of goodwill and public outreach. Pakistan Navy officers meet Omani military and civilian leadership, while cultural and social events are organized. During flotilla visits, civilians, students, and government representatives tour Pakistani warships, promoting transparency and creating a positive impression. The visit of the Pakistani flotilla to Oman underscores Pakistan's commitment to maritime security at both regional and global levels. The two countries cooperate to safeguard sea lines of communication, counter piracy and smuggling, and work jointly during natural disasters and humanitarian assistance operations. This cooperation is vital for regional peace, stability, and prosperity. Overall, the visit plays an important role in strengthening bilateral relations, enhancing maritime security, and promoting peace in the region. Such engagements highlight Pakistan as a responsible maritime state and a reliable partner.

In addition to Passage Exercises conducted jointly with Oman, the Pakistan Navy recently carried out a comprehensive naval exercise in the Northern Arabian Sea. During the exercise, a successful live firing of the LY-80 air defence missile was conducted, destroying an aerial target at long range. The Pakistan Navy also successfully tested an unmanned surface vessel (USV), which demonstrated high speed, superior control, and effective performance in challenging weather conditions. Surface targets were successfully engaged using loitering munitions, further validating the USV's capabilities under demanding maritime environments. The Commander Pakistan Fleet observed the exercise, while the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf, praised the professional competence of officers and sailors, affirming that the Pakistan Navy remains fully committed to defending the country's maritime borders under all circumstances. This exercise reflects the Pakistan Navy's modern capabilities, defensive preparedness, and ability to meet future warfare challenges. The Pakistan Navy stands as a strong shield of the nation, protecting Pakistan's sovereignty, security, and dignity at sea. Despite modern challenges, the Navy has consistently demonstrated the highest standards of professionalism, discipline, and sacrifice. Recent exercises and international cooperation are clear evidence that the Pakistan Navy is not only fully prepared for national defence but is also playing an active role in promoting regional peace and stability. The nation takes pride in its brave Navy, which works day and night to protect maritime borders, secure trade routes, and defend national interests. May Allah Almighty grant continued success to the officers and sailors of the Pakistan Navy and enable them to serve the beloved homeland with distinction.

Briefs

Gilani emphasises faster Italy...

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than 300,000 members of the Pakistani diaspora. Gilani noted the presence of several Italian companies in Pakistan, particularly in pharmaceuticals, oil and gas, and railways, and underscored Pakistan's interest in expanding trade and investment ties. The Italian ambassador said that Italy deeply cherished its long-standing friendship with Pakistan and noted that Pakistan was among the first countries with which the Italian Republic established diplomatic relations. She shared that in 2025, Italy issued visas to over 15,000 Pakistani students who got admission to Italian universities for postgraduate and PhD programmes. Referring to Italy's shortage of skilled manpower, particularly in scientific, IT-related fields and healthcare, she said Italian institutions welcomed initiatives by Pakistani universities to offer Italian language courses to improve employment prospects. The meeting reaffirmed the shared commitment to further deepen bilateral cooperation in education, migration, trade and people-to-people exchanges.

Govt to formulate new policy...

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According to government sources, besides the law minister, the members of the committee established regarding the visa clearance regime include Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, Minister for Climate Change Musadik Malik and the federal law and interior secretaries. The Interior Ministry will provide secretarial support to the committee. The federal government recently approved a new visa clearance system as part of reforms in Pakistan's visa and travel clearance system. The objective of the new system is to make the visa acquisition process more transparent, secure and efficient for Pakistani citizens abroad. The decision has been made in the context of illegal migration, counterfeit travel documents and stricter internal laws by various countries. A day earlier, Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have agreed to sign a "pre-immigration clearance" agreement, allowing the UAE-bound travellers to complete clearance in Pakistan and exit the airport directly, similar to domestic passengers in the Gulf nation. The development came during a meeting between Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and a UAE delegation led by Al Dara Border Crossing Customs Director General Ahmed Abdullah Bin Lahej Al Falasi. The initiative comes against the backdrop of the offloading of passengers owing to improper, incomplete documentation in recent months, in the light of stern measures implemented by the authorities to curb human trafficking and illegal travel abroad. The prospects of a new visa-related policy come against the backdrop of the offloading of passengers owing to improper, incomplete documentation in recent months, in light of stern measures implemented by the authorities to curb human trafficking and illegal travel abroad. Earlier this month, the government also launched "Pre-Departure Facilitation Desks" for assisting passengers travelling abroad. The measures are to be taken in the context of a large number of Pakistanis travelling abroad, where the data released by the Bureau of Immigration, as reported by the publication earlier, shows that more than 727,000 Pakistanis migrated overseas for employment in 2025. The figures reveal that the exodus spans all skill levels. Over 400,000 unskilled and more than 200,000 skilled workers secured jobs abroad in 2025, underscoring the scale of labour migration. Saudi Arabia remained the top destination by a wide margin, absorbing the bulk of Pakistani workers.

Al-Ittihad drop points in Abha as Al-Fateh cruise to fifth consecutive win

Al Ittihad stumble at Damac as Matchday 15 delivers drama, red cards, late chances, Al-Fateh surge, Al-Okhdood edge win in Saudi Pro League while Benzema exits injured and title race

RIYADH: Matchday 15 of the Saudi Pro League continued on Tuesday with three fixtures across three cities. Al-Ittihad shared the spoils with Damac in Abha, Al-Okhdood edged Al-Kholood 1-0 in Nairan, while Al-Fateh defeated Al-Riyadh 3-1 in Al-Ahsa. The result in Abha was a disappointing one for the defending champions. Since their defeat to city rivals Al-Ahli on November 8 of last year, Al-Ittihad had won every match in the league. Damac proved stubborn opposition at the Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz Stadium, which welcomed a vibrant crowd, split – albeit unevenly – between Damac's red and Al-Ittihad's black and yellow.

Early signs suggested the visitors were in control. From the outset, the threat of Moussa Diaby stretching the pitch down the right, combined with Muhammed Al-Shanqeeti's underlapping runs, led Al-Ittihad to what appeared to be an early

opener in the 3rd minute. Al-Shanqeeti, providing the connection between Diaby and Karim Benzema, took advantage of a failed clearance to fire past Damac goalkeeper Kewin. Unfortunately for the visitors, the goal was ruled out, as Diaby failed to keep the ball in play before delivering the cross. Damac gradually grew into the contest, with their compact 5-4-1 shape limiting the opposition from establishing control. Al-Ittihad resorted to direct balls from deep to exploit space in behind, but the well-drilled Damac defence consistently denied them from the final touch. The hosts then struck against the run of play. After an accidental intervention by the referee, play resumed with Riyadh Sharahili threading a pass behind the Ittihad centre-backs for Abdullah Al-Qahtani, who finished confidently to open the scoring in the 37th minute.

Sharahili would be involved in a goal at the other end just eight minutes later. The underlapping Al-Shanqeeti runs would come back to bite Damac, as he was spotted by Diaby inside the box, only for Sharahili's misfired clearance to fall back to him to finish for the equaliser. Sergio Conceiç's side knew that an early goal in the second half was crucial against a side like Damac. However, Benzema was surprisingly brought off at half-time in favour of Saleh Al-Shehri. Social media footage later suggested the Frenchman had been substituted due to injury. Al-Shehri provided a different attacking profile, as Al-Ittihad now relied on crosses from Ahmad Al-Julyadan, but Damac defenders Abdulrahman Al-Khaibary and Hassan Rubayyi of Damac's dealt well with the threat. Their plan to draw Al-Ittihad forward and strike on the counter nearly paid off late on. In the sixth minute of stoppage

time, they found themselves in a three-on-two situation that quickly turned into a one-on-one, only for Abdulrahman Al-Obaid's effort to crash against the post. Al-Ittihad's night ended on a sour note when Fabinho was sent off for a dangerous tackle on Yahya Naji. Despite avoiding defeat, this draw was Al-Ittihad's seventh game away at Damac without a win. Elsewhere, Al-Fateh continued their stellar run of form to grab their fifth win on the trot with a 3-1 victory over Al-Riyadh. After spending the first part of the season lingering outside the relegation zone, they now sit 12 points clear in 10th place. In Nairan, Al-Kholood fell to a 1-0 defeat against Al-Okhdood, marking their eighth loss in nine matches. Matchday 15 concludes on Wednesday, with Al-Qadsia vs. Al-Fayha at 5:45pm, followed by Al-Ahli vs. Al-Taawoun in the battle for second place at 8:30pm alongside Al-Shabab vs. NEOM. – APP

Semenyo an instant hit as Man City close on League Cup final

NEWCASTLE: Antoine Semenyo made himself an instant Manchester City hero as Pep Guardiola's men took a giant stride towards the League Cup final with a 2-0 win at Newcastle. The Ghana international, who joined from Bournemouth for £65 million (\$87 million) last week, opened

the scoring and also had a second goal controversially ruled out. But Rayan Cherki delivered what could be the knockout blow to the holders in the 98th minute. The Magpies ended a 70-year wait for a domestic trophy by winning the League Cup last season, but will need a heroic fightback to

reach Wembley when the sides meet again for the second leg of the semi-final on February 4. Semenyo also scored on his debut on Saturday in a 10-1 demolition of Exeter in the FA Cup. In previous years he would have been cup-tied after featuring for Bournemouth earlier in the competition.



Griezmann's free kick seals Atletico Madrid progress in Copa del Rey

MADRID: Antoine Griezmann's sublime second-half free kick earned Atletico Madrid a 1-0 win at second-tier Deportivo La Coruna on Tuesday, securing their spot in the Copa del Rey quarterfinals. Coming off a frustrating start to 2026 with a disappointing 1-1 draw in LaLiga against Real Sociedad and a 2-1 loss in the Spanish Super Cup to bitter rivals Real Madrid, Diego Simeone fielded a near full-strength side at the Riazor Stadium, with only goalkeeper Jan Oblak rested among regular starters. Midfielder Conor Gallagher, reportedly close to joining Tottenham Hotspur, and forward Giacomo Raspadori, linked with a move to Atlanta, were also absent from the squad that made the trip to Galicia. Atletico dictated the early proceedings, with Julian Alvarez denied by La Coruna keeper German Parreno following a sharp effort, while Matteo Ruggeri struck the woodwork in the 15th minute. La Coruna came close to an opener when Cristian Herrera's close-range shot was superbly saved by Atletico's back-up goalkeeper Juan Musso.

Griezmann grew into the game, narrowly missing the target with a fierce strike from distance that rattled the crossbar in the 40th minute before the decisive moment arrived in the 61st. Awarded a free kick on the edge of the penalty area, Griezmann stepped up and delivered a left-footed effort that curled into the top corner, leaving keeper German Parreno with no chance. Atletico maintained control for much of the second half, their defensive organization under Simeone proving impenetrable for a La Coruna side that has now won just once in their last seven outings across all competitions. – APP

PCB invites bids for Multan Sultans franchise ahead of PSL 11

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has formally issued an advertisement inviting bids for the sale of franchise team rights of Multan Sultans. In an advertisement released in newspapers on Wednesday, the PCB invited "interested parties" to acquire the franchise rights of the Multan team in the Pakistan Super League (PSL), describing it as an opportunity for investors to be part of what it called a "new era" of the league. According to the PCB's invitation for bids, Multan Sultans, which entered the PSL in its third edition in 2018, has built an established fan base and presence within the competition. The board said the franchise now presents a "compelling opportunity" for new owners to build on its legacy and take the team to "unprecedented heights" in the PSL. Under the bidding process, parties wishing to participate must obtain the bid documents from the PCB. The deadline for submission of technical proposals has been set for January 30, 2026, at 3pm, with the proposals to be opened the same day. "Only technically qualified bidders will be allowed to proceed to the next stage of the process," the PCB said in the notice. Further information can be sought from the PCB through the official email address: psl@pcb.com.pk, with the board cautioning that any information from other sources will not be deemed official. The move comes against the backdrop of recent remarks by PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi, who has publicly taken on

the challenge of turning Multan Sultans into a profitable franchise before its sale for the next season. Addressing a high-profile ceremony held for the auction of the league's seventh and eighth teams last week, Naqvi said Multan Sultan had been labelled a "loss-hit" franchise on social media, but he was determined to prove otherwise. "I took a challenge, and that is that there were a lot of claims on social media that the team was in losses," Naqvi said. "So I, and all of the team, decided that we would show you how much profit this business offers, publish the numbers before going for the auction." Naqvi confirmed that the PCB will continue to run Multan Sultans during the upcoming PSL 11 season before offering it to new owners. He revealed that there had been suggestions to auction Multan alongside the two new franchises sold this week, but he chose instead to operate the team for another year to demonstrate its commercial potential. The advertisement for Multan's franchise rights also comes at a time of rapid expansion for the PSL. Hyderabad and Sialkot were officially confirmed as the league's seventh and eighth franchises following the completion of the expansion auction, taking the competition to eight teams for the first time. The 11th edition of the PSL is set to run from March 26 to May 3, 2026, with the expanded format expected to provide fans across Pakistan and beyond with another extended period of competitive T20 cricket. – DNA

US to take three-quarter stake in Armenia corridor

The company's objectives will include giving a "financial return to the US for its initial contribution or other economic benefits to the US government or for US companies," the framework said

WASHINGTON: Armenia will give the United States a nearly three-quarters stake in a corridor of its land connecting parts of rival Azerbaijan, Washington announced Tuesday, as it said it expected to benefit financially from the arrangement but promised to respect sovereignty.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio laid out a framework for the project as he met in Washington with the top diplomat of Armenia, whose government agreed to the plan after a crushing Azerbaijani military victory in 2023 that ended a long-running conflict. The United States had proposed developing a corridor that would connect the larger part of Azerbaijan with its exclave of Nakhchivan, which is not linked otherwise with the rest of Azerbaijan and borders the country's key ally, Turkey. Armenia lies between these two parts of Azerbaijan. In the typical fashion of President Donald Trump's administration, the corridor is

named after him – the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) – and he has listed Armenia and Azerbaijan as beneficiaries of peace after a series of wars he claims to have ended.

A framework released by the State Department after Rubio's meeting said that Armenia would give the United States a 74 percent share in a new "TRIPP Development Company" and retain the rest for itself. The company will set up a corporate structure bringing together the two governments that will develop rail and road routes through the corridor, it said. The company's objectives will include giving a "financial return to the US for its initial contribution or other economic benefits to the US government or for US companies," the framework said.

The project will open new markets for US investment and speed up trade "to bring raw materials, critical minerals and rare

earth metals to American markets," it said. Speaking with Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan, Rubio said: "The TRIPP arrangement really is going to turn out to be a model for the world of how you can open yourself up to economic activity and prosperity without in any way questioning or undermining your sovereignty and your territorial integrity." "It's going to be great for Armenia, great for the United States, great for everyone involved," Rubio said.

Release of the project details come days after the United States deposed the leader of Venezuela and said that US companies whose proceeds would go back to buy US products. The United States previously announced \$145 million in funding for development of the Armenia corridor. The framework said that Armenia's sovereignty over the corridor would be "absolute and non-negotiable." Armenia will maintain the right to enforce its own domestic laws within the TRIPP area, including by controlling law enforcement. Some US policymakers hope that the corridor will also help reduce the influence of Russia, the historic ally of Armenia. Many Armenians voiced resentment that Moscow, bogged down in Ukraine, failed to prevent the Azerbaijani victory in 2023.

Armenian separatists for nearly three decades had the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh inside energy-rich Azerbaijan, which swept through the area in a lightning offensive in 2023. The TRIPP project, and the prospect of a major US presence, has raised concern in Iran, which also borders Nakhchivan and has had warm relations with Armenia.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan last year assured Iran's clerical government by saying that the corridor would remain under Armenian sovereignty. – APP

Pakistan appoints envoys

FROM PAGE 01
across key regions and enhance engagement with important partners worldwide.

Pak signs accord on dollar-linked stablecoin

FROM PAGE 01
with regulation, stability, and national interest." With sustained international interest and a structured, regulation-first approach, the authority said that Pakistan is increasingly being viewed as a market to watch in the evolution of global digital finance.

Pakistan dismisses Indian NSA's...

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rather than responsible statecraft. The statement came in response to media queries regarding the Indian NSA's "avenging history" remarks. The Foreign Office spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said that Pakistan had taken note of Doval's comments, which were made during a public address to young delegates in India earlier this week.

He said that such rhetoric undermines responsible diplomacy and regional stability. "We have seen the reports on remarks made by the National Security Advisor of India. Such rhetoric is hardly surprising coming from camouflaged hate-mongers, for whom imagined historical vendettas are a substitute for responsible statecraft," Andrabi said. The spokesperson's comments followed Doval's speech at the Vicks Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue on January 10, where the Indian official referred to the country's colonial past and spoke about strengthening India in various fields in order to "avenge" what he described as a painful history of attacks and subjugation. In his address, Doval cited the sacrifices of historical figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Subhash Chandra Bose and Bhagat Singh, arguing that their struggles should inspire India's future course. Although framed as a message to young people about "national development and security", the language of "revenge" and historical redress drew attention across the region, including in Pakistan, where it was viewed as politically charged and potentially destabilising. Doval said India must strengthen itself not only at its borders but also economically, socially and in other areas. He used the word "avenge" in reference to what he described as the country's historical experience of attacks and subjugation, and said that this sentiment could serve as a motivating force for national development.

Khabib slams Real Madrid star players after Alonso's departure

MADRID: UFC legend Khabib Nurmagomedov has slammed Real Madrid star players after Xabi Alonso left the club. Alonso departed Real by mutual agreement a day after their 3-2 defeat by bitter rivals Barcelona in the Spanish Super Cup, the La Liga club said on Monday. "Xabi Alonso will always have the love and admiration of all Real Madrid fans because he is a Real Madrid legend and has represented the values of our club at all times. Real Madrid will always be his home," the club said in a statement.

Briefs

Geoeconomic confrontation tops global risks in 2026: WEF

DUBAI: Geoconomic confrontation has emerged as the top global risk this year, followed by state-based armed conflict, according to a new World Economic Forum report. The Global Risks Report 2026, released on Wednesday, found that both risks climbed eight places year-on-year, underscoring a sharp deterioration in the global outlook amid increased international competition. The top five risks are geoeconomic confrontation (18 percent of respondents), state-based armed conflict (14 percent), extreme weather events (8 percent), societal polarization (7 percent) and misinformation and disinformation (7 percent). The WEF's Managing Director Saadia Zahidi said the report "offers an early warning system as the age of competition compounds global risks – from geoconomic confrontation to unchecked technology to rising debt – and changes our collective capacity to address them. "But none of these risks are a foregone conclusion." The report assesses risks across three timeframes: immediate (2026); short-to-medium term (next two years); and long term (next 10 years).—APP

Lebanon says France to host conference to support army

BEIRUT: Lebanon said Wednesday that a conference in support of the country's army as it seeks to disarm militant group Hezbollah would take place in Paris on March 5. The announcement follows recent promises of support to the military, which lacks funds, equipment and technical expertise. Presidency spokeswoman Najat Charafeddine said President Joseph Aoun met French envoy Jean-Yves Le Drian, Saudi envoy Yazid bin Farhan and ambassadors including from the US, Egypt and Qatar, discussing preparations for "a conference to support the Lebanese army and internal security forces." It was decided to hold the conference in Paris on March 5, to be opened by French President Emmanuel Macron," she said at the presidential palace. Under US pressure and fearing expanded Israeli strikes, Lebanon has committed to disarming the Iran-backed Hezbollah, which was badly weakened in more than a year of hostilities with Israel that largely ended in late 2024. Last week, Lebanon's army said it had completed the first phase of its plan to disarm the group, covering the area south of the Litani river, around 30 kilometers (20 miles) from the Israeli border.—APP

Kazakhstan to channel 240b tenge for geological exploration

ASTANA : In line with the Kazakh President's tasks to expand geological study of the country using modern exploration methods, the Government is set to launch a new stage of subsurface research at a more detailed scale, Qazinform News Agency reports.

Last year, 20 projects were developed to conduct geological mapping at a 1:50,000 scale over an area of 100,000 km², with plans to cover 30,000 km annually in the most promising regions. For comparison, Soviet-era mapping was carried out at a 1:200,000 scale. Over the next three years, 240 billion tenge, or nearly 500 million US dollars, will be channeled for implementing these projects, seismic surveys in underexplored sedimentary basins, and building modern geological infrastructure, against 469 million US dollars invested in geological exploration over the past 15 years. When selecting sites, factors such as resource depletion, lack or minimal presence of subsoil users, and potential for priority minerals were considered.—APP

Apparel exporters appeal PM for strong Pak presence at MAGIC USA 2026

Both organizations sought the PM's urgent intervention to ensure the establishment of a well-organized and visible Pakistan Pavilion at the event. In their letter, the two leading trade bodies highlighted that despite exporters completing their registrations, paying participation fees, and initiating buyer outreach, the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) has yet to confirm adequate arrangements for a national pavilion, causing anxiety among exporters, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises

DNA

LAHORE: The value-added textile and apparel export industry of Pakistan has expressed serious concern over the lack of timely arrangements by TDAP for Pakistan's participation in the internationally renowned trade exhibition "Sourcing at MAGIC", scheduled to be held from February 17-19, 2026, in Las Vegas, USA. In separate letters written to the Prime Minister Mr. Muhammad Shehzad Sharif, the Pakistan Readymade Garments Manufacturers & Exporters Association (PRGMEA) and the Pakistan Hosiery Manufacturers & Exporters Association (PHMA) pointed out that the value-added apparel sector contributes nearly 55% of total

textile exports, earns billions in foreign exchange, and provides employment to millions of workers across the country. Industry stakeholders view this exhibition as a critical platform for sustaining export growth, strengthening buyer confidence, and expanding Pakistan's footprint in the highly competitive North American apparel market. Both organizations sought the PM's urgent intervention to ensure the establishment of a well-organized and visible Pakistan Pavilion at the event. In their letter, the two leading trade bodies highlighted that despite exporters completing their registrations, paying participation fees, and initiating buyer outreach, the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) has yet to confirm adequate

arrangements for a national pavilion, causing anxiety among exporters, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). "Sourcing at MAGIC" is globally recognized as the largest and most influential apparel sourcing platform in North America, hosting over 2,000 international exhibitors and attracting more than 78,000 buyers, brands, and sourcing professionals from around the world. The exhibition offers unparalleled opportunities for networking, order booking, brand positioning, and long-term business development. TDAP has historically organized Pakistan's Pavilion at this exhibition, and its continued participation is essential to sustaining the country's credibility and visibility as a reliable source

ing destination for leading global apparel brands. The appeal has been endorsed by prominent industry leaders, including Mr. Abdul Hameed (Chairman North Zone, PHMA), Mr. Shahzad Azam Khan (Former Chairman, PHMA) Ijaz A. Khokhar (Former Chairman, PRGMEA), Sohail Afzal Sheikh (Former Chairman, PRGMEA), Mr. Mubashar Naseer Butt (Former Chairman, PRGMEA) and Mr. Rizwan Zubair (Acting Chairman, PRGMEA). The PHMA and PRGMEA leadership reaffirmed their commitment to working closely with the government to promote exports, enhance international market access, and project a strong, progressive, and competitive image of Pakistan's value-added textile and apparel industry on the global stage. The associations em

phasized that the current global trade environment presents a unique opportunity for Pakistan. Changes in U.S. tariff regimes have comparatively enhanced Pakistan's competitiveness against regional rivals. Countries such as India, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, and China consistently participate in Sourcing at MAGIC with large, professionally designed national pavilions, allowing them to aggressively market their products and secure substantial export orders. Any absence or weak representation by Pakistan would risk ceding market share to competitors at a time when export-led growth is critical for economic stability. PHMA and PRGMEA leaders recalled that in previous editions of the exhibition, strong buyer attendance was observed;

however, Pakistan's underrepresentation limited exporters' ability to fully capitalize on the opportunity. They stressed that without timely government facilitation, exporters' individual efforts may not yield optimal results, undermining months of preparation and investment by the industry. The joint appeal urged the Prime Minister to personally direct TDAP to immediately finalize arrangements for a prominent Pakistan Pavilion, ensuring appropriate space allocation, branding, and logistical support. The associations noted that time is running short, and any further delay could result in Pakistan missing this crucial opportunity to boost exports, enhance its international image, and support employment across the textile value chain.

High Commissioner M Saleem meets RCP Canada executive

High Commissioner Muhammad Saleem held meeting with Mr. Craig Ceppetelli, Executive Director and COO, Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada



Israeli firm loses British Army contract bid

LONDON: A UK subsidiary of Israeli weapons giant Elbit Systems has lost its bid to win a prominent British Army contract, The Times reported. The loss followed high-profile reporting on controversy surrounding Elbit Systems UK's handling of the bid. The subsidiary led one of two major arms consortiums attempting to secure the \$2.6 billion bid to prepare British soldiers for war and overhaul army standards. Rivaling Elbit, the other consortium led by Raytheon UK, a British subsidiary of the US defense giant, ultimately won the contract, a Ministry of Defence insider told The Times. It had been decided following an intricate process that Raytheon was a "better candidate," the source said. Elbit Systems UK's controversial handling of its contract campaign was revealed in reports by The Times. A whistleblower had compiled a dossier surrounding the bid that was shown to the MoD last August, though the report was privately revealed to the ministry months earlier. It alleged that Elbit UK had breached business appointment rules when Philip Kimber, a former British Army brigadier, had reportedly shared information with the firm after leaving the military. Kimber attending critical meetings at the firm to discuss the training contract that he had once overseen at the ministry, the report alleged. In one case, Kimber was present in an Elbit meeting and sitting out of view of a camera. He reportedly said he "should not be there," according to the whistleblower's report. In response to a freedom of information request, the MoD later admitted that it had held the dossier for seven months without investigating its claims. Insiders at the ministry blamed the investigative delay on "administrative oversight." A month after being pushed on the allegations by The Times, a senior civil servant completed an "assurance review" in September and found that business appointment rules had not been breached. Other allegations concerned lunches and dinners hosted by Elbit UK in which civil servants at the heart of the contract decision process were invited.—APP

France bans 10 British anti-migration activists from entering

PARIS: France's interior ministry said on Wednesday it has banned 10 British far-right activists from entering or staying in the country, after they carried out actions deemed to incite violence and seriously disturb public order on French territory. The activists, identified as members of a group called "Raise the Colors" that was involved in a national flag-raising campaign, seek to find and destroy boats used to carry migrants and spread propaganda on France's northern coast calling on the British public to join the movement to stop migration, according to the French interior ministry. "Our rule of law is non-negotiable, violent or hate-inciting actions have no place on our territory," French Interior Minister Laurent Nunez wrote on social media platform X on Wednesday. The ministry said in a statement it had been informed of the group's activities in December last year and that it had referred the matter to the relevant authorities, as the actions were likely to cause "serious disturbances" to public order.—APP

Chinese AI startup tops global embodied intelligence benchmark

Han Fengtao, founder and CEO of Spirit AI, said that Spirit v1.5 has a unified Vision-Language-Action (VLA) architecture that integrates perception, reasoning and action into an end-to-end system, reducing errors associated with established modular approaches

HANGZHOU: Chinese startup Spirit AI has said that its Spirit v1.5 embodied intelligence foundation model now ranks first according to the RoboChallenge real-world robotics benchmark, surpassing a leading U.S. model. According to the RoboChallenge leaderboard, Spirit v1.5 has achieved a total score of 66.09 with a task success rate of 50.33 percent, outperforming the pi0.5 model developed by U.S.-based Physical Intelligence. Spirit AI said it has open-sourced the leading model and related resources. RoboChallenge, which industry observers often describe as a "global exam" for robots, is a real-machine evaluation platform that tests embodied intelligence models in physical environments. Its benchmarking process includes 30 tasks covering everyday operations such as object placement, target recognition and tool use. In addition to achieving the highest overall score on the platform, Spirit v1.5 was also the only model to achieve a success rate above 50 percent, according to publicly available results. The enterprise was founded in Hangzhou, the capital city of east China's Zhejiang Province, which is also home to AI startup DeepSeek and humanoid robotics firm Unitree Robotics. It focuses on embodied intelligence and robotics research. In June 2025, the company unveiled its Mozi humanoid robot, targeting enterprise applications such as logistics and industrial scenarios. Qiu Jiefan, an associate professor at Zhejiang University of Technology, said the top ranking suggests Spirit v1.5 has demonstrated strong overall capabilities across general robotics tasks and real-world execution. "For embodied intelligence, the ability to understand and perform across multiple tasks and scenarios is very important," Qiu said, noting that while the technology is not yet ready for large-scale deployment, this latest result marks a significant step toward practical application. Han Fengtao, founder and CEO of Spirit AI, said that Spirit v1.5 has a unified Vision-Language-Action (VLA) architecture that integrates perception, reasoning and action into an end-to-end system, reducing errors associated with established modular approaches. He said the company expects a wider range of service robots to emerge within the next two to three years.—DNA

Witkoff meets COAS Asim Munir

The meeting reflected the growing interest of international private investment groups in Pakistan's evolving economic landscape and also signals rising global confidence in Pakistan's fintech potential and aims to strengthen financial inclusion and cross border digital finance

DNA

RAWALPINDI: A delegation of World Liberty Financial USA led by Mr. Zachary Witkoff, Chief Executive Officer of a leading global Fintech firm, called on Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), HJ, COAS & CDF. The meeting reflected the growing interest of international private investment groups in Pakistan's evolving economic landscape and also signals rising global confidence in Pakistan's

fintech potential and aims to strengthen financial inclusion and cross border digital finance. Mr. Witkoff highlighted the immense economic potential Pakistan holds and lauded the efforts of Pakistan's leadership in embracing futuristic technologies to realize the full possibilities of its economic prowess. Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir welcomed the exchange of views and emphasized Pakistan's commitment to economic stability, investor confidence, and enabling an environment conducive to responsible private sector participation in national development.



Dozens killed, 8,000 displaced as fighting escalates in Sudan's North Darfur, UN says

PARIS: France will open a consulate in Greenland on February 6, the foreign minister said Wednesday, calling the move a "political signal" over the strategic Danish territory, which US President Donald Trump has vowed to seize. The comments came on the day that Denmark's top diplomat is to meet senior US officials at the White House for talks over the future of vast, mineral-rich Arctic island. Since returning to office nearly a year ago, Trump has repeatedly mused about taking over Greenland from longtime ally and European Union member Denmark. French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot told French RTL broadcaster that the decision to open the consulate was taken last summer, when President Emmanuel Macron visited Greenland in a show of support. "For my part, I went there at the end of August to plan the consulate, which will open on February 6," he said. "It's a political signal that's associated with a desire to be more present in Greenland, including in the scientific field.—APP

Kazakhstan to channel 240b tenge for geological exploration

ASTANA : In line with the Kazakh President's tasks to expand geological study of the country using modern exploration methods, the Government is set to launch a new stage of subsurface research at a more detailed scale, Qazinform News Agency reports. Last year, 20 projects were developed to conduct geological mapping at a 1:50,000 scale over an area of 100,000 km², with plans to cover 30,000 km annually in the most promising regions. For comparison, Soviet-era mapping was carried out at a 1:200,000 scale. Over the next three years, 240 billion tenge, or nearly 500 million US dollars, will be channeled for implementing these projects, seismic surveys in underexplored sedimentary basins, and building modern geological infrastructure, against 469 million US dollars invested in geological exploration over the past 15 years. —APP

Briefs

Iran vows fast trials over protests

DNA

TEHRAN: Iran on Wednesday vowed fast-track trials for people arrested over a massive wave of protests, after US President Donald Trump threatened "very strong action" if the Islamic republic goes ahead with hangings. International outrage has built over a crackdown on the demonstrations, which a rights group said has likely killed thousands in one of the biggest challenges yet to Iran's clerical leadership.

Iranian authorities have insisted they have regained control of the country after successive nights of mass protests, repeatedly accusing the demonstrators of carrying out "acts of terror" of the kind committed by militant Islamic State group. Judiciary chief Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei said on a visit to a prison holding protest detainees that "if a person burned someone, beheaded someone and set them on fire then we must do our work quickly", in comments broadcast by state television. Iranian news agencies also quoted him as saying the trials should be held in public and said he had spent five hours in a prison in Tehran to examine the cases.

PPP continues to question deforestation in Capital

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The PPP on Wednesday continued questioning the government on the recent deforestation in Islamabad, expressing dissatisfaction with the answers given by the government in a session of the National Assembly (NA) a day earlier. In the past few days, there has been widespread criticism over the cutting of thousands of mature trees in various locations of the federal capital, including the levelling of acres of tree cover around Shakarparyan. On Tuesday, Minister of State for Interior Talla Chaudhry had informed lawmakers that 29,115 trees had been removed from the Islamabad Capital Territory region (ICT), but that more than this number would be planted in the coming months.

PPP lawmaker Shazia Marrri, addressing a press conference, said that the issue had been raised in the NA as "all parliamentarians were concerned", hoping that they would receive answers to the "questions that have been flying about". However, she said, the response by the state minister for interior during Tuesday's NA session had only raised more questions. "Sometimes it is said that it is because of pollen allergies ... yesterday another impression was given, that there are some brown districts and some green districts – so you have to keep some brown and some green," Marrri said.

Aurangzeb admits some firms leaving Pakistan amid high taxes

There are 20 new foreign investors entered Pakistani market in last 18 months: Aurangzeb

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb on Wednesday admitted that some firms are leaving the country due to high taxes and expensive energy, stressing that the government is fully aware of the challenges facing the economy. However, the finance minister said there are 20 new foreign investors, including Google, Aramco, Wafi Energy, Turkish Petroleum, and others entered the Pakistani market in the last 18 months. "There are firms which are also leaving that is true...if the taxation is high or the energy cost is high or its financing cost is always moving in the right direction, those have been real issues," he said while addressing the Pakistan Policy Dialogue in Islamabad.

The finance minister said that high taxes and high energy cost remain "real problem for businesses," adding that the government has begun reforms to reduce the burden on the national exchequer and bring economic stability.

FinMin Auragzeb also pointed out the business models of firms leaving the country. "But those firms which have been able to look at business models...because it takes two to tango, what the government has to do, and what the private sector has to do, and if you have wedged into their business models for the last 50 years it's not going to work in the New World Order."

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The finance minister said some of the multinational firms switched to local sourcing "because of that their margins are fine [and] they are now able to export, therefore they stay." "And if another firm has not been able to do that, then that's something we know they need to think through," he added. Aurangzeb said that structural reforms are underway across the country and that the transformation process of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) is continuing. "Compliance and enforcement are essential to ensure imple-

mentation of tax laws," he added. The minister said that the tax policy is now with the Ministry of Finance, adding that the FBR's role is limited to collecting tax revenues. Regarding state-owned enterprises, the minister said that nearly Rs 1 trillion is wasted annually due to the inefficiency of some state-owned institutions. "According to a report, we are losing close to a trillion rupees every single year, and we can put it to much better use as we go forward," he added.

Aurangzeb said that as part of cost-cutting measures, Utility Stores, PWD, and PASCO have been closed due to "corruption" in the subsidies. He said that 24 organisations have been handed over to the Privatisation Commission, adding that Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) privatisation saw participation from local investors. Addressing public debt, he said that interest payments remain the largest expenditure and that a Debt Management Office has been established to improve efficiency. "Last year, Rs85 billion was saved on interest payments, and similar savings are expected in the current fiscal year."



MANAMA: President Asif Ali Zardari in a meeting with His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa at Al-Qudaibiya Palace. — DNA

Petrol price expected to drop by Rs4.59 per litre from Jan 16

Anticipated reduction is attributed to fluctuations in international oil market driven by geopolitical risks

ISLAMABAD: Petroleum product prices are expected to fall by up to Rs4.59 per litre from January 16 for the next fortnight, The News reported on Wednesday.

international oil market driven by geopolitical risks, supply concerns and changing demand dynamics.

Following the United States' increased control over Venezuelan crude oil exports, global oil prices came under downward pressure. However, persistent uncertainty has caused prices to oscillate in both directions.

Oil market forecasters have largely predicted that prices in 2026 will fall further than in 2025, when global benchmarks lost nearly 20% of their value.

Brent crude is forecast to average below \$60 per barrel, while West Texas Intermediate (WTI) is expected to hover around \$50 per barrel, with the possibility of falling even lower during the year. Based on current projections, the revised prices are expected to stand at Rs248.58 per litre for petrol, Rs254.38 for HSD, Rs169.06 for kerosene and Rs144.10 per litre for LDO.

Pak , UAE move closer to CEPA as technical talks near conclusion, says Jam Kamal

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan on Wednesday said that Pakistan and United Arab Emirates (UAE) are moving closer to the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) as technical talks near conclusion. Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to Pakistan, Salem Mohammed Salem Al Babaw Al Zaabi, called on Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan at his office here, where both sides reaffirmed their commitment to deepening bilateral economic ties and expediting progress on the Pakistan-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), said a release issued here. Khan underscored the historical, strategic, and people-to-people bonds between Pakistan and the UAE, describing the relationship as strong and time-tested across political, defence, and social spheres. He emphasized, however, that both countries are keen to translate this closeness into a more robust and balanced trade and investment partnership that reflects the true potential of bilateral relations. The minister highlighted Pakistan's ongoing economic reforms and reaffirmed the government's resolve to create a more enabling environment for business and investment. He noted that despite short-term challenges faced by the private sector due to stabilization measures, the government remains focused on medium-term growth, export expansion, and regional connectivity, particularly through partnerships with Gulf countries.

Ambassador Al Zaabi appreciated Pakistan's reform efforts and the professionalism of the technical teams engaged in CEPA negotiations. He lauded Pakistan's market size, human capital, and strategic location, and conveyed the UAE's strong interest in expanding cooperation in trade, logistics, ports, infrastructure, manufacturing, and investment facilitation. Both sides also discussed opportunities for joint ventures, trilateral cooperation in third-country markets, and enhanced collaboration in emerging regions such as Central Asia and Africa. The meeting concluded with a shared resolve to maintain close coordination and ensure the timely completion of CEPA process, paving the way for a new phase of mutually beneficial economic partnership between Pakistan and the UAE. — APP

Over 20 killed in train accident at China-backed project in Thailand

BEIJING: A crane at a China-backed high-speed rail project in Thailand collapsed onto and derailed a passenger train on Wednesday, killing at least 22 people and injuring scores, local authorities said.

Footage from the scene verified by AFP showed the crane's broken structure resting on giant concrete pillars, with smoke rising from the wreckage of the train below. Rescuers worked to extract passengers from the tilted carriages in Nakhon Ratchasima province, northeast of the capital Bangkok. Thatchapon Chinnawong, the district police chief, told AFP that 22 people had been confirmed dead and 80 more were injured. "We are now asking the hospital to say how many people are in critical condition," Thatchapon said.

"At around 9:00am, I heard a loud noise, like something sliding down from above, followed by two explosions," said 54-year-old local resident Mitr Intrpanya, who was at the scene. "When I went to see what had happened, I found the crane sitting on a passenger train with three carriages."

"The metal from the crane appeared to strike the middle of the second carriage, slicing

it in half," Mitr told AFP. The accident happened at a construction site that is part of a \$5.4-billion project backed by Beijing to build a high-speed rail network in Thailand. It aims to connect Bangkok to Kunming in China via Laos by 2028 as part of China's vast Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

"A crane collapsed onto a train causing it to derail and catch fire," the Nakhon Ratchasima provincial public relations department said in a statement. Live footage aired by local media showed rescue workers rushing to the scene, with a brightly coloured train derailed on its side as smoke billowed from the debris. Thatchapon, the police chief, later told AFP that authorities were pausing the rescue operation due to "chemical leakage" at the scene. The Nakhon Ratchasima provincial department said the train was travelling from Bangkok to Ubon Ratchathani province. Transport Minister Phiphat Ratchaprapha said 195 people were on board the train and authorities were rushing to identify the deceased. He ordered officials to determine the cause of the accident, according to a statement. — Agencies

Pakistan in talks with several countries to sell JF-17 fighter jets

China's consent will be part of any such deal, says Defence Production Minister Raza Hayat Haraj

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Defence Production Raza Hayat Haraj has confirmed that Pakistan is in talks with several countries over potential agreements to sell JF-17 Thunder fighter jets. In an interview with the BBC, the minister said negotiations were underway with multiple states for the export of the multi-role combat aircraft, which has been jointly developed by Pakistan and China. He added that any agreement would require China's consent, given its role in the development of the JF-17. "These negotiations are taking place and they take some time. Many countries are interested in these aircraft," the minister said.

Reuters has repeatedly published reports, citing official sources, mentioning talks with Libya, Sudan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia regarding defence agreements, particularly sale of JF-17 Thunder jets. However, Minister Raza Haraj avoided naming any country, saying: "These are classified matters. I cannot name any country or say at what level our talks with them are". "When these aircraft are delivered, the world will know which countries have bought them," the minister said. The minister said, "Performance of JF-17 Thunder jets during the Pakistan-India war was seen by air forces around the world, and it was praised". Raza Haraj said in addition to its performance, the price of the fighter jet is also "an important factor". He said globally, the average price of such

aircraft ranges between \$250 and \$350 million, whereas JF-17 Thunder is priced lower than that. He said: "Its price is approximately \$40 to \$50 million".

Raza Haraj explained: "Some parts of this aircraft are manufactured in China and some in Pakistan. Whenever we enter into any agreement with someone, China will be included in it". When asked whether China would also be a financial partner in such agreements, the minister said: "Many issues are discussed at the table. China is fully involved, it should be, and it is its right".

Analysts who monitor Pakistan's defence and military capabilities believe Pakistan will need to exercise caution in concluding agreements related to JF-17 Thunder. Analysts believe China is "senior partner" in joint JF-17 Thunder project and will closely monitor negotiations related to its export. Another analyst says: "Pakistan can sell these aircraft, but technology will remain under China's control. Export of JF-17 Thunder will be a joint China-Pakistan arrangement, with China as the senior partner". Commenting on potential JF-17 Thunder sales, the minister said: "This aircraft is not for sale to every country. We want to ensure that we sell it only to friendly countries". When the minister was asked about the defence agreement signed between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia last year, he said its details could not be shared. "This is a defence agreement between Field Marshal Asim Munir, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and the Saudi government. I cannot say anything more than this".

Venezuelans regain access to social network X after yearlong block

CARACAS: The social network X was once again accessible in Venezuela on Tuesday, more than a year after users were blocked by deposed president Nicolas Maduro, who was captured by US forces last week. Interim president Delcy Rodriguez updated her bio — she served as vice president under Maduro — and wrote: "Let us stay united, moving toward economic stability, social justice, and the welfare state we deserve to aspire to."

Access remained spotty to the social media network owned by billionaire Elon Musk, who engaged in heated online exchanges with the ousted Venezuelan leader, until Maduro lashed out in retaliation for criticism of his contested 2024 election and shut X down.

After the July 2024 election, Maduro was declared the winner amid allegations of fraud and suspended the platform in August.

Prior to that, X had been a prominent social media network for Venezuelans, but the blockade meant ministers, lawmakers and government institutions stopped updating their pages.

Rodriguez assumed power after Maduro was captured by US military forces on January 3 along with his wife, during attacks that left more than 100 dead, according to official figures.

The couple faces US charges of alleged drug trafficking. Maduro's X account was also updated with a photo of the deposed leader and his wife, Cilia Flores. "We want you back," the post reads. — Agencies

Danish foreign minister heads to White House

WASHINGTON: Denmark's top diplomat visits the White House on Wednesday in a high-stakes attempt to lower the temperature on Greenland, which US President Donald Trump has vowed to seize from longtime ally.

Danish Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen had sought the talks with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio. The meeting will take place at the White House, after Vice President JD Vance requested to join.

On requesting the meeting, Lokke said he was hoping to "clear up certain misunderstandings." But it remains to be seen if the Trump administration also sees a misunderstanding and if it wants to climb down.

Trump, when asked Tuesday about Greenland's leader saying that the island prefers to remain an autonomous territory of Denmark, said: "Well that's their problem."

"Don't know anything about him, but that's going to be a big problem for him," Trump said. Trump, a real-estate developer, said on Friday that he wanted Greenland "whether they like it or not" and "if we don't do it the easy way, we're going to do it the hard way." — Agencies

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