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China greatly values relations with Pak, says vice minister

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Police officers to get world class training

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Briefs

Pak wants robust ties with Bahrain

NEWS DESK

MANAMA: President Asif Ali Zardari, who is on a four-day visit to Bahrain, highlighted on Thursday that Pakistan's strategic geographic connectivity, linking South Asia, Central Asia, China and the Middle East, complemented the Gulf country's financial expertise and regulatory framework. He expressed these views while addressing a reception at the headquarters of Bahrain's Economic Development Board (EDB), which is an investment promotion agency, a statement by the President's Office said.

In his address, the president underscored Pakistan's commitment to expanding economic cooperation, investment partnerships and institutional linkages with Bahrain, the statement said. He "noted that the Economic Development Board plays a central role in shaping Bahrain's economic strategy, attracting foreign investment and supporting diversification across key sectors."

Is Taliban faced with internal rift?

MONITORING DESK

KABUL: It was a piece of audio obtained by the BBC that revealed what worries the Taliban's leader most. Not an external danger, but one from within Afghanistan, which the Taliban seized control of as the previous government collapsed and the US withdrew in 2021. He warned of "insiders in the government" pitted against each other in the Islamic Emirate the Taliban set up to govern the country. In the leaked clip, the supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada can be heard giving a speech saying that internal disagreements could eventually bring them all down.

"As a result of these divisions, the emirate will collapse and end," he warned. Javid Ashna / Middle East Images / AFP via Getty Images Composite image shows headshots of three members of the Taliban - on the left, Taliban Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani, in the centre is Afghan leader Hibatullah Akhundzada and on the right is Acting Defence Minister of Afghanistan Mohammad Yaqoob Mujahid.

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Bangladesh not joining Gaza force

NEWS DESK

DHAKA: Facing domestic backlash, Bangladesh has backtracked on its initial interest in joining the US-planned military force in Gaza, with the interim administration saying it would leave the decision to the government appointed after next month's polls. The possibility of Bangladesh joining the International Stabilization Force - a part of US President Donald Trump's controversial Gaza peace plan - was floated by National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman last week, during his visit to Washington D.C., where he said he had "expressed Bangladesh's interest in principle" to join it. The announcement was immediately met with criticism from civil society at home, where any move perceived as undermining Bangladesh's support for the Palestinians is unlikely to be popular.

India not in 75 countries list

Pak in touch with US over visa issue: FO

Spokesperson rejects Indian army chief's allegations as politically motivated, hopes peace will prevail in Iran

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is in touch with the US officials on the suspension of immigrant visa processing, hoping that the process "will resume soon," Foreign Office Spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said on Thursday.

The statement comes as US State Department has ordered an indefinite pause on immigrant visa processing for applicants from 75 countries including Pakistan, effective January 21, 2026. "The State Department will pause immigrant visa processing from 75 countries whose migrants take welfare from the American people at unacceptable rates," the department said in a post on X.

It added that the freeze will remain active until the US can ensure that new immigrants will not extract wealth from the American people. Addressing a weekly briefing in Islamabad today, the spokesperson said that Foreign Office had also seen a "brief statement" issued by the US State Department about an internal review. He added that Pakistan is in touch with US authorities to seek further details, describing the situation as evolving. "We are in touch with US authorities to ascertain further details ... this is an evolving news that we are following. We understand this is internal ongoing process of review of US immigration. (We) hope that routine processing of immigrant visa will resume soon." Meanwhile, speaking on US-Iran tensions, the FO spokesperson said that Pakistan is closely monitoring the ongoing developments in Tehran. He said while speaking to Reuters: "All these people who were waiting for a long time for

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani immigration agents and citizens voiced concerns on Thursday after the administration of US President Donald Trump announced a suspension of immigrant visa processing for applicants from 75 countries, including Pakistan.

A US State Department spokesperson said a day earlier that the Trump administration is suspending immigrant visa processing for nationals of 75 countries as part of Washington's intensified immigration crackdown. The pause is set to take effect from January 21.

The suspension will affect applicants from a wide range of regions, including Latin American countries such as Brazil, Colombia and Uruguay, Balkan states including Bosnia and Albania, South Asian nations Pakistan and Bangladesh, as well as several countries across Africa, the Middle East and the Caribbean. "It is a matter of concern," Mohammad Yaseen, a travel and immigration agent in Karachi, said while speaking to Reuters. "All these people

who were waiting for a long time for

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Amidst huge public criticism IHC orders halting tree-cutting drive

Court issues notice to CDA, Ministry of Climate, Pepa; seeks detailed report by February 2

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The ongoing tree-cutting drive by the Capital Development Authority (CDA) has been put on hold by the Islamabad High Court (IHC).

The court on Thursday issued notices to the CDA, Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency (Pepa) and the Ministry of Climate Change, seeking a clause-wise response and detailed report from all parties on the petition by February 2. IHC's Justice Khadim Hussain Soomro's order came during a plea filed by a citizen Muhammad Naveed Ahmed on the said matter.

The issue of CDA's tree-cutting drive in the federal capital has been the talk of the town in recent days and has become a point of contention between the ruling coalition, where the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) have expressed concern about the cutting of trees.

The Islamabad district administration,

last week, asserted that the tree-cutting campaign was targeted at paper mulberry trees, saying they were causing health issues in the federal capital. The CDA, in over a year, has also removed nearly 30,000 paper mulberry trees, including 8,700 allergy-causing trees in the city to mitigate the intensity of pollen allergy.

DDG Environment Dr Samina Pasha has said that non-allergenic trees being planted include Amaltas, Jacaranda, Arjun and other species. Addressing the matter, Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry had earlier informed the National Assembly that that only the allergy-causing paper mulberry trees had been removed and that 60,000 trees would be planted by the end of March, in addition to more than 40,000 mature trees that have already been planted. Separately, Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination Dr Musadik Malik has also said that the CDA will plant three

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Pakistan-Saudi-Turkiye defence deal in pipeline, says minister

Minister for Defence Production says draft agreements already available with all three countries

CENTRELINE REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkiye have prepared a draft defence agreement after nearly a year of talks, Minister for Defence Production Raza Hayat Harraj said, a signal they could be seeking a bulwark against a flare-up of regional violence in the last two years. Harraj told foreign news agency that potential deal between the three regional powers was separate from a bilateral Saudi-Pakistani accord announced last year. A final consensus between the three states is needed to complete the deal, he said.

"The Pakistan-Saudi-Turkiye trilateral agreement is something that is already in pipeline," Harraj said in an interview. "The draft agreement is already available with us. The draft agreement is already with Saudi Arabia. The draft agreement is already available with Turkiye. And all three countries are deliberating. And this agreement has been there for the last 10 months." Asked at a press conference in Istanbul on Thursday about media reports on negotiations

Iran reopens airspace after brief closure amid tensions with US

DNA

TEHRAN: Iran reopened its airspace after a closure of nearly five hours, imposed amid concerns over possible military action between the United States and Iran, which forced airlines to cancel, divert or delay several flights. Iran closed its airspace to all flights, except authorised international arrivals and departures, at 5:15pm ET (2215 GMT) on Wednesday, according to a notice on the US Federal Aviation Administration website. The notice was withdrawn shortly before 10pm ET (0300 GMT), flight-tracking service

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif inaugurates the Pakistan Asan Khidmat Center in Islamabad on 15 January 2026. — DNA

Asan Khidmat Markaz opened

PM Shehbaz praises Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev support

The prime minister directed Federal Minister Ahad Cheema, in coordination with the Capital Development Authority (CDA), to further expand the facility and ensure its swift replication

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday extended his gratitude to the President of Azerbaijan for his extraordinary support in establishing Pakistan's first Asan Khidmat Markaz being inaugurated here amid describing it as a key intervention towards citizen-centric governance, improved public service delivery and ease of doing business.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony after touring the facility, the prime minister thanked Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev in establishing the centre modelled on Azerbaijan's internationally acclaimed public service system. He said the initiative would not have been possible without Azerbaijan's cooperation and guidance.

Prime Minister also acknowledged the role of the Chairman of the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations (SAPSSI) of Azerbaijan, the Pakistani ambassador, and other stakeholders for their unwavering sup-

port. He lauded the minister and secretary of information technology, along with allied departments, for their collective efforts in operationalising the centre.

PM Sharif underlined that the Asan Khidmat Markaz got multiple public services under one roof, including those of Nadra, the Foreign Office, Police department, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and other departments, aimed at facilitating citizens and businesses through efficient, transparent and courteous service delivery.

He noted that the staff deployed at the centre had received specialised training in Azerbaijan from master trainers, and stressed that courtesy, professionalism and a welcoming demeanour must be the hallmark of public service.

"Your behaviour should inspire the people who come here and raise the overall quality of services," he told the staff. The prime minister mentioned that he was deeply impressed by the efficiency and responsiveness of Azerbaijan's

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Rising tensions

US slaps new sanctions on Iran

Trump says killings in Iran's crackdown on nationwide protests were subsidising

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: In a latest development, the United States has slapped new sanctions on Iran. Certain individuals and institutions are likely to be hit by the new wave of curbs. Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump said killings in Iran's crackdown on nationwide protests were subsidising and he believed there was no plan for large-scale executions of protesters, as analysts and diplomats warned of possible risks from a US military intervention.

Trump's comments during an Oval Office event come as fears have escalated in the Middle East that the United States could launch strikes on Iran, following the US president's repeated threats to intervene on behalf of protesters. He did not rule out possible US military intervention, however. Some experts and regional diplomats warn that military intervention could backfire by smothering protests, fueling an intensified crackdown on those who participated and triggering retaliatory Iranian

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Govt vows full protection for polio workers

RAWALPINDI :Senior parliamentarian, Tahira Aurangzeb MNA on Thursday strongly condemned any mistreatment of polio workers and reaffirmed the government's unwavering commitment to ensuring their complete safety and respect. While welcoming the frontline health workers with tea at her home, Tahira Aurangzeb praised their tireless dedication. "Polio workers are performing their duties with utmost sincerity and passion, any kind of misconduct towards them will not be tolerated, and the government stands fully committed to protecting their honour and security", she said. She urged all parents to extend full cooperation to the polio teams and ensure that every child receives polio drops without fail. "Your positive and supportive attitude is extremely important for the success of the anti-polio campaign", she said. The polio workers briefed the MNA on the various challenges and ground realities they encounter during door-to-door campaigns. They highlighted that house-to-house marking is done solely to facilitate parents and maintain accurate records of vaccinated children. Tahira Aurangzeb reiterated that the government, under the leadership of Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz, has taken decisive and far-reaching steps toward eradicating polio. She noted a significant decline in polio cases and expressed optimism that Pakistan could become completely polio-free by 2026. The polio workers appreciated the MNA's encouragement and support, describing the interaction as a morale booster for their ongoing efforts in the field.—APP

KP Governor
meets Saudi
envoy,
discusses aid
for TDPs

ISLAMABAD: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundis visited the Saudi Embassy in Islamabad and met with Saudi Ambassador to Pakistan Nawaf bin Saeed Al-Maliki. During the meeting, matters of mutual interest were discussed, with a particular focus on the law and order situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The KP Governor also held talks with the Saudi envoy regarding the provision of Saudi humanitarian assistance for the temporary displaced persons (TDPs) who were forced to migrate from district Khyber. —APP

Meeting reviews progress on slaughter- house project

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A meeting regarding the Islamabad Slaughterhouse Project was held at the CDA Headquarters on Thursday, chaired by Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa. The meeting was attended by CDA Board Member Engineering Syed Nafasat Raza, Member Planning and Design, Dr. Khalid Hafiz, DG Resources Shakeel Ahmed, DG Works, consultants and other senior officers. During the meeting, detailed discussions were held on the progress of the Islamabad Slaughterhouse Project. While briefing the meeting, it was informed that the Islamabad Slaughterhouse Project will be constructed under the Public-Private Partnership model. It will ensure the provision of modern and state-of-the-art facilities.

It was further informed that under this project, facilities such as a modern abattoir and chilling rooms will be provided. All facilities of the Islamabad Slaughterhouse will be available under a service model. Similarly, a commercial area and an area for animal trading have also been allocated in the Slaughterhouse. The financial model of the Islamabad Slaughterhouse was also considered in the meeting. Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa directed that the design and model of this project be presented before the CDA Board and the Meat Board. He said that the completion of the project will help meet the meat requirements of the residents of the twin cities and also assist in exporting meat to international markets. Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa further said that all resources are being utilized to provide the best possible facilities to the citizens of the Federal Capital, Islamabad.

Advisor to Chairman Senate, discuss bilateral ties with UAE envoy

Ms. Misbah Khar underscored that Pakistan greatly values its close and time-tested relations with the UAE, which are rooted in shared history, mutual respect, and strong people-to-people bonds

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Advisor to Chairman Senate and Ambassador to the Inter-Parliamentary Speakers' Conference (ISC), Ms. Misbah Khar, held a meeting with the Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in Islamabad and exchanged views on Pakistan-UAE bilateral relations. During the meeting, both sides discussed avenues for enhancing cooperation in investment, trade, and broader economic opportunities. Emphasis was placed on further strengthening collaboration across diverse sectors to unlock mutual benefits and promote sustainable economic growth. Ms. Misbah Khar underscored that Pakistan greatly values its close and time-tested relations with the UAE, which are rooted in shared history, mutual respect, and strong people-to-people bonds. She highlighted the importance of high-level exchanges and sustained engagement at multiple levels, including government-to-government, people-to-people, and parliament-to-parliament interactions, to further deepen bilateral ties. The UAE Ambassador congratulated Ms. Misbah Khar on the successful hosting of the Inter-Parliamentary Speakers' Conference (ISC) in Islamabad last November and appreciated Pakistan's efforts in promoting parliamentary diplomacy. Both sides agreed that parliamentary exchanges have proven to be a fruitful means of bringing people closer and strengthening mutual understanding. The meeting reaffirmed the shared commitment of Pakistan and the UAE to enhancing cooperation through high-level engagements and parliamentary collaboration, thereby boosting bilateral relations and expanding cooperation across diverse fields.



Salik inaugurates five modern hospitals in Balochistan

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development Chaudhry Salik Hussain on Thursday inaugurated five newly built, fully equipped 25-bed Workers' Hospitals in Balochistan's remote mining regions, including Pishin, Dalbandin, Nokundi, Chama-lang and Muslim Bagh. The inauguration ceremony was attended by provincial ministers, Members of the Provincial Assembly from Pishin, Labour Advisor Balochistan Sardar Ghulam Rasool Umranji Provincial Minister Noor Muhammad Dummar, Federal Secretary Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry, Secretary Workers Welfare Fund Zulfiqar Ahmed, senior officials of the Balochistan Health Department, officers of the Workers Welfare Fund Balochistan, representatives of workers' organizations, and a large number of workers.

Federal Minister Chaudhry Salik Hussain, while addressing the ceremony, said the initiative reflected more than an official duty. He noted that he stood there as a Pakistani paying tribute to the sacrifices and hard work of miners. He added that the hospitals being established were not mere structures, but a solemn pledge by the State of Pakistan to safeguard the welfare of its workers. He informed that these hospitals have been constructed in accordance with the guidelines of the International Labour Organization (ILO) to provide safe, dignified, and free medical facilities to industrial and mining workers. He further stated that although these hospitals were constructed in 2018, they remained non-functional due to the lack of medical equipment and the absence of MoUs. However, through the joint efforts of the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development and the Government of Balochistan, these hospitals have now been fully activated and handed over to the Balochistan Health Department. The Federal Minister clarified that these hospitals will not be limited only to workers and their families; rather, the general public of Balochistan will also be able to benefit from these medical facilities without discrimination and free of cost. "The workers of Balochistan are our top priority. The Federal Government will continue to take all possible measures for their health, safety, dignity, and welfare," he added. On the occasion, the Federal Minister expressed special gratitude to Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, stating that due to his worker-friendly policies and vision, such welfare projects are being materialized.—DNA

Bio-saline farming project reclaims 460 acres

claimed 460 acres of salt-affected and waterlogged land across four districts, achieving nearly 70 percent of its overall target under the "Bio Saline Agriculture Research & Development Phase-II" project. The project aims to reclaim a total of 600 acres by June 30, 2026, and is being implemented under the Directorate General of Agriculture Research Sindh with funding from the provincial Annual Development Programme (ADP). Director General Agriculture Research Sindh Dr Mazharuddin Keerio told Wealth Pakistan that the reclaimed land is located in Tharparkar, Umerkot, Tando Adam and Khairpur Mirs districts which are severely affected by soil salinity and waterlogging. He said the core objective of the project is to convert saline and waterlogged land into arable farmland through the cultivation of crops and plants that can tolerate high salinity and excess moisture. Over time, this biological

structure, enabling the land to support a broader range of crops. Currently, crops such as falsa, chiko (sapodilla), isabgol (psyllium), mustard, lemon and berries are being grown under the project, as these varieties are well suited to saline and waterlogged conditions, he said. "We expect that within the next five years, this land will become fertile enough to support additional crops as well. The aim is to gradually transform infertile land into productive farmland," Keerio said. The bio-saline agriculture project was approved on October 5, 2022, and was initially launched in Tharparkar, Khairpur Mirs and Umerkot. Key activities under the initiative include experimental research and the establishment of demonstration plots on farmers' fields using salt-tolerant crops, trees, grasses and plant species. These measures are intended to enhance land productivity, raise farm incomes and support poverty reduction in rural areas.—APP

Anti-encroachment drive in Peshawar division ordered

PESHAWAR :Commissioner Peshawar Division, Riaz Khan Mehsud on Thursday convened an emergency meeting to launch a decisive operation against encroachments and to improve sanitation conditions across all five districts of the Peshawar Division. The meeting was called in response to public complaints received during an online Facebook open court (Khuli Kachehri). Deputy Commissioners, District Police Officers, and concerned municipal officials from Peshawar, Nowshera, Charsadda, Mohmand tribal district, and Khyber district will attend the session. During the meeting, a comprehensive strategy will

honorariums to religious scholars, action against professional beggars, and disciplinary measures against negligent or incompetent government officials. Reports from all concerned departments have been sought within 24 hours. Speaking directly to the public, Commissioner Riaz Khan Mehsud thanked citizens for their active participation in the open court and announced that such sessions would be held regularly every week. He said that open courts would help bridge the gap between the public and the government, strengthen coordination, and pave the way for lasting solutions to public issues.—APP

Pakistani student develops Urdu ChatGPT

PESHAWAR. Taimoor Hassan, a Pakistani student studying in the United States has developed and officially launched Pakistan's own Urdu ChatGPT, "Qalb", marking a historic milestone in the country's digital journey. "Qalb is now recognized as the world's largest Large Language Model created exclusively for the Urdu language," claims Taimoor in a message shared on Thursday. Taimoor Hassan is a young serial entrepreneur who has successfully launched and exited 13 startups. He is a former winner of the Microsoft Cup and has represented Pakistan at international forums. Taimoor completed his BS in Computer Science from FAAST University Peshawar Campus and is currently pursuing further studies in the United States while working on advanced technology and artificial intelligence projects. "Trained on a massive dataset of 1.97 billion tokens and benchmarked across seven-plus international evaluation frameworks, Qalb outperforms existing Urdu-focused AI models on key real-world performance indicators, setting a new standard for natural language processing in Pakistan," Taimoor claimed. "This is a development model and in the next phase we would soon launch App for mobile and web so that people could use and benefit from Qalb ChatGPT," he told APP.

National Days and Armed Forces Days

JANUARY

Jan 01 / CUBA Revolution Day

Jan 01 / Palestine Palestine Revolution Day

Jan 01 / Sudan National Day

Jan 04 / Myanmar Independence Day

Jan 06 / Iraq Armed Forces Day

Jan 12 / Tanzania Armed Forces Day

Jan 14 / Uzbekistan Armed Forces Day

Jan 15 / Nigeria Armed Forces Day

Jan 20 / Mali Armed Forces Day

Jan 20 / Laos Armed Forces Day

Jan 25 / Thailand Armed Forces Day

Jan 26 / Australia National Day

Jan 26 / India Republic Day

Turkish Airlines.....8494949



Emergency

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



Hospitals

CMH.....5611111
 MH.....561116
 Cantt Hospital.....9270907-11
 DHO.....5556311-4
 RGH.....9290301-7
 Holy Family.....9290322-7
 PIMS.....9261170-79
 Polyclinic.....9218300-09
 Shifa International 4603666



Departments

CDA.....9221334-43
 CDA.....9208301-04
 Met Office.....9250360-6
 RDA.....5555864
 TMA.....5770886
 Cantonment Board 927015-3



Islamabad Metropolitan

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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Floral tribute at Pak-Romania friendship monument in Capital

Speaking on the occasion, Ambassador Dan Stoenescu highlighted the significance of Romania's National Culture Day and emphasized the enduring importance of poetry, culture, and intellectual exchange in strengthening ties between nations

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A floral tribute ceremony was held at the Pakistan Romania Friendship Monument in Islamabad to mark Romania's National Culture Day and the birth anniversary of Romania's national poet Mihai Eminescu. The event was organized by the Policy Institute for Peace and Development (PIP). The ceremony was attended by H.E. Mr. Dan Stoenescu, Ambassador of Romania to Pakistan, along with officials of the Romanian Embassy. Representing PIPD, Wadana Gul Khattak, President of the Policy Institute for Peace and Development, participated along with members of the institute. Floral wreaths were laid at the monument, which honors both Mihai Eminescu and Allama Muhammad Iqbal, symbolizing the shared cultural and intellectual heritage of Romania and Pakistan. Speaking on the occasion, Ambassador Dan Stoenescu highlighted the significance of Romania's National Culture Day and emphasized the enduring importance of poetry, culture, and intellectual exchange in strengthening ties between nations. He appreciated Pakistan's respect for Eminescu's legacy and underlined the role of cultural diplomacy in fostering mutual understanding between Romania and Pakistan. On this occasion, Wadana Gul Khattak emphasized that the Pakistan Romania Friendship Monument stands as a powerful symbol of people-to-people ties and cultural dialogue. He reaffirmed PIPD's commitment to promoting cultural diplomacy, mutual respect, and international friendship through such initiatives. The ceremony concluded with a renewed commitment to strengthening cultural cooperation and fostering deeper people-to-people relations between Pakistan and Romania.



PNCA hosts three-day intensive stage workshop

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) turned into a vibrant hub of creativity and learning as it successfully hosted a three-day intensive theatre and acting workshop, drawing an impressive number of participants from across the performing arts community. Led by renowned theatre practitioner, arts educator and programme organizer Dr. Waqar Azeem, the workshop attracted students, emerging artists and seasoned profes-

sionals, reflecting a growing national interest in structured theatre education and professional skill development. The programme offered a rich, hands-on learning environment, highlighting theatre and acting as powerful tools of human expression, social awareness and creative growth. Through interactive sessions and practical exercises, participants explored body language, facial expression, voice modulation, imagination and scene creation, while also gaining

insight into the collaborative dynamics of directing and stage production. Director General PNCA, Muhammad Ayoub Jammali lauded Dr. Waqar Azeem's contribution, saying the workshop had set a new benchmark in theatre education at the national level. He noted that participants not only sharpened their technical skills but also developed a deeper understanding of theatre's artistic depth and social relevance.—APP

SC grants bail to accused in rape case

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Thursday granted bail to Mudassir, an accused in a rape case, after hearing arguments concerning the investigation, evidence, and relevant legal points. During the proceedings, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhai observed that the more serious the allegation, the more thorough and credible the investigation must be. Counsel for the accused argued that his client completely denied the charge. The state counsel informed the court that the investigation had revealed the girl had been residing in the accused's house. Justice Mandokhai asked whether the medical report also supported the prosecution's stance. The state counsel responded that the medical examination had been conducted after a delay of two months. Justice Malik Shahzad remarked that the burden of proving the allegation rests with the complainant and cannot be shifted onto the accused. Justice Musarrat Hilali questioned why a father would falsely accuse someone and subject his daughter to public scrutiny. Justice Mandokhai noted that many such incidents never get reported. Justice Mandokhai further remarked that not every case constitutes rape, while the state counsel argued that families often remain silent due to concerns about their daughters' honour. Justice Hilali added that if a woman herself alleges rape, that in itself is a strong piece of evidence. Justice Malik Shahzad observed that a conviction cannot be based solely on the testimony of the girl. Justice Mandokhai also questioned whether anyone had ever been punished for consensual relations and whether consent could be treated under sections relating to coercion. He emphasized that punishment must correspond strictly to the nature of the offence proved. The court was informed that the case had been registered last year in Toba Tek Singh on the complaint of the girl's father. After hearing all parties, the Supreme Court approved Mudassir's bail.—DNA

2nd 10-day inter-provincial writer's program

ISLAMABAD: The inaugural ceremony of the second 10-day Inter-Provincial Residential Program for Young Writers will be held at the Committee Room of the Pakistan Academy of Letters (PAL) on Friday. Organized by the Pakistan Academy of Letters (PAL) under the auspices of the National Heritage and Culture Division, the program will run from January 15 to 24, 2026, bringing together young writers from across the provinces. According to a spokesperson for PAL, following the success of last year's initiative, selected writers from all provinces and regions of the country have once again been included in this resi-

tial program. "The primary objective of the program is to introduce writers from remote areas to the mainstream literary landscape and to refine and enhance their creative abilities," the spokesperson said. He added that another important aim of the initiative is to explore new literary possibilities within the capital's cultural environment while fostering unity, harmony, and intellectual exchange among writers from different parts of the country. Under the program, participating writers will stay at the Pakistan Academy of Letters' guest house from January 15 to January 24, 2026, and will take part in

various literary activities. These include participation in literary events organized by the Academy, visits to other academic and literary institutions, opportunities to meet prominent literary figures, and a platform to present their creative works. He further emphasized that this residential program would play a significant role in strengthening national literary cohesion and promoting meaningful engagement among writers across Pakistan. It is worth mentioning that 20 writers from the four provinces, Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan have been selected for this program, which will conclude on January 24.—

Ethiopia, Pakistan forge strategic cooperation

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The premier think tanks of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on Thursday signed a Memorandum of understanding (MoU) to institutionalize intellectual and policy cooperation for driving innovation and growth in both nations. The MoU was virtually signed by H.E. Jafar Bedru Geletu, Executive Director of the Institution of Foreign Affairs (IFA) Ethiopia, and H.E. Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman Board of Governors of the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI). H.E. Dr. Omer Hussein Oba, Ambassador designate of Ethiopia to Pakistan witnessed the ceremony here at the ISSI, Islamabad, while his counterpart Ambassador Atif Sharif Miran was present at the IFA Headquarters in Addis Ababa. The MoU will allow the two institutions to establish a framework for cooperation in the fields of diplomatic training, professional development, research and analysis through delegations' exchange, conferences, co-publications and joint researches. Felicitating both sides on achieving a milestone in the bilateral relations, the Executive Director IFA said Ethiopia and Pakistan

walked a long road together, guided by mutual respect, South-South solidarity, and a shared hope for a more stable, prosperous world. "By combining IFA's deep knowledge of the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea with ISSI's regional research strengths, we are building a platform that can do real work: align our views on maritime security and trade routes, craft joint approaches to stability and counter-terrorism, and deliver policy recommendations that reflect today's realities," H.E. Jafar Bedru remarked. Ethiopia is a gateway to Africa, said the ISSI Chairman while emphasizing on establishing robust academic linkages that are crucial to foster joint research, delegations exchange and policy dialogues for benefit of both the nations. H.E. Ambassador Dr. Omer Hussein highlighted the positive trajectory of relations between the two countries and called for the two think tanks to actively collaborate to utilize each other's potentials. He stressed the importance of reinforcing all existing pillars of the relationship particularly in political and economic spheres and urged both the institutions to work closely within this framework that is imperative for strengthening bilateral relations.



Police arrest 15 in crackdown against kite-flying

RWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi Police arrested 15 suspects and seized more than 2,000 kites and dozens of spools of string during an ongoing district-wide crackdown, a police spokesperson said on Thursday. The spokesperson said on Thursday that the action, launched on the directives of City Police Officer (CPO) Syed Khalid Hamdani, focused on suppliers involved in the illegal trade of kites and string. He said the Dhamial Police arrested one suspect and recovered 500 kites and 15 spools. The Pirwadai Police detained two suspects and seized 430 kites and five spools, while the Taxila Police apprehended three suspects, recovering 300 kites and five spools. The Wah Cantt Police nabbed one suspect and seized 250 kites, while the Sadiqabad Police arrested two suspects and recovered 185 kites and two spools. The Wah Saddar Police also detained two suspects and seized 158 kites. The Chaklala Police arrested two suspects and recovered 105 kites and four spools, while the Westridge Police held one suspect and seized 100 kites and two spools. The Ganjamdi Police detained one suspect and recovered 50 kites and two spools. The spokesperson said separate cases had been registered against all suspects.—APP

FCCP adjourns super tax case till today

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Constitutional Court on Thursday adjourned the hearing of the super tax case until Friday. The three-member bench, headed by Chief Justice Amin-ud-Din Khan, resumed proceedings on the constitutional challenges related to the levy. During the hearing, Barrister Farogh Naseem, representing various companies, argued that no authority is permitted to insert words into the Constitution or statutory law under any circumstance. He contended that the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) was applying its own rules and regulations in an arbitrary manner and was interpreting the law according to its convenience. The court directed Barrister Naseem to continue his arguments and adjourned the proceedings until tomorrow, when he is expected to conclude his submissions.—APP

AIOU launches fully digital degree issuance system

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has taken a historic and modern step by announcing the complete digitization of the process for issuing degrees, diplomas and certificates. Under this new system for students admitted in Fall 2024 and onward degrees or certificates will be automatically issued, eliminating the need for students to submit separate applications. This will make the process extremely easy, fast and transparent. Furthermore students who enrolled in any university program from Spring 2021 onward and have completed their academic program can now submit their degree/certificate requests online through the university's CMS portal under the "Student Service Request" section, using the new degree form instead of submitting manual application forms. This system will not only save time but also make the process more transparent and convenient. It should be noted that for students admitted in Fall 2020 or earlier, the issuance of degrees and certificates will continue according to the previously established procedures. Regarding this initiative, the Vice-Chancellor of the university Prof. Dr Nasir Mahmood stated that digitizing the issuance of degrees and certificates is an important step taken with students' convenience in mind. "This measure will not only save time but also make the university's administrative system more efficient. Our aim is to enable students to easily obtain certificates of their academic achievements without any additional hassle or delay," he added.—DNA

Customs destroys prohibited, expired goods worth Rs 3.92b

ISLAMABAD: The Collectorate of Customs (Enforcement) Karachi, in collaboration with the Collectorate of Customs (Airports) Karachi, conducted a joint ceremony for the destruction of prohibited, expired, and hazardous goods worth Rs 3.92 billion under the Customs Act, 1969, to safeguard public health and government revenue. The destroyed goods had been lawfully seized after completion of all legal formalities, and were disposed of in compliance with CGO 12/2002 and other applicable laws, said a news release. The ceremony took place at Plot No. 243, Deh Narathar, Gadap Town, Karachi, under strict supervision to ensure transparency, legal compliance, and environmental protection. The event was attended by the Collector Customs Enforcement Karachi, Collector Customs (Airports) Karachi, and senior officials from Sindh Rangers, FIA, and Sindh Police. Items destroyed included betel nuts, gutka, alcohol, Ajinomoto salt, cigarettes, tobacco products, animal vaccines, heroin, hashish, and other harmful goods banned under the Import Policy Order 2022.—APP

Briefs

ICT Dolphin Force steps up crackdown

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad's Dolphin Force carried out extensive surveillance and snap-checking operations during the first 12 days of 2026, checking more than 39,000 individuals, 46,000 motorcycles, and 11,000 vehicles across the federal capital. A police spokesperson told APP on Thursday that under the supervision of SP Dolphin Owais Ali Khan, smart cars, special naks and rapid-response patrols were deployed to keep strict vigilance on criminal elements. He said that 25 vehicles and over 30,000 motorcycles were shifted to respective police stations for further verification, while 339 suspicious individuals were taken into custody for interrogation during the crackdown. As part of traffic regulation measures, the Dolphin Force also removed tinted glasses from 1,279 vehicles, ensuring compliance with traffic safety rules. SP Dolphin Owais Ali Khan said that no compromise would be made on the safety of citizens and that strict action against criminal elements will continue. He added that the Dolphin Force remains fully committed to proactive policing, street-crime prevention and maintaining a secure environment across Islamabad.—APP

Three suspects arrested

RAWALPINDI: The Westridge Police have arrested three suspects allegedly involved in the killing of a man over a personal enmity, a Rawalpindi Police spokesperson said. According to the spokesperson, the suspects had opened fire on the victim, killing him on the spot, and fled the scene immediately after the incident. The police registered a case and employed technical surveillance and human intelligence to identify the suspects, leading to their arrest in a successful operation. The Superintendent of Police (SP) Potohar said further investigation was under way and the suspects would be challaned to court with solid evidence to ensure they received exemplary punishment.—APP

Dasu HPP achieves major milestone

ISLAMABAD: The Dasu Hydropower Project (Dasu HPP) has achieved a major milestone with the successful commencement of tunneling work on the Shori-1 Tunnel under the Dasu KKH-02 Realignment Road Project. Energy China Pakistan announced that the milestone was marked by the first controlled blast carried out on December 29, 2025, formally initiating excavation of the approximately 530-meter-long tunnel, according to a Gwadar Pro's report on Thursday. The company said the work is being carried out under challenging geological conditions, with strict safety measures and advanced engineering techniques being applied to ensure steady progress.—APP

Gold price falls by Rs 3,700 per tola

ISLAMABAD: Gold prices witnessed a notable decline in the local market on Thursday, as the price of 24-karat gold per tola decreased by Rs3,700 to settle at Rs482,462. The price of 10 grams of 24-karat gold dropped by Rs3,172 to Rs413,633, according to the All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association. Similarly, the price of 10 grams of 22-karat gold fell by Rs2,908 to Rs379,177. Silver prices also recorded a downward trend, with 24-karat silver per tola declining by Rs150 to Rs9,425, while the price of 10 grams of silver decreased by Rs129 to Rs8,080. In the international market, gold prices fell by \$37 to \$4,601 per ounce, whereas silver prices declined by \$1.50 to \$89.50 per ounce, the association reported.—APP

Interior Minister commits to world class training for ASPs

Mohsin Naqvi addressed the probationary ASPs. He said that plots will be allotted to the officers upon passing out. The current police batch will be trained according to international standards. Probationary ASPs will be sent to Beijing, China, for a one-month training program

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi visited the National Police Academy. The Interior Minister reviewed the ongoing renovation and gave necessary instructions to the Commandant, Muhammad Idrees. He inspected the

conference hall, dining hall, and other rooms. Mohsin Naqvi addressed the probationary ASPs. He said that plots will be allotted to the officers upon passing out. The current police batch will be trained according to international standards. Probationary ASPs will be sent to Beijing, China, for a one-month training program. He stressed that modern mod-

ules will be added to the ASPs' training to align it with advanced requirements. Steps will be ensured to enhance the professional capability and practical skills of the officers. Special measures are being taken to ease the financial constraints of police officers. Interior Minister added that he wants every officer's salary to improve. He said that with the support of

the National Police Foundation, modern facilities will be provided for officers. Promotion issues of officers will also be resolved. The Commandant National Police Academy briefed the Interior Minister on the academy's affairs. The Deputy Commandant, Additional Deputy Commissioner Islamabad, and other officials were also present.



ISLAMABAD: A skilled painter busy in making traditional truck on the trucks at Pir Wadhai area as Pakistani truck art, known as Phool Patti, is world-famous for transforming trucks into vibrant, moving canvases with intricate floral designs, calligraphy, portraits, and poetry, showcasing local pride and culture.

PM hails satisfactory outcomes of revolutionary steps for Railways' uplift

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, on Thursday appreciating the effective performance shown by Pakistan Railways despite limited resources, said that a series of revolutionary measures initiated by the government for the institution's uplift were yielding satisfactory outcomes. The prime minister, chairing a consultative meeting with private sector experts to enhance the effectiveness of Pakistan Railways, appreciated the railways minister and his team, saying that the revolutionary measures to further enhance institutional and administrative efficiency in Pakistan Railways had been inevitable for decades. He said that the consultation with private sector experts was part of the government's economic reforms for overall economic development, industrial and commercial growth, and improvement in other sectors. He viewed that the Railways could help promote national industry and trade and facilitate investors if made profitable consequent to the ongoing reforms. He asked the Pakistan Railways to present a practical roadmap containing actionable steps next week, after meaningful consultation with all relevant units and institutions. Expressing regret over the non-provision of government funds for development works related to Pakistan Railways for decades, he said in next year's PSDP proportionate budget would be allocated for its projects. He stressed the need for steps to make Pakistan Railways a part of an international-standard commercial communication system, owing to its valuable role in economic development and increasing national income. Prime Minister Shehbaz also called for reviewing the possibilities of private partnerships for the profitable commercial use of the railway structure and preparing a comprehensive strategy for the profitable and commercial use of its resources. The prime minister highlighted the importance of the quality performance of railways for the country's overall economic development, regional industrial and trade cooperation, and public convenience. The representatives of the private sector experts presented various recommendations to make railways' performance more effective and for its commercial use. The meeting was attended by federal ministers Muhammad Hanif Abbasi, Muhammad Aurangzeb, Attaullah Tarar, Musadiq Malik, and Ahd Khan Cheema, Special Assistant to PM Haroon Akhtar, National Coordinator SIFC Lieutenant General (Retd) Sarfraz Ahmed, secretaries of relevant ministries, and other government officials, as well as private sector experts including Zaid Bashir, Pir Saad Ehsanuddin, and others.—DNA

Cold wave alert issued for northern, upper regions

ISLAMABAD: The National Emergencies Operations Center (NEOC) of NDMA has warned of a strong cold wave likely to grip Gilgit-Baltistan, upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Azad Jammu & Kashmir in the coming days. According to meteorological forecasts, very cold to extremely cold conditions are likely to prevail, particularly during nighttime and early morning hours, while daytime temperatures are expected to remain below normal. The forecast indicates moderate to heavy snowfall over high-altitude and hilly areas, which may lead to disruptions in road connectivity, transportation, and power supply in mountainous regions. Adjoining plains are expected to experience cold and dry weather, with frost formation in isolated pockets. The prevailing conditions may increase the risk of snow slides and avalanches at vulnerable locations in hilly areas, posing threats to human safety, infrastructure, and livestock. Prolonged exposure to extreme cold and snowfall may also heighten health risks, especially for children, the elderly, and those with pre-existing medical conditions, while frost may cause damage to standing crops and orchards in nearby

plain areas. In view of the expected weather conditions, NDMA advises the public to avoid non-essential travel to high-altitude and snowfall-prone areas and to ensure the use of snow chains where travel is unavoidable. Citizens are urged to make adequate arrangements for heating, warm clothing, and shelter, with particular attention to protecting vulnerable populations. Local communities are advised to remain vigilant and strictly follow advisories issued by relevant local authorities. NDMA has directed all concerned provincial and district authorities to remain on high alert and ensure preparedness for snow clearance operations, emergency response, and timely restoration of essential services, including electricity and communications. NDMA through its NEOC will continue to monitor the situation closely and issue further updates as required. The public is advised to obtain authentic and official information through television and radio broadcasts, verified social media platforms, and "Pak NDMA Disaster Alert" mobile application, available on both Play Store and App Store, to stay informed and take necessary precautionary measures.—APP

Pakistani, Chinese researchers develop smart irrigation approach

The diagram shows how field sensors send real-time data to a cloud platform

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani and Chinese agricultural researchers have developed a temperature-responsive irrigation approach that could help protect crops from rising heat while improving water efficiency, according to a peer-reviewed study published in the international journal Irrigation Science, Gwadar Pro reported on Thursday. The research was conducted by a joint team from China and Pakistan, including Pakistani researcher Dr. Imran Ali Lakhia, alongside Chinese Scientists Professor Chuan Zhang and Professor Haofang Yan, and other experts from agricultural engineering institutions in China. The study examines how precision irrigation systems, combining drip irrigation, micro-sprinklers and temperature-based control, can reduce heat stress on crops while conserving water, an issue becoming more urgent as climate change drives higher temperatures and frequent heatwaves. "Water is considered one of the vital natural resources and factors for performing short and long-term agricultural practices on Earth," the authors wrote, warning that the agriculture sector utilizes around 70% of available freshwater annually to irrigate only 25% of the arable land. According to the researchers, traditional irrigation practices are increasingly unable to cope with climate variability. In contrast, precision irrigation systems adjust water application based on real-time temperature, soil moisture and plant needs, helping crops maintain higher physiological activity during periods of extreme heat. The study found that properly regulated micro-sprinkler irrigation

improves the cooling environment around plants by lowering air and leaf temperatures, which supports photosynthesis that is often suppressed when temperatures exceed optimal levels. The diagram shows how field sensors send real-time data to a cloud platform, enabling remote monitoring and control of smart irrigation systems. "Precision irrigation methods have appeared as game-changers in the traditional agriculture sector for efficient water utilization and management," the authors said, adding that such systems can significantly enhance water-use efficiency while reducing environmental footprints. Speaking to Gwadar Pro, Dr. Imran Ali Lakhia said the findings are particularly relevant for Pakistan, where heat stress and water scarcity are increasingly affecting both open-field and greenhouse farming. "In Pakistan, rising temperatures and inefficient water use are major challenges for farmers," Lakhia told Gwadar Pro. "If precision irrigation systems like these are adapted to local conditions, they can help farmers cool crops during heatwaves, reduce water losses and protect yields." Lakhia said modern pressure-driven irrigation systems are far more efficient than conventional methods. He said the study reported water application efficiencies of 50-70% for furrow irrigation, 40-60% for border irrigation and about 40% for basin irrigation, compared with 65-95% for drip irrigation and 50-90% for sprinkler systems.—DNA

Concern over Rawal Lake water quality, minister orders testing

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination Dr Musadik Malik on Thursday directed the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Water and Sanitation Agency (Wasa) to conduct comprehensive water quality testing at multiple points along the Rawal lake's inflows and outflows to identify the sources and extent of contamination. Chairing a high-level meeting on the issue, officials briefed the minister that three major streams – Korang, Lake View and Jinnah – flow into Rawal Lake, some of which have been polluted due to the discharge of untreated sewage from nearby residential areas. They said planning was under way to install three sewage treatment plants at Simli Road, Bari Imam, and Shadrahs to address the problem. "We must ask ourselves whether this is water we are comfortable feeding to our children," the minister said, stressing the need for evidence-based interventions and immediate remedial measures. Dr. Malik said access to clean and safe drinking water was a fundamental right of every citizen and assured that although his ministry did not have direct jurisdiction over water supply and sewerage management, it would extend full facilitation and coordination support to the relevant departments to ensure timely action. He also called for stronger coordination between federal and provincial authorities to fast-track the installation of sewage treatment plants and ensure the provision of clean drinking water to the public at the earliest. The meeting was attended by Secretary Climate Change Aisha Moriani, Secretary Water Resources Syed Ali Murtaza, the directors general of the EPA and the Rawalpindi Development Authority.

ECP directs lawmakers to file asset details by Jan 15

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Thursday directed senators, MNAs and MPAs to file their asset and liability details by January 15, 2026, in accordance with Section 137 of the Election Act. The Commission cautioned that lawmakers failing to submit financial statements by January 16 will face suspension of membership. To ensure compliance, the ECP's Political Finance Wing at Kohsar Block will remain open until midnight on Thursday to receive the required documents.—APP

Gwadar's strategic readiness strengthened

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has taken another huge step toward strengthening the operational readiness and international credibility of Gwadar as a strategic aviation and trade hub by successfully conducting its first full-scale Airport Emergency Exercise 2026 at the New Gwadar International Airport (NGIAP), Gwadar Pro reported on Thursday. The drill, carried out by the Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) in line with international aviation safety standards, underscores the growing importance of Gwadar within the framework of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). According to PAA officials, the large-scale exercise simulated a complex aircraft accident involving fire and multiple casualties, designed to test emergency preparedness under challenging conditions. Fire-fighting units, rescue teams, medical personnel, and security agencies responded swiftly, demonstrating a high level of coordination and operational efficiency even under low-light and limited-visibility scenarios. The exercise follows earlier safety milestones at NGIAP, including Pakistan's first-ever nighttime fire emergency drill at the airport in 2025. Together, these initiatives signal a deliberate effort to ensure that Gwadar's aviation infrastructure meets global safety benchmarks as the port city emerges as a key logistical and economic gateway under CPEC. A fully functional triage area was established during the drill, where medical teams carried out realistic casualty assessments and administered immediate first aid based on injury severity. The seamless interaction among the Airport Security Force (ASF), fire and rescue units, medical staff, and supporting agencies highlighted the effectiveness of inter-agency coordination and the robustness of the Airport Emergency Plan (AEP). Supervised by the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer (CFRO), the exercise also served as a real-time evaluation of command-and-control mechanisms at the field level. Aviation experts note that such drills are critical not only for passenger safety but also for building international confidence in Gwadar as a future hub for commercial flights, cargo operations, and CPEC-linked connectivity projects.—APP

Tang Pakistan, Hazara varsity to expand academic cooperation

ISLAMABAD: Tang Pakistan Technical Education on January 14 signed a memorandum of understanding with Hazara University to strengthen academic cooperation, expand student opportunities and promote collaboration under the second phase of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The MoU was signed during a formal ceremony at Hazara University in Mansehra, marking a new phase of partnership focused on joint degree programs, short-term professional training initiatives and the introduction of a Chinese language program, said Tang Pakistan in a statement, according to Gwadar Pro on Thursday. The ceremony also featured the distribution of certificates to students who successfully completed Tang's short training programs at the university. Hazara University, a leading public-sector institution in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with more than 10,000 students across its three campuses, aims to further deepen cooperation with Chinese educational institutions as part of its long-term academic vision.—DNA

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The AI we need for sustainable infrastructure

BERTRAND BADRE

INFRASTRUCTURE investment is booming. Around the world, governments are pouring trillions of dollars into roads, power grids, data centers, water systems and housing, with many responding to intensifying climate shocks and the growing need for adaptation. Yet the construction industry – the single largest force physically reshaping the planet – is among the last major sectors to unlock all the benefits that digital technology offers. As a result, it accounts for about 21 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, produces half of global landfill waste and overspends by \$1.6 trillion a year. This must change and artificial intelligence may offer the solutions that the industry needs. But that will require fully leveraging the potential of institutional collaboration and human networks.

While generative AI can write code or summarize documents, building real-world assets like bridges and power grids requires what we might call “cognitive infrastructure:” difficult-to-access data, human expertise, domain knowledge and institutions through which to deploy new tools for planning and delivery. Like electricity without a power grid, AI without this foundation will remain a source of untapped potential.

What would leveraging AI look like in practice? For starters, it would require unlocking and integrating siloed data from thousands of stakeholders, including construction firms, suppliers, government ministries, multilateral agencies and financiers. It would also involve codifying domain knowledge from past project cycles to understand why delays happen, how risks compound and where capacity breaks down, and building intelligent digital agents that understand infrastructure-specific workflows (contracting, procurement, permitting and budgeting). But most importantly, it would demand institutional collaboration. We do not need static roadmaps but rather dynamic, evolving feedback mechanisms. AI for infrastructure would learn from every project and apply lessons across organizations. The opportunity to improve how we build things comes just as the geopolitics of infrastructure is shifting.

The opportunity to improve how we build things comes just as the geopolitics of infrastructure is shifting. As President Donald Trump seeks to reverse all his predecessor's clean energy policies, others are filling the leadership vacuum the US has created. China, for example, has reoriented its Belt and Road Initiative toward “green, high-quality” development, pairing massive overseas transport and energy investments with climate resilience projects at home. It is pursuing large-scale desert reforestation and new renewables projects, even

Dr M Ali Hamza



The recent diplomatic friction between the United States and Denmark over Greenland's future is not a minor bilateral dispute, but a revealing tactic of diversion. By publicly floating the idea of purchasing Greenland in 2019 and continuing strategic investment talks, the U.S. creates a controlled, manageable controversy that serves a dual purpose. On the surface, it asserts American hemispheric interests in the Arctic, a region of immense strategic and resource value. However, its deeper function is to redirect global...

US and us: the world

THE detention of Maduro is not a dusty historical footnote; it is a live wire in the geopolitics of 2026, offering a potent blueprint for aggression. This sets a catastrophic precedent: sovereign borders and the sanctity of a nation's leadership are negotiable if a great power deems it necessary. Russia's ongoing justification for its war in Ukraine, operates on this identical premise. If Washington can plot to remove a leader it calls illegitimate or drug mafia, Moscow argues, then why can't it dismantle a government it labels a threat? The 2026 news cycle makes this analogy impossible to ignore, paralysing Western moral authority in Global South capitals. For Vladimir Putin, it is a gift allowing him to frame his invasion not as an outlier, but as a mere mimicry of established US playbook tactics; just executed more overtly. Trumps proudly speaking the kidnapping of Maduro did not just expose a mistake, it actively reinforced the very doctrine of unilateral intervention that Russia uses to justify its actions in Ukraine today. The forceful U.S. operations targeting Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro including extra-legal capture plots have established a dangerous new global standard. This is not an isolated precedent; it is part of a demonstrable pattern of U.S. aggression now visibly targeting Iran, challenging the very foundation of the international order.

The facts are stark. Following the maximalist “maximum pressure” campaign, which crippled Iran's economy in a bid to incite popular unrest, the U.S. has aggressively amplified internal Iranian dissent. This is executed by supporting for opposition groups. The goal is transparent: to create conditions of civil strife that weaken the regime from within, mirroring the attempted coercive regime change in Caracas.

This strategy represents a profound challenge to global norms. It moves beyond traditional diplo-

macy or even sanctions into the realm of hybrid warfare, where sovereign nations are internally destabilized by an external power. The emotional and logical appeal for nations opposing U.S. hegemony, like Russia and China, becomes clear: the international system is not rules-based but might-based. If the U.S. can justify kidnapping a foreign president or fueling riots to topple a government, it legitimizes any powerful state acting unilaterally against its perceived adversaries. The aggression against Iran, therefore, is not merely a bilateral conflict; it is an aggressive assertion that U.S. security interests override the sovereignty of nations, a precedent that destabilizes the world. The recent diplomatic friction between the United States and Denmark over Greenland's future is not a minor bilateral dispute, but a revealing tactic of diversion. By publicly floating the idea of purchasing Greenland in 2019 and continuing strategic investment talks, the U.S. creates a controlled, manageable controversy that serves a dual purpose. On the surface, it asserts American hemispheric interests in the Arctic, a region of immense strategic and resource value. However, its deeper function is to redirect global diplomatic attention. While the world focuses on a narrative of U.S. ambition clashing with Danish sovereignty, a clean, sovereign-versus-superrule power story, more aggressive and consequential U.S. actions elsewhere face less scrutiny. This “Greenland gambit” provides a smokescreen.

Denmark's firm, public rejection is essential to this theater. It allows the U.S. to appear checked by a steadfast ally, projecting an image of a system where even small nations can say no. This manufactured drama subtly reinforces a narrative of a rules-based order, even as the U.S. systematically undermines those same rules through extraterritorial kidnappings, hybrid warfare, and unilateral sanctions against nations like Iran and Venezuela. The

Greenland discussion is a geopolitical sleight of hand: a loud, symbolic argument over territory that will never change hands, designed to distract from the quiet, real-world erosion of sovereignty that is already underway. It is aggression disguised as awkward diplomacy. Trump's persistent campaign to destabilize sovereign states, from orchestrating capture plots against Venezuela's Maduro to fueling hybrid warfare in Iran, is not a contained strategy. It is a reckless catalyst for global systemic collapse. By repeatedly crossing the red line of sovereignty, Washington is not merely targeting regimes; it is invoking a dangerous and equal reaction from other great powers. This pattern of aggression, presented under the thin veil of democratic promotion, is actively dismantling the very international order it claims to uphold. The logic is inescapable: if unilateral regime change and internal subversion are legitimized as tools for the West, they become justified tools for all. Russia and China observe these manoeuvres not with alarm, but with a cold calculus of precedent. Moscow's intervention of Ukraine and Beijing's increasing engagement in the Asia-Pacific are, in their framing, merely adopting the playbook authored in Washington and London. The emotional resonance for billions in the Global South is a deepening cynicism, seeing not a rules-based order but a law of the jungle where hypocrisy is the only constant. We are accelerating toward a multipolar war of all against all, where norms are relics and every nation prepares for clandestine intervention or open conflict. The sole responsibility for this descent will lie with the Western allies who are blinded by a crusading exceptionalism, chose to break the system rather than share it. Their short-sighted campaigns in Caracas and Tehran are not securing peace; they are moving the world inescapably toward destruction.

Did Trump Avoid Israel's Iran Trap?

Qamar Bashir



When this evidence was reportedly shown to President Trump, his initial posture hardened. He openly stated that all options remained on the table. However, the situation shifted when Iran halted scheduled executions and refrained from further mass repression. Trump himself publicly stated that executions had been stopped and that there would be no further oppressive measures against protesters. With that declaration, he effectively poured cold water on Netanyahu's attempt to maneuver the United States into another...

THE Middle East has been subjected to a destructive and repetitive doctrine that promises peace through regime change but delivers only chaos, fragmentation, and endless war. At the core of this ideology stands Benjamin Netanyahu, whose long-held belief is that Israel's security and regional dominance require the dismantling of hostile governments rather than coexistence with them. From Iraq to Libya, from Syria to Afghanistan, from Lebanon to Gaza, this toxic philosophy has left entire societies in ruins—yet it is being recycled once again, this time against Iran. Israel's current military campaign in Gaza and the West Bank, its permanent occupation of the Golan Heights, its repeated strikes inside Syria, and its confrontations with Lebanon all reveal a broader expansionist vision. However, Netanyahu understands that without neutralizing Iran—the only regional power capable of resisting Israeli military dominance—this vision cannot fully materialize. This is why Iran has been framed as an “existential threat,” and why regime change in Tehran has become a central obsession.

Even before the brief twelve-day escalation in June involving Israel, United States, and Iran, Netanyahu had been relentlessly injecting the idea that once Iran's leadership is removed, peace will finally descend upon the Middle East. This is the same argument used to push the United States into Iraq, to destroy Libya, to destabilize Syria, and to militarize Afghanistan. Every time this doctrine was applied, conditions worsened—terrorism expanded, refugees multiplied, and regional instability deepened. At that critical moment, Donald Trump did not endorse regime change in Iran. He resisted plunging the United States into another open-ended conflict. However, Israel did not abandon its objective. Instead, it adopted a two-pronged strategy: destabilization from within and the grooming of a manufactured alternative leadership for Iran.

According to Iranian authorities, the current unrest was not merely spontaneous protest but was instigated, coordinated, and guided by Israeli intelligence networks operating under Mossad. Tehran presented

evidence that Mossad-linked operatives were embedded among protest groups, receiving instructions directly from headquarters in Tel Aviv. These instructions allegedly included plans to incite large-scale rioting, burn banks, attack police officers, and sabotage mosques and public infrastructure. The objective was not reform but disorder. Most critically, Iranian officials revealed that even after the country shut down its domestic internet, communications between these operatives and their handlers continued through satellite-based systems, while Iran simultaneously faced hundreds of thousands of cyberattacks targeting its communications infrastructure. This exposed the operation as a coordinated hybrid assault combining street violence, cyber warfare, and psychological pressure.

When this evidence was reportedly shown to President Trump, his initial posture hardened. He openly stated that all options remained on the table. However, the situation shifted when Iran halted scheduled executions and refrained from further mass repression. Trump himself publicly stated that executions had been stopped and that there would be no further oppressive measures against protesters. With that declaration, he effectively poured cold water on Netanyahu's attempt to maneuver the United States into another Middle Eastern war. Parallel to the destabilization campaign, Israel simultaneously cultivated a political alternative: Reza Pahlavi, the son of Iran's former monarch. Pahlavi has lived outside Iran since the age of twelve, spending his entire adult life in the United States. He has no organic political base inside Iran, no demonstrated grassroots support, and no tangible connection to the daily struggles of the Iranian people. For decades, he remained politically irrelevant. Suddenly, amid unrest, he was reintroduced as a “savior.”

Despite living a luxurious lifestyle in the United States without any clearly defined source of income, Pahlavi has been aggressively promoted as a viable leader for Iran. He was invited to Jerusalem, where, in interviews with Israeli media, he openly spoke about historical alignment between Iran, Israel, and the Jewish people. In doing so, he publicly positioned himself as ideologically aligned with Israel's regional agenda. This appearance confirmed that he has effectively sold himself as a convenient figurehead—offered the illusion of kingship in exchange for political obedience. This two-pronged Israeli strategy—instigating large-scale unrest while simultaneously presenting a pre-selected alternative ruler—mirrors earlier regime-change playbooks used elsewhere. However, it is fundamentally flawed. Reza Pahlavi does not repre-

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as coal, oil and gas projects still feature heavily in its overseas portfolio. Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, has launched the Saudi Green Initiative to funnel tens of billions of dollars toward solar and wind projects, green finance frameworks and new public-private partnerships. The Kingdom aims to generate half its electricity from renewables by 2030. And India has already hit its target of committing 50 percent of its installed power capacity to non-fossil sources. It has also launched a National Green Hydrogen Mission, targeting annual production of 5 million tonnes by 2030, and has used global platforms such as the G20 and the UN Climate Change Conference to champion climate-resilient infrastructure and “green development pacts.” The result is a fragmented map. While the world's largest historical emitter is doubling down on fossil fuel exports, emerging and middle-income economies are increasingly presenting themselves as voices of climate responsibility (even as they continue to navigate their own contradictions). In this new landscape, the contest is not only over whose capital builds the next generation of ports, grids and railways, but whose data, standards and AI systems will guide those investments. The next leader in infrastructure will focus on three immediate priorities. The first is to make the most of available data. Infrastructure know-how tends to be buried in PDFs, contracts and permit files. Governments, banks and companies must uncover this hidden history to help all stakeholders avoid past mistakes and navigate new policy settings when governments abruptly rewrite the rules (as the US has done). The second priority is to build AI tools for this specific purpose. What we need is not a generic chatbot but models trained on materials science, logistics and local regulations. An AI that understands why projects fail can make success more likely. Emerging and middle-income economies are increasingly presenting themselves as voices of climate responsibility. Lastly, we must do a better job of sharing knowledge across borders. Instead of having each institution reinvent the wheel, we need a shared knowledge base so that lessons from a dam in India or a metro in Paris can improve projects everywhere. Over the next decade, infrastructure will define not just climate adaptation but global competitiveness. It is the muscle of the real economy. The countries that align their climate commitments, industrial policies and infrastructure pipelines with credible, data-driven intelligence will set the rules of the game for everyone. Those that weaponize uncertainty or treat sustainable infrastructure as an afterthought will find their influence eroding. AI should not be seen as a centralized oracle or as an abstract mind in the cloud. Its real uses lie in targeted applications to connect real-world projects, institutional workflows and human networks. That is the kind of intelligence that will build not just better roads and resilient grids, but also more effective and efficient systems and organizations. In a world where technological capacity is abundant but political will is unevenly distributed, the real test of leadership lies in project execution. Whoever can turn infrastructure from a source of climate risk into a shared, intelligent platform for sustainable prosperity will have something to teach everyone.

sent modern Iran. He has no roots in today's Iranian society, no institutional backing inside the country, and no legitimacy among a population that has lived through revolution, war, sanctions, and resistance. Attempting to impose him as a solution only exposes the artificial nature of the entire project. More dangerously, an attack on Iran would not resemble Iraq or Libya. Iran controls or influences critical waterways and trade corridors. It possesses strategic depth, hardened military infrastructure, and powerful allies. Any war would immediately draw in Russia and China, turning a regional conflict into a global economic and military crisis. Energy markets would collapse, supply chains would fracture, and the United States would face overstretch and humiliation rather than victory. While the U.S. mainland may be geographically distant, American military bases across the Middle East and beyond remain well within Iran's reach. Moreover, if Iran preserves even part of its nuclear infrastructure under such pressure, the eventual consequences for Israel could be far more severe than anything Netanyahu anticipates. A cornered Iran is not a defeated Iran. At this moment, the United States is already deeply entangled elsewhere—in Venezuela, in the Greenland controversy in the Arctic, amid internal unrest over federal enforcement actions, and as the credibility of NATO and the United Nations continues to erode. Being dragged into another war engineered by Netanyahu would contradict every principle of “America First.” This is the moment for the United States to free itself from external pressure groups, including AIPAC, and to pursue an independent foreign policy grounded in national interest rather than ideological entanglements. The Middle East does not need another regime destroyed. It needs restraint, realism, and an end to expansionist fantasies that have already devastated an entire region. History has already judged the regime-change doctrine. The only question now is whether the United States will finally refuse to repeat it.

— Press Secretary to the President (Rtd)

Former Press Minister,

Embassy of Pakistan to France

Former Press Attaché to Malaysia

Former MD, SRBC

Macomb, Michigan

Briefs

Is Taliban faced with internal rift?

FROM PAGE 01
Supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada (centre) has "absolute power", his spokesman said - but ministers including Sirajuddin Haqqani (left) and Mohammad Yaqoob (right) have questioned decisions. The speech, made to Taliban members at a madrasa in the southern city of Kandahar in January 2025, was more fuel to the fire of rumours which had been circulating for months - rumours of differences at the very top of the Taliban. It is a split the Taliban leadership has always denied - including when asked directly by the BBC. But the rumours prompted the BBC's Afghan service to begin a year-long investigation into the highly secretive group - conducting more than 100 interviews with current and former members of the Taliban, as well as local sources, experts and former diplomats. Because of the sensitivity over reporting this story, the BBC has agreed not to identify them for their safety. Now, for the first time, we have been able to map two distinct groups at the very top of the Taliban - each presenting competing visions for Afghanistan. One entirely loyal to Akhundzada, who, from his base in Kandahar, is driving the country towards his vision of a strict Islamic Emirate - isolated from the modern world, where religious figures loyal to him control every aspect of society. And a second, made up of powerful Taliban members largely based in the capital Kabul, advocating for an Afghanistan which - while still following a strict interpretation of Islam - engages with the outside, builds the country's economy, and even allows girls and women access to an education they are currently denied beyond primary school. One insider described it as "the Kandahar house versus Kabul". But the question was always whether the Kabul group, made up of Taliban cabinet ministers, powerful militants and influential religious scholars commanding the support of thousands of Taliban loyalists, would ever challenge the increasingly authoritarian Akhundzada in any meaningful way, as his speech suggested. After all, according to the Taliban, Akhundzada is the group's absolute ruler - a man only accountable to Allah, and not someone to be challenged. Then came a decision which would see the delicate tug of war between the most powerful men in the country escalate into a clash of wills.

Pak in touch with US...

FROM PAGE 01
as well as an important member of the international community. "Pakistan hopes that peace and stability will prevail in Iran," he said, while reaffirming support for all efforts aimed at a peaceful resolution of the situation. "We want to see Iran as a friend and brotherly country, peaceful and prosperous," Andrabi noted. Indian Army's allegations 'baseless'. The spokesperson also rejected baseless allegations levelled by Indian Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi, terming them baseless and politically motivated. The rebuttal came against remarks made by General Dwivedi, who had accused Pakistan of "drone intrusions", saying that at least eight drones had been sighted since Saturday.

Citizens voice...

FROM PAGE 01
their visas to be issued, they also had an appointment date, but their visas would be suspended. They will be affected by this news and this ban," he added. A local resident and banker, Amar Ali, said the ban will economically dent Pakistan, because many Pakistanis earn and send dollars back home, which boosts its economy. Another resident Anwer Farooqui, urged President Trump to reconsider this decision and keep Pakistan, which is a very reliable friend of the United States, at the same level.

IHC orders halting...

FROM PAGE 01
trees for every one cut and that his ministry will launch additional plantation drives across Islamabad.

Norwegian Ambassador lauds PRCS' humanitarian efforts

the Mrs Farzhana Naek apprised the Ambassador on the NorCross-supported programmes currently being implemented across Pakistan and highlighting their impact in strengthening community resilience and addressing humanitarian needs since last more than 20 years

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Norwegian Ambassador in Pakistan Mr. Per Albert Ilsaas met with Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) Chairperson Mrs Farzhana Naek at the PRCS National Headquarters. The Head of Development Cooperation for Norwegian Embassy in Pakistan Ms Anja Myrteit, Global Grants and Partnership Advisor of Norwegian Red Cross for Asia Pacific region Ms Sofia Janjua and the Head of Delegation NorCross Pakistan Dr Ulugbek Aminov were also present during the meeting. During the meeting, the Mrs Farzhana Naek apprised the Ambassador on the NorCross-supported programmes currently being implemented across Pakistan and highlighting their impact in strengthening community resilience and addressing humanitarian needs since last more than 20 years. She also briefed the Ambassador on her recent visit to Norway, during which she met with the leadership of the Norwegian Red Cross, the Norwegian Agency for



Development Cooperation (NORAD), and members of the Pakistani diaspora in Norway, emphasizing opportunities for enhanced

collaboration and support for humanitarian initiatives in Pakistan. Highlighting PRCS priorities, the Chairperson PRCS also emphasized the need to prioritize

programme interventions in far-flung and under-served regions of Pakistan, where humanitarian needs

remain acute. During the meeting, Ambassador Ilsaas emphasised the crucial role of humanitarian service, expressing a shared dedication to advancing such efforts in Pakistan. He also appreciated the humanitarian services of PRCS and reaffirmed Norway's continued support through the Norwegian Red Cross in Pakistan. He stated that the Embassy of Norway in Pakistan looks forward to supporting PRCS programmes and is keen to expand cooperation to reach vulnerable and marginalized communities across the country. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening humanitarian partnership and cooperation to better serve vulnerable communities across Pakistan. The Ambassador also penned his remarks in the PRCS Visitors' Book, acknowledging the valuable humanitarian role of PRCS and reaffirming Norway's commitment to continued collaboration.

Bangladesh players' boycott delays BPL match amid row with BCB

SPORTS DESK

DHAKA: Bangladesh's cricketers boycotted all forms of cricket unless Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) director M Nazmul Islam resigns, following his controversial remarks against former national captain Tamim Iqbal. The announcement was made by Mohammad Mithun, president of the Cricketers' Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB), hours after Nazmul Islam's comments sparked widespread outrage on Wednesday. The development comes with two Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) matches scheduled to be played today (Thursday), with Mithun saying Nazmul should resign be-

fore the fixtures or the players would not take the field. Mithun said the remarks were against the players' dignity, professionalism and respect. On Thursday, the boycott impacted domestic cricket, with matches in the Dhaka Cricket League not beginning as the player boycott threatened by the CWAB last evening came into effect. The first BPL match on Thursday, between Chattogram Royals and Noakhali Express, was also delayed after both teams did not arrive at the venue for the toss, which was scheduled for 12.30pm local time. The match was supposed to begin at 1pm local time. In response to the controversy, the Bangladesh Cricket Board distanced itself from Islam's com-

ments, expressing regret in an official statement. "The Board expresses its sincere regret for remarks that may be deemed inappropriate, offensive, or hurtful," the statement read. "Such comments do not reflect the values, principles, or official position of the Bangladesh Cricket Board, nor do they align with the standards of conduct expected from individuals entrusted with the responsibility of serving Bangladesh cricket."

Morocco beat Nigeria on penalties to reach Africa Cup of Nations final

RABAT: Goalkeeper Yassine Bounou was the hero with two saves in the shoot-out as hosts Morocco beat Nigeria 4-2 on penalties to set up an Africa Cup of Nations final showdown this weekend with Senegal after a tense last-four clash on Wednesday finished 0-0 at the end of extra time. Bounou saved from Samuel Chukwueze and brilliantly from Bruno Onyewuchi, allowing Youssouf En-Nesyri to convert the winning kick and spark wild celebrations inside the Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium in Rabat. There was joy but also relief for Hamza Igamane, who had appeared distraught after his kick - Morocco's second in the shoot-out - was saved by Nigeria goalkeeper Stanley Nwabali. He was the only Moroccan player to fail to score in the shoot-out, however, with captain and talisman Achraf Hakimi among those who converted their penalties. Morocco will now play Senegal on Sunday for the title after the Lions of Teranga defeated Mohamed Salah's Egypt 1-0 in the other semi-final earlier in Tangiers thanks to a Sadio Mane goal. That will be a clash between the top two African sides in the FIFA world rankings and a fitting showpiece for the tournament. Walid Regragui's Morocco have been under enormous pressure to deliver a first AFCON title for their country in half a century but will be confident of coming out on top with their support behind them. - APP

Bayern beat Cologne 3-1 to set Bundesliga record at halfway mark

COLOGNE: Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich battled past hosts Cologne 3-1 on Wednesday to record the best first half of a season in the league's history and maintain their 11-point lead at the top of the standings. Bayern came from a goal down to earn their sixth league win in the last seven matches, and moved up to 47 points with a goal difference of +53. The previous best mark after 17 matches belonged to Pep Guardiola's Bayern for the 2013/14 season, also with 47 points but a goal difference of +35. The Bavarians, who host Union Saint-Gilloise in the Champions League next week, have clear water between themselves and Borussia Dortmund in second place on 36 points. Cologne did not look at all intimidated by Bayern's 8-1 demolition of VfL Wolfsburg on Sunday, and took a fully deserved 41st-minute lead with Linton Maina's spectacular 60-meter solo run and superb finish to beat keeper Manuel Neuer. The visitors managed to level before the break when Serge Gnabry flicked the ball into the net off the crossbar from the tightest of angles in first-half stoppage time. Jakub Błaszczykowski had the hosts' best chance to score again with a low 58th-minute drive, but Neuer did well to push the ball wide in a crowded box. The hosts managed to keep Bayern away from their box for much of the second half but could do nothing when Hiroki Ito headed on a deep cross and Kim Min-jae nodded in for a 2-1 lead. - APP

Chelsea paid for costly errors in Arsenal defeat, says Rosenior

LONDON: Liam Rosenior admitted Chelsea paid the price for costly mistakes after Arsenal took advantage of his side's blunders to win 3-2 in the League Cup semi-final first leg on Wednesday. Rosenior's team face a tough task to set up a final against either Manchester City or Newcastle following their error-strewn display in their new manager's first home match. Chelsea were guilty of sloppy marking for Ben White's early headed opener before goalkeeper Robert Sanchez gifted striker Viktor Gyokeres Arsenal's second goal after half-time. Alejandro Garnacho got one back for Chelsea but Martin Zubimendi then netted for Arsenal after more lacklustre defending from Rosenior's men. Substitute Garnacho's second goal gave Chelsea a glimmer of hope heading into the second leg at the Emirates Stadium in February. "Disappointed to concede from a corner. Disappointed with the third goal as well because we were right back in the game and we were on top at that moment," Rosenior said. "We switched off from a restart from a central free-kick but I can't fault the players. "We need to make sure we perform individually and we don't concede as many goals."

Rosenior was without a host of key players, including Cole Palmer, Reece James and Liam Delap, due to injuries and illness. "It's another step" in his second game since replacing Enzo Maresca as Blues boss, the 41-year-old took heart from the way Chelsea kept fighting to find a way back into the tie. "We've had illness in the squad, we've picked up a few knocks this week but what the squad has shown is that they are willing to run and fight for each other," he said. Rosenior, who oversaw a 5-1 FA Cup third-round win at Charlton in his debut last weekend, refused to condemn Sanchez for the latest in a long line of shaky performances. "Rob's a very good goalkeeper. He made an outstanding save at 3-1 to keep us in the tie, so for me load of things to improve but the overall attitude of the team I liked," Rosenior said. "Hopefully, we get a few bodies back for Brentford on Saturday." Arsenal are now unbeaten in 10 games in all competitions as they moved a step closer to their first silverware since the 2020 FA Cup. The Gunners had lost their previous four semifinals across a variety of competitions, including the League Cup last year. Mikel Arteta was impressed with Arsenal's ability to subdue Chelsea for long periods, but he was left to rue their failure to kill off their London rivals. "I have to praise the players for the performance against a really good opponents. It's a really tough place to come. That's why I really value what the team has done again," Arteta said. - Agencies

Real Madrid crash out of Copa del Rey at Albacete on Arbeloa debut

Arbeloa suffers humiliating debut as Real Madrid stunned by second-tier Albacete in Copa del Rey thriller, late Jefe double seals historic upset after shock defeat on foggy night in Spain

MADRID: Real Madrid fell to a shock 3-2 defeat in the Copa del Rey last 16 on Wednesday as Alvaro Arbeloa's debut as coach ended in humiliation by second-tier opposition. Appointed on Monday to replace Xabi Alonso, Arbeloa and his side were ousted by Jefe Betancor's stoppage-time winner at the Carlos Belmonte stadium.

Without French superstar Kylian Mbappe and various other key players, Arbeloa's side struggled against a side currently 17th in Spain's second division. Albacete took the lead through Javi Villar but Franco Mastantuono equalized just before half-time. Jefe put the hosts back ahead after 82 minutes and then scored the winner after Gonzalo García's 91st-minute goal looked to have forced extra time for the 15-time European champions.

"Here at this club a draw is already bad - it's a tragedy. Imagine a defeat like this, it's painful," Arbeloa told reporters.

"I'm sure all our fans feel the same way. Even more so when it happens against a team from a lower division, although we already know here how tough any opponent can be. "If anyone is responsible and to blame for this outcome, it's clearly me, the one who made the decisions regarding

the line-up, how we wanted to play, the substitutions. "I can only thank the players for the way they welcomed me, for the effort they put in today." After Madrid lost the Spanish Super Cup final on Sunday against rivals Barcelona, president Florentino Perez replaced Alonso with reserve team coach Arbeloa. The Spaniard selected two players currently playing in the reserves he led until

Monday - holding midfielder Jorge Cestero and right-back David Jimenez. As well as Mbappe he left out players including goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and Jude Bellingham, to rest ahead of the return to La Liga action on Saturday against Levante. "I'd do the same again, I brought a team capable of winning," said Arbeloa. The first half was mostly played under

heavy gloom, not just Madrid's mood but an intense fog which set in a few minutes into the game. Vinicius Junior smashed high and wide from long range as neither side produced any clear chances until shortly before half-time when the hosts took a shock lead. Villar escaped Mastantuono's attentions at a corner and nodded Albacete in front after 42 minutes.

Arbeloa's side levelled before the break through, also capitalizing on a corner, with Mastantuono turning home from close range. Albacete frustrated Madrid after the break and then burst into life in attack to take the lead once more. Andriy Lunin pushed away an effort from Riki but shortly afterwards Jefe put Alberto Gonzalez's side ahead. Gonzalo Garcia's clearance fell to the striker in the box and he fired down into the ground with ball bouncing up and flashing past Lunin. Madrid's young forward made amends by pulling his team level in stoppage time with a well-placed header. However there was a sting in the tale as Jefe produced a sensational lofted finish past Lunin to snatch a famous late victory for Albacete, their first ever against Real Madrid. - Agencies



Pakistan-Saudi-Turkiye...

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between the three sides, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said talks had been held but that no agreement had been signed. Fidan pointed to a need for broader regional cooperation and trust to overcome distrust that creates "cracks and problems" that led to the emergence of external hegemonies, or wars and instability stemming from terrorism, in the region. "At the end of all of these, we have a proposal like this: all regional nations must come together to create a cooperation platform on the issue of security," Fidan said. Regional issues could be resolved if relevant countries would "be sure of each other," he added.

Iran reopens airspace...

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FlightRadar24 said. At a similar time last week to the airspace closure there had been dozens of planes in the air over Iran, FlightRadar24 said. The temporary closure came as President Donald Trump was being weighed a response to the situation in Iran, which is seeing its biggest anti-government protests in years. Western military official told Reuters on Wednesday that "all the signals are that a US attack is imminent".

PM Shehbaz praises...

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public service institutions during his visit to SAPSSI Centre in Baku, and upon returning to Pakistan had directed to replicate the similar system. "There is a clear lesson in public service, one must remain ready at all times to serve the people," he said. The prime minister directed Federal Minister Ahad Cheema, in coordination with the Capital Development Authority (CDA), to further expand the facility and ensure its swift replication. He also ordered the immediate establishment of Asan Khidmat Markaz centres in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan as a gift from the federal government to the people and administrations of the two regions.

US slaps new sanctions...

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missile attacks on US bases in the Middle East. In a more extreme scenario, several said, US strikes might hasten the government's collapse, possibly unleashing chaos across the nation of 90 million, encouraging insurgencies by minority Kurdish and Baloch separatists and leaving Iran's nuclear and missile programs unsecured. Still, several US intelligence assessments earlier this week concluded that while the protests posed a serious challenge, the government did not appear close to collapsing, according to four knowledgeable sources.

Pakistani passport...

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Singapore ranked the highest, with visa-free access to 192 countries, followed closely by Japan and South Korea with 188. Denmark, Luxembourg, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland tied for the third spot with visa-free access to 186 countries. According to the Henley Index, Pakistani passport holders have free visa access to Barbados, Cook Islands, Dominica, Haiti, Micronesia, Montserrat, Rwanda, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and Vanuatu.

13 terrorists killed in KP

FROM PAGE 01
found in the area as relentless Counter Terrorism campaign under vision "Azm e Isteekham" (as approved by Federal Apex Committee on National Action Plan) by Security Forces and Law Enforcement Agencies of Pakistan will continue at full pace to wipe out menace of foreign sponsored and supported terrorism from the country.

Briefs

Rupee gains 01 paisa against US Dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Thursday appreciated by 01 paisa against the US Dollar in interbank trading and closed at Rs 279.96 compared to the previous day's closing at Rs 279.97. According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs 280.7 and Rs 282.8, respectively. The price of the Euro decreased by Rs 0.38 to close at Rs 325.59 from the previous day's close of Rs 325.97, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese Yen remained unchanged and closed at Rs 1.76, whereas the exchange rate of the British Pound witnessed a decrease of Rs 0.24 and closed at Rs 376.07 compared to the previous day's Rs 376.31. The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal remained stagnant and closed at Rs 76.22 and Rs 74.65, respectively.—APP

Pakistan, Japan private sector business dialogue held

ISLAMABAD: The 10th Pakistan-Japan Private Sector Business Dialogue was held on Thursday in Tokyo with the participation of business leaders and institutions from both countries. The Dialogue was co-chaired by Mr. Murtaza Mandiwala, Chairman, Pakistan-Japan Business Forum (PJBF), and Mr. Akira Terakawa, Chairman, Japan-Pakistan Business Co-operation Committee (JPBCC), said a release issued here. A 26-member PJBF business delegation participated in the Dialogue, reflecting strong private-sector interest from Pakistan, with the active support and facilitation of JPBC, H.E. Mr. Abdul Hameed, Ambassador of Pakistan to Japan, welcomed participants and highlighted the importance of trust, continuity, and practical cooperation in strengthening bilateral business ties.—APP

Over 10 hours gaming weekly harms young people's diet, sleep

SYDNEY: Playing video games for more than 10 hours a week may significantly affect young people's diet, sleep and body weight, a new study shows. The research, led by Australia's Curtin University and published in Nutrition, surveyed 317 students from five universities across the country, with a median age of 20, said a Curtin University statement on Thursday. Participants were classified as low (0-5 hours per week), moderate (5-10 hours) and high (10+ hours) gamers. Researchers found while low and moderate gamers reported similar health outcomes, results worsened dramatically among those who gamed more than 10 hours weekly.—APP

Vice Minister IDCPC meets PM Shehbaz; discuss ties

The Prime Minister also reaffirmed Pakistan's unwavering commitment to the One China Policy. On the economic partnership, the Prime Minister lauded China's generous support to Pakistan, especially through CPEC and stressed upon the need to ensure timely implementation of the next phase of CPEC

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Ms. Sun Huiyan, Vice Minister, International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (IDCPC), called on the Prime Minister at the Prime Minister House today. The Prime Minister was assisted by SAPM Tariq Fatemi, PM's Special Representative on China Amb. Zafar Uddin Mahmood, and Foreign Secretary Amb. Amna Baloch. During their warm and cordial meeting, the Prime Minister welcomed the Chinese dignitary and her delegation to Pakistan and said it was particularly auspicious that the visit was taking place when both countries were celebrating the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries. He noted that the year had commenced with the successful visit of the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Pakistan to Beijing, followed by a visit by the Interior Minister to Shanghai. The Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan was also expected to visit China in the coming days. The Prime Minister conveyed his warm greetings to President Xi Jinping and the Chinese leadership. He reaffirmed Pakistan's iron-clad All



Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership with China, and said that this would remain unshakable at all times. The Prime Minister also reaffirmed Pakistan's unwavering commitment to the One China Policy. On the economic partnership, the Prime Minister lauded China's generous support to Pakistan, especially through CPEC and stressed upon the need to ensure timely implementation

of the next phase of CPEC. He also reiterated his most cordial invitation to President Xi Jinping to undertake an official visit to Pakistan this year, as this was a special year and a milestone in both countries. The Chinese Vice Minister thanked the Prime Minister for his warm and hospitable welcome and said that China was committed to strengthening its long-standing, time-tested re-

lations with Pakistan across all spheres. She congratulated the Prime Minister for bringing economic as well as political stability in the country and said the Chinese nation took great pride in Pakistan's diplomatic successes. She briefed the Prime Minister that the Chinese Communist Party had maintained excellent ties with a wide range of political parties in Pakistan and appreci-

ated the Prime Minister for his leadership role in unifying these political entities for effective governance.

The Vice Minister emphasized the significance of party-to-party ties and expressed the Chinese Communist Party's commitment and resolve to deepen collaboration with political parties in Pakistan, through inter-party mechanisms.

Palestinian factions agree on body members to run Gaza

CAIRO: Egypt said Wednesday that all the members of a 15-person Palestinian technocratic committee meant to administer post-war Gaza had been agreed upon by all Palestinian factions, who swiftly offered their support. Under a 20-point Gaza truce plan brokered by US President Donald Trump in October, the Palestinian territory would be governed by the committee operating under the supervision of a so-called "Board of Peace," to be chaired by Trump himself. Hamas officials said earlier in the day that the group had opened talks with Egyptian mediators in Cairo on the committee, which forms part of Trump's truce plan for Gaza. "We hope that following this agreement, the committee will be announced soon... and will then be deployed to the Gaza Strip to manage daily life and essential services," Abdelatty said. The majority of the Palestinian factions offered their support to the committee after Abdelatty's announcement. In a statement, the factions including Hamas and Islamic Jihad said they had agreed "to support the mediators' efforts in forming the Palestinian National Transitional Committee to administer the Gaza Strip, while providing the appropriate environment" for it to begin its work. The Ramallah-based Palestinian presidency also announced its support in official media, with a source from the office telling AFP the statement "reflects the position of the Fatah movement because President (Mahmud) Abbas is also the head of Fatah.—APP

Jordanian, Irish officials discuss regional stability

LONDON: King Abdullah II of Jordan and Ireland's minister of foreign affairs, trade and defense, Helen McEntee, discussed ways to enhance cooperation across various sectors and achieve stability in the region. The meeting, held in Amman on Wednesday, focused on both regional and international developments. King Abdullah emphasized the importance of all parties committing to the agreement aimed at ending the war in Gaza. He also warned of the potential for escalation in the West Bank and Jerusalem, according to the Petra news agency. He expressed Jordan's readiness to strengthen cooperation with the EU, emphasizing the significance of building on the outcomes of the recent Jordan-EU Summit in Amman earlier this month. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi, along with the director of His Majesty's Office, Alaa Batayneh, and Ireland's ambassador to Jordan, Marianne Bolger, attended the meeting.

McEntee also held talks with Safadi in a separate meeting on Wednesday. The foreign ministers discussed expanding cooperation across key sectors, including trade, investment, education, tourism and defense. Safadi emphasized the significance of the first Jordan-EU Investment Conference in April, highlighting its positive impact on the Jordanian economy and ties with the EU, the Petra news agency added.—APP

Abrupt policy shifts shake investors' confidence: Tahir

PAEA, REAP delegation visits ICCI to apprise sector challenges

DNA

ISLAMABAD: An eight-member delegation of the Pakistan Alternative Energy Association (PAEA) and the Renewable Energy Association of Pakistan (REAP), led by PAEA Chairman Asif Javed, visited the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) and held a detailed meeting with President ICCI Sardar Tahir Mehmood to apprise him of the serious challenges being faced by the renewable and alternative energy sector in the wake of the proposed changes to the Net Metering Policy.

Speaking on the occasion, President ICCI Sardar Tahir Mehmood assured the delegation of the Chamber's all-out support and reaffirmed that ICCI would play an active advocacy role by raising the issue at all relevant forums. He emphasized that abrupt or unconsulted policy shifts could undermine investor confidence, adversely impact employment, and slow down the momentum of clean energy adoption, which is vital for economic stability and climate resilience. He stressed the need for

meaningful stakeholder consultation to ensure policy continuity, transparency, and a balanced approach that safeguards national economic interests. Senior Vice President ICCI Tahir Ayub and Vice President Irfan Chaudhry, in their remarks, endorsed the concerns raised by PAEA and REAP and highlighted that renewable energy has emerged as a key contributor to reducing pressure on the national grid and lowering dependence on imported fuels. They underscored that protecting investor confidence and ensuring sustainable growth of the solar and allied industries is essential for job creation and long-term energy security, adding that ICCI would continue to support initiatives promoting a stable and business-friendly energy policy framework. Earlier, PAEA Chairman Asif Javed underlined the need to retain net metering as an effective policy mechanism that encourages distributed solar generation without imposing additional costs or inefficiencies on the power system. He emphasized that the government should instead focus on addressing core issues such as transmission and distribution losses, recovery rates, transmission system constraints, and other structural inefficiencies that are major contributors to cost escalation in the power sector. He also called for effective management of IPPs and recovery of losses from all relevant sources. Vice Chairman Renewable Energy Association of Pakistan (REAP) Tayyab Niaz stated that PAEA and REAP are fully committed to working closely with government agencies to amicably resolve issues related to losses, generation management, transmission, and distribution in the best interest of the country. The delegation thanked ICCI leadership for their support and expressed hope that timely intervention by the Chamber would help address industry concerns while aligning power sector reforms with Pakistan's climate commitments and broader economic priorities. Former ICCI President Mohammad Ejaz Abbasi, Executive Members Zulqurnain Abbasi, Mohsin Khalid Malik, Raja Naveed Satti, ICCI Member Israr ul Haq Mashwani, and others were also present on the occasion.

Iran temporarily closes airspace to most flights Follow

WASHINGTON: Iran temporarily closed its airspace to all flights except international ones to and from Iran with official permission at 5:15 p.m. ET on Wednesday, according to a notice posted on the Federal Aviation Administration's website. The prohibition is set to last for more than two hours until 7:30 p.m. ET, or 0030 GMT, but could be extended, the notice said. The United States was withdrawing some personnel from bases in the Middle East, a US official said on Wednesday, after a senior Iranian official said Tehran had warned neighbors it would hit American bases if Washington strikes missile and drone barrages in a growing number of conflict zones represent a high risk to airline traffic. India's largest airline, IndiGo said some of its international flights would be impacted by Iran's sudden airspace closure. A flight by Russia's Aeroflot bound for Tehran returned to Moscow after the closure, according to tracking data from FlightRadar24. Earlier on Wednesday, Germany issued a new directive cautioning the country's airlines from entering Iranian airspace, shortly after Lufthansa reigned its flight operations across the Middle East amid escalating tensions in the region. The United States already prohibits all US commercial flights from overflying Iran and there are no direct flights between the countries. Airline operators like flydubai and Turkish Airlines have canceled multiple flights to Iran in the past week. "Several airlines have already reduced or suspended services, and most carriers are avoiding Iranian airspace," said Safe Airspace, a website run by OPSGROUP, a membership-based organization that shares flight risk information.—APP

Hamas says technocratic body key to consolidating Gaza truce

GAZA: A senior Hamas official on Thursday welcomed the formation of a technocratic committee to govern post-war Gaza, saying it would help consolidate the ceasefire and prevent a return to fighting. Egypt, a mediator in indirect ceasefire talks between Israel and Hamas, announced the formation of a 15-member Palestinian technocratic committee that would operate under the overall supervision of a so-called "Board of Peace," to be chaired by US President Donald Trump. "The formation of the committee is a step in the right direction," said Bassem Naim, a senior leader in the Palestinian Islamist movement. "This is crucial for consolidating the ceasefire, preventing a return to war, addressing the catastrophic humanitarian crisis and preparing for comprehensive reconstruction," he said. Hamas has exercised total control over public life in Gaza since 2007. It has repeatedly said it does not seek a role in any future governing authority in Gaza and would limit its involvement to monitoring governance. Naim said Hamas was ready to hand over administration of the Gaza Strip to the national transitional committee and to facilitate its work. "The ball is now in the court of the mediators, the American guarantor and the international community to empower the committee," he said. He urged them to counter what he described as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's attempts to "stall or obstruct" the next stages of the ceasefire. Since the ceasefire took effect on October 10, Gaza has been split by a so-called "Yellow Line," marking the boundary between territory controlled by Hamas and areas under Israeli military authority.—APP

Three more UK pro-Palestinian activists end hunger strike

LONDON: Three detained pro-Palestinian activists awaiting trial in the UK have ended their hunger strike after 73 days, a campaign group said. The three began "refeeding" on Wednesday, Prisoners for Palestine said in a statement late on Wednesday. The decision leaves just one person still on hunger strike who started six days ago, it confirmed to APP. Four others called off their hunger strike earlier. The detainees are due to stand trial for alleged break-ins or criminal damage on behalf of the Palestine Action campaign group before it was banned under anti-terrorism laws. They deny the charges. The group, aged 20-31, launched their hunger strike in November in protest at their treatment and called for their release from prison on bail as they await trial.—APP

Urgent need for conducive tax environment to broaden tax net: RCCI

DNA

RAWALPINDI : Emphasizing the urgent need for a conducive and business-friendly tax environment to effectively broaden the tax net, the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce & Industry (RCCI) hosted a high-level meeting with a visiting delegation of the Regional Tax Office (RTO), led by Ms. Farhat Qayum, Chief Commissioner, RTO. RCCI highlighted that Pakistan currently has one of the highest tax rates in the region, which poses serious challenges to business growth and competitiveness. Addressing the gathering, RCCI President Usman Shaukat stressed that sustainable economic growth is not possible without a fair, predictable, and growth-oriented tax regime. He urged the tax authorities to reduce the excessive burden on existing taxpayers, recognize and acknowledge compliant and high tax-paying businesses, and shift the focus towards broadening the tax base instead of repeatedly taxing the same segment. Highlighting

the issue of high taxation, President RCCI noted that when super tax and other levies are combined, the corporate tax rate effectively goes beyond 55 percent, levels more commonly associated with developed economies. He questioned how businesses could remain competitive locally when such high legitimate tax rates are imposed, while better services and facilitation are available abroad at comparatively lower costs. He emphasized that businesses are willing to be tax compliant, provided the system is fair and facilitative. He further suggested non-monetary recognition mechanisms for compliant taxpayers such as recognition cards, priority facilitation at airports, and public acknowledgment stating that such measures do not impose a financial burden on the state but significantly enhance the dignity and motivation of taxpayers. President RCCI also presented key recommendations, including tax incentives for exporters, reduction in the corporate tax rate, and strong action against corrupt practices and harassment by lower-level staff under the guise of registration, audits, and enforcement,

which create uncertainty and discourage voluntary compliance. In her remarks, Chief Commissioner Ms. Farhat Qayum appreciated RCCI's constructive and pragmatic recommendations for broadening the tax net

and sought the Chamber's continued cooperation in improving tax compliance and revenue collection. She informed the participants that digitization reforms are actively underway to curb malpractices, including digital

invoicing and POS system installation, aimed at enhancing transparency and minimizing human intervention. The meeting was attended by Senior Vice President Khalid Farooq Qazi, Vice President Fahad Barlas, former

RCCI Presidents Najam Rehan and Asad Mashadi, members of the Executive Committee, representatives of markets and trade associations, various business sectors, and members of the Tax Bar Association.



