



Islamabad POST

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US President Trump revokes invite to Canada

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Briefs

UK police probe attack on Pakistan dissidents

DNA

LONDON: British counter-terrorism police are investigating a series of what authorities have described as "highly targeted" attacks against two Pakistani dissidents living in the United Kingdom, according to a report published by The Guardian on Friday. Scotland Yard's counter-terrorism command took over the investigation following four attacks that began on Christmas Eve in Cambridgeshire and Buckinghamshire. One person has been arrested, and one of the incidents involved the use of a firearm. The attacks targeted two prominent supporters of former Pakistani prime minister Imran Khan, who is currently incarcerated. One of the victims told The Guardian that his attackers appeared to be "fair-skinned, white or wearing masks" and said he feared for his life. The first two attacks took place on Christmas Eve. In Chesham, Buckinghamshire, two men broke into the home of a dissident shortly after 8am and vandalised the property. The second attack occurred at the Cambridgeshire home of rights lawyer Mirza Shahzad Akbar, a human rights lawyer and former member of Imran's cabinet.

Pakistan calls for strict adherence to Syrian-Kurds ceasefire accord

DNA

UNITED NATIONS: Pakistan has called for faithful implementation of the recent ceasefire agreement between the Syrian Government and SDF, a US-backed Kurdish-led group, in an effort to advance Syria's stability and security and uphold its unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity after years of devastating conflict in the Arab country. "All state institutions and security structures must operate under a single, central framework to ensure effective governance," Ambassador Usman Jadoon, acting permanent representative of Pakistan to the United Nations, told the UN Security Council on Thursday. In this regard, he also welcomed the Presidential decree concerning the Kurdish community, pointing out that measures aimed at ensuring equal citizenship, cultural and linguistic recognition, and inclusive participation were important to strengthen social cohesion and national reconciliation.

Breakouts by Daesh a threat: EU

CENTRELINE REPORT
BRUSSELS: The EU said Friday that alleged breakouts by detained foreign fighters from the Daesh group in Syria were of "paramount concern," and it was monitoring the transfer of prisoners to Iraq. "The recent alleged breakouts of Daesh detainees amidst the clashes is of paramount concern," EU spokesman Anouar El Anouni said, referring to fighting between the Syrian government and Kurdish-led forces who had previously secured the prisoners. "We closely monitor the situation, including the transfer of remaining fighters detained, including foreign terrorist fighters to Iraq," El Anouni said.

'Diplomatic win'

Govt defends joining Gaza peace board

Minister says peace board role strengthens Pakistan's voice, rejects opposition's isolation claims

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning Ahsan Iqbal on Friday defended the government's decision to join the US President Donald Trump-led Board of Peace, aimed at ensuring lasting peace in Gaza, terming the move a "diplomatic success" for Pakistan. "Pakistan doesn't need lessons from anyone on national security and should not be accused of cowardice or negligence," the minister said while speaking at the joint sitting of Parliament in response to the remarks made by Opposition Leader in the Senate, Allama Raja Nasir Abbas. US President Donald Trump kicked off his new "Board of Peace" at Davos on Thursday, with world leaders, including Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, signing on to pursue a lasting agreement for Gaza. A group of leaders and senior officials from 19 countries including Trump allies from Argentina and Hungary – gathered on stage with the US president to put their names to the founding charter of the body. Trump was the first to sign the charter, who later witnessed the ceremony held on the sidelines of the 56th Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF). Pakistan had received the invitation from President Trump to join the Board, which was later accepted. During today's session, Iqbal maintained that joining the Gaza Peace Board was a calculated step to help stop Israel's ongoing

oppression of Palestinians, stressing that Pakistan's principled stance against Israel had not changed. He said Pakistan considers Israel an aggressor whose hands are soaked in the blood of innocent Palestinian people, adding that the government supports the creation of an independent Palestinian state based on the pre-1967 borders. The minister argued that had Pakistan stayed out of the forum, the opposition would have claimed the country had been isolated. Iqbal further said Pakistan should instead be welcomed for securing an important role at a critical time, adding that the ceasefire currently in place in Gaza was the result of efforts by eight Islamic countries. Earlier, opposition parties protested during the joint parliamentary session over Pakistan's participation in the Gaza Peace Board. Abbas said that what Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu failed to achieve was now being pursued under the banner of a "peace board." He complained that Pakistan had joined the forum without national consensus and that lawmakers were not informed about its terms. Meanwhile, JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman also criticised the decision, saying US President Donald Trump was strengthening Israeli aggression and issuing threats to Hamas. He questioned Pakistan's participation in a forum that, in his view, began with threats rather than peace, and alleged that the prime minister neither took parliament nor the cabinet into confidence before making the decision.

Easing inflation

SBP to further cut policy rate

Of the 10 analysts surveyed, seven expect the SBP to cut rates by 50 basis points, two see a deeper 75 basis point reduction, while one expects the central bank to hold rates unchanged, following a surprise cut in December that ended a four-meeting pause

MONITORING DESK

KARACHI: The central bank is expected to cut its key policy rate by 50 basis points at its upcoming meeting, a poll showed, as easing inflation, improving foreign exchange buffers and a stabilising rupee bolster the case for further monetary easing despite lingering risks. The State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) Monetary Policy Committee is scheduled to meet on Jan 26 (Monday). Of the 10 analysts surveyed, seven expect the SBP to cut rates by 50 basis points, two see a deeper 75 basis point reduction, while one expects the central bank to hold rates unchanged, following a surprise cut in December that ended a four-meeting pause. The median forecast points to a 50 bps cut. That would cement a change in direction from the SBP's aggressive tightening cycle after rates peaked at a record 22 per cent in 2023, with cumulative cuts since mid-2024 totalling 1,150 bps so far. Analysts projecting a 50 bps move cited moderating inflation, higher foreign exchange reserves and a better balance of payments outlook, while flagging the need for caution given persistent core inflation and geopolitical risks.

The inflation outlook has eased marginally and external buffers have strengthened, giving the SBP room to support growth, said Waqar Ghani, Head of equity research at JS Global Capital, adding that expectations remain anchored despite elevated non-food inflation. Those expecting a larger cut argue that macroeconomic conditions are now aligned for more decisive easing. Pakistan appears on the verge of returning to a single-digit policy rate, said Sana Tawfiq, head of research at Arif Habib Limited, pointing to improving growth momentum, stable reserves and inflation running below the central bank's medium-term target. A 50 basis point cut would bring Pakistan's policy rate to 10.5 per cent. The cautious camp, however, warned that risks remain. Fawad Basir, head of research at KTrade, cited geopolitical uncertainty and its impact on fuel prices as a reason for a measured pace of easing, while AKD Securities expects

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Trump claims NATO troops avoided Afghan frontline

US reportedly lost more than 2,400 soldiers

CENTRELINE REPORT

LONDON: A UK minister said Friday that US President Donald Trump was "plainly wrong" to claim that NATO soldiers did not fight on the front line in Afghanistan, as the claim sparked outrage in Britain. In an interview with Fox News aired on Thursday, Trump appeared unaware that 457 British soldiers died fighting in the South Asian country following the September 11 attacks on the United States. "They'll say they sent some troops to Afghanistan," Trump told the US outlet. "And they did, they stayed a little back, a little off the front lines," he added. Trump also repeated his suggestion that NATO would not come to the aid of the United States if asked to do so. In fact, following the 9/11 attacks, the UK and a number of other allies joined the US from 2001 in Afghanistan after it invoked NATO's collective security clause. As well as Britain's, troops from other NATO ally countries including Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Denmark and others also died. Care Minister Stephen Kinnock said

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DNA



MURREE: Heavy snowfall on Friday left a large number of vehicles stranded at the hill resort, disrupting traffic and causing difficulties for visitors. – DNA

Gul Plaza death toll crossed 70

BUREAU REPORT

KARACHI: The death toll of Karachi's Gul Plaza blaze crossed 70 on Friday as rescuers found more remains from the rubble of the gutted shopping centre. Police Surgeon Dr Summaiya Syed issued an updated list of 71 deceased. Of the 16 identified so far, nine were identified through DNA tests, which have been performed for 49 samples.

The deadly inferno, which erupted on the night of January 17 at the mall and took nearly two days to be fully extinguished, has left the ground-plus-three-storey building in ruins, with some sections collapsed.

As more bodies were recovered from different parts of the building, officials cautioned that the final toll can only be determined once the identification of the remains is completed.

Continued on Page 06

Nine dead in Chitral

Snow blankets parts of KP, Murree areas

It should be mentioned that the residents of Tirah have been vacating their homes amid a planned military operation against militants in the restive valley

BUREAU REPORT

KHYBER/ SHANGLA/ RAWALPINDI: Commuters and residents faced difficulties on Thursday as snow blanketed several parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Murree. While a restriction was placed on the entry of vehicles into Murree, a rescue operation was underway in Tirah. Meanwhile, the Met Office said more rain and snowfall was expected in different areas from Sunday night till Tuesday under the influence of a westerly wave. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Rescue 1122 Spokesperson Bilal Faizi said on Friday that a comprehensive rescue operation was ongoing to help the people affected by heavy snowfall in the province.

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ICT admin enforces ban due to snowfall

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Entry into Murree has been reduced to zero vehicles as the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration enforced a restriction due to snowfall and weather conditions. The Islamabad district administration said the move aims to manage traffic, ensure safety, and allow road clearance. Officials urged tourists to delay travel until conditions improve and routes reopen. The Islamabad district administration

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KP govt, tribal elders explore industrial zone status for Darra

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government and tribal leaders on Friday held a Jirga to give industrial zone status to Darra Adam Khel to boost economy and formalize arms industry.

The high-level consultative Jirga held at eagle fort, district Kohat, chaired by Provincial Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs Aftab Alam and attended by Commissioner Kohat Division Syed Motasim Billah Shah, Deputy Commissioner Kohat Rahimullah Mehsud, Managing Director Small Industries Abdul Hameed, officials from the Industries Department, and local tribal elders. Participants highlighted Darra Adam Khel's historical commercial importance and its traditional craftsmanship, particularly the world-famous handmade arms industry. Speakers emphasized the area's strong potential for industrial development, while tribal elders presented practical proposals for transforming the region into an industrial hub. Addressing the Jirga, Managing Director Small Industries Abdul Hameed said that granting industrial status to Darra Adam Khel would significantly boost economic activity, create employment opportunities for local youth, and accelerate overall regional development. Minister Aftab Alam assured the tribal elders of full government support, stating that the KP government was committed to developing Darra Adam Khel as an industrial center and would take concrete measures to achieve this objective.—APP

47 illegal chromite mines closed in Pishin: CM

QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti on Friday said that at least 47 illegal chromite mines have been closed in Pishin district during a joint operation by the district administration and law enforcement agencies (LEAs).

In his message on social media, he said that the mineral resources of Balochistan are the collective property of the people of the province and any illegal activity on these resources would not be tolerated under any circumstances. The chief minister clarified that illegal mining was not only damaging the national and provincial treasury but was also a serious challenge to law enforcement.

He said that these actions were practical proof that the government of Balochistan would not compromise on the protection of mineral resources and the rule of law. Mir Sarfraz Bugti pointed out that due to illegal mining, the province was earning less than Rs 10 billion annually from the mines and minerals sector, which was a matter of concern for a resource-rich province like Balochistan. He said that due to illegal activities, the province had been deprived of its real income and the people of their legitimate rights. The chief minister announced that the Balochistan government was introducing a comprehensive.—APP

Karachi Port-Kazakhstan rail link to boost regional integration: Abbasi

This comprehensive railway project, reflecting the Prime Minister's vision, will serve as a milestone for the entire region," Abbasi said

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi Thursday said that the Karachi Port-Kazakhstan railway connectivity a mega initiative that would open new avenues for trade, transit and regional integration. During a meeting with Ambassador of Kazakhstan Yerzhan Kistafin in Islamabad, focusing on strengthening regional connectivity and enhancing bilateral cooperation in the railway sector, the minister said Pakistan Railways' regional connectivity initiative as a highly important and strategic project under Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif's vision to link Pakistan with Central Asia through an integrated rail network. He said significant progress has been made on the proposed Pakistan-Kazakhstan railway connectivity, including the preparation of a plan to establish a direct rail link from Karachi to Central Asia. "This comprehensive railway project, reflecting the Prime Minister's vision, will serve as a milestone for the entire region," Abbasi said. The minister said that the President of Kazakhstan is likely to visit Pakistan on February 3, during which a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will be signed to advance the project.

According to the Ministry of Railways, the Pakistan-Kazakhstan railway connectivity project is estimated at \$7 billion and is planned to be completed within a record period of three



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi meeting to discuss Pakistan Railways' mega project with Kazakhstan Ambassador Yerzhan Kistafin.

years. The proposed rail corridor will connect Pakistan with Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Ka-

zakhstan via Chaman, establishing a comprehensive rail network linking South Asia with Central

Asia. The minister emphasized that direct railway connectivity with Central Asia would prove to

be a game changer for the region and a significant milestone for Pakistan's economy, facilitating

trade, transit and people-to-people contacts across the wider region.

Kundi lauds Punjab for assistance to Tirah, Kurram affectees

The Governor said the relief sent for 500 families of Tirah TDPs has been handed over to the Red Crescent Society for Merged Districts and assured that the assistance would be delivered to the deserving affectees with transparency

PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Friday lauded the Government of Punjab and Governor Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider for extending timely humanitarian assistance to the affectees of Tirah Valley and Kurram. The Governor received the relief consignment sent on the instructions of Governor Punjab at Governor House Peshawar. The relief goods were handed over by the Punjab Red Crescent Society (PRCS) to the Red Crescent Society for Merged Districts, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, during a ceremony held at the Governor House. Principal Secretary to Governor Zubair Arshad, PRCS Merged Districts representative Imran Wazir, Secretary Shahid Malik, PRCS Punjab Secretary General Mehboob Qadir Shah at Governor House. On the occasion, the Governor thanked Governor Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider and the Punjab Red Crescent Society for their continued support to the affectees of Tirah and Kurram. The Governor said the relief sent for 500

on the occasion. The relief package comprises 500 ration packs, each weighing 20 kilograms, containing flour, rice, sugar, ghee and other essential food items. In addition, 1,900 bottles of clean drinking water and medicines for 3,000 patients were also included. The assistance will be distributed among the affectees who were temporarily displaced from Tirah Valley. Later, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi held a meeting with PRCS Punjab Secretary General Mehboob Qadir Shah at Governor House. On the occasion, the Governor thanked Governor Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider and the Punjab Red Crescent Society for their continued support to the affectees of Tirah and Kurram. The Governor said the relief sent for 500

families of Tirah TDPs has been handed over to the Red Crescent Society for Merged Districts and assured that the assistance would be delivered to the deserving affectees with transparency. He added that various donors were also contributing to relief efforts and all-out efforts were being made to ensure maximum assistance to the affected people. Governor Kundi said that the Punjab Red Crescent Society has always stood by the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during difficult times, including cloudbursts and floods, and appreciated its humanitarian role. He expressed gratitude, on behalf of the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, merged districts and Tirah, to Governor Punjab and Punjab Red Crescent Society for their solidarity and cooperation.—APP

FTO vows to protect taxpayers' rights

ISLAMABAD: Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) Mr. Zafar-ul-Haq Hijazi paid an official visit to the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) and addressed the business community, assuring them of full protection of taxpayers' rights and relief-oriented measures. This was Mr. Hijazi's maiden visit to any chamber after assuming charge as Federal Tax Ombudsman. Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Hijazi said that every possible step would be taken to safeguard the rights of taxpayers. He emphasized that upcoming budget proposals would ensure an end to harassment of tax filers. He informed the participants that the time for registering complaints against the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and filing appeals has been reduced to just one day. "Now complaints will be reviewed and appeals will be fixed within a single day," he stated, adding that his priority is to provide maximum relief to businessmen. Almas Ali Jovindah Advisor (Legal) FTO informed that FTO has received more than 38000 complaints against the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) during 2025 and 98 percent of the FTO's recommendations were implementation by the FBR. RCCI President Mr. Usman Shaukat, in his address, highlighted the importance of the Federal Tax Ombudsman as a key institution, deterrence and appreciated its role in timely resolution of traders' complaints. He said that the FTO has played an effective role in addressing issues faced by the business community. Group Leader RCCI Mr. Sohail Altaf said that the confidence of the business community in the FTO office has significantly increased. He clarified that traders have no objection to paying taxes; rather, their concerns relate to the procedures adopted by FBR. He pointed out that as withholding agents, the business community collects and deposits taxes for FBR free of cost, yet no credit or recognition is given. He demanded that businessmen should be given the status of partners of FBR in tax collection. Senior Vice President Mr. Khalid Farooq Qazi, Vice President Mr. Fahad Barlas, former presidents of RCCI, Vice President FPCCI Mr. Tariq Jadoon, Executive Committee members, and a large number of chamber members were also present on the occasion.—DNA

CDA, UN join hands to boost environmental protection

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, held a meeting with United Nations Senior Coordination Officer for Climate and Environment and UNEP Focal Point, Alex Forbes, on Friday. The meeting was attended by CDA Member Environment Esfandyar Baloch, Deputy Commissioner Islamabad Irfan Nawaz Memon, Director General Resources and other senior officers. The meeting discussed measures for environmental protection and the acquisition of carbon credits in the Federal Capital Islamabad. Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa said that CDA is following a comprehensive strategy for the environmental protection and improvement of the Capital City Islamabad. He said that in this regard, CDA wishes to fully benefit from the global framework and market for acquiring carbon

credits. Chairman CDA said that CDA is working on several projects for environmental protection and acquiring carbon credits. He said that they are increasing the city's green cover by planning to convert brown areas into green areas in the Federal Capital Islamabad. Chairman CDA said that they are working on modern solid waste management project

in the Federal Capital Islamabad, which can facilitate the acquisition of carbon credits. He mentioned that a project comprising 160 environmentally friendly electric feeder buses is running successfully in the Capital City Islamabad and in the future, further expansion of electric tram projects and eco-friendly transport can also be utilized to benefit

from carbon credits. Chairman CDA said that the completion of development projects in the Federal Capital Islamabad will also lead to a reduction in carbon emissions as well as citizens' convenience. He said they are striving to establish modern scientific landfill sites in Islamabad according to international standards, which will reduce environmental pollution. During the meeting, United Nations Senior Coordination Officer for Environment, Alex Forbes, emphasized promoting future technical assistance and cooperation, saying that they would consider providing technical support for acquiring carbon credits under international frameworks and green programs. Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa said that technical assistance and cooperation with the UN and other international development partners are essential to address environmental challenges. He said that by enhancing CDA's capacity, practical progress for acquiring carbon credits can be ensured.



Govt believes in giving opportunities to youngsters: Rana

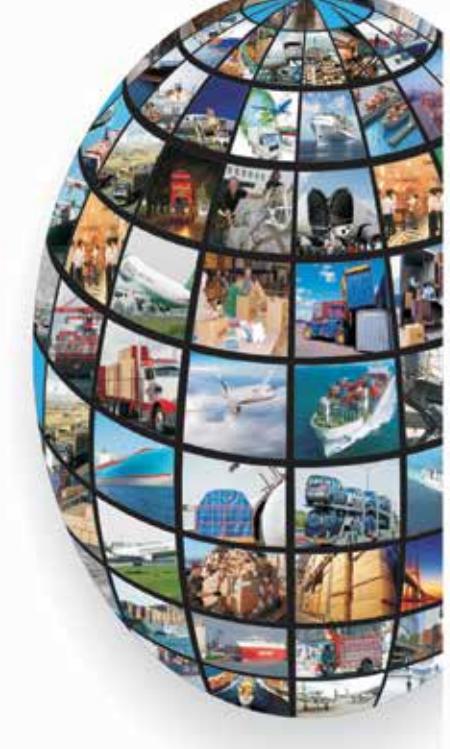
LAHORE: Prime Minister's Youth Programme (PMYP) Chairman Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan has said that PML-N government believes in giving opportunities to youngsters purely on merit. He said this while addressing Prime Minister's Youth Laptop distribution ceremony at Lahore College Women University (LCWU) on Friday. He said that in 1997, Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif as Punjab CM eliminated 'boti mafai' cheating culture and always emphasized on promoting merit. He said that credit goes to PML-N government for introducing country's first youth policy understanding that the country's progress was linked with promotion of education. He said, "After laptop initiative, the Punjab Education Endowment Fund has been started which is benefiting millions of deserving students in pursuing their education." He further said that there were millions of students who after completing their

education through Punjab Education Endowment Fund were now doing so well in their practical lives. He said that Pakistan came into being on basis of equality offering equal opportunities to everyone living in the country. PMYP chairman said that under the youth policy, youngsters were brought towards self entrepreneurship giving them confidence and courage to promote slogan i.e. 'dare to dream'. He stated that government started giving soft loans to youngsters so that their ideas and startups could be materialized. He said that Danish Schools project was initiated with a vision to extend quality education facilities to remote and underprivileged areas of the country and this initiative yielded positive results. He said with the grace of Allah, the Almighty Punjab Education Endowment Fund had become Pakistan Endowment Fund benefiting children across the country. Rana Mashhood said that Punjab Danish Authority had become Pakistan Danish Authority and Danish Schools network was being expanded across the country. He said that 'Pakistan is 4th fastest growing freelance market and it is just because of the distribution of more than 1.8 million laptops among students purely on merit.' He said that it was a resolve of PML-N government to take IT exports to 25 billion dollars. He said that during 'Marka-i-Haq', Pakistan proved its mettle in the field of IT. He stated that youngsters must register themselves on digital youth hub platform to benefit from this unique initiative. He said 'Digital youth hub is a artificial intelligence based platform and it provides proper guidance to youth in line with their provided data whether they need any further academic courses besides telling them about available scholarships as well.' He said that Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif believed in empowering youth.—DNA



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National Days and Armed Forces Days

JANUARY

Jan 01 / CUBA Revolution Day

Jan 01 / Palestine Palestine Revolution Day

Jan 01 / Sudan National Day

Jan 04 / Myanmar Independence Day

Jan 06 / Iraq Armed Forces Day

Jan 12 / Tanzania Armed Forces Day

Jan 14 / Uzbekistan Armed Forces Day

Jan 15 / Nigeria Armed Forces Day

Jan 20 / Mali Armed Forces Day

Jan 20 / Laos Armed Forces Day

Jan 25 / Thailand Armed Forces Day

Jan 26 / Australia National Day

Jan 26 / India Republic Day

Turkish Airlines.....8494949



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Islamabad Metropolitan

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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Info ministry assures resolution of journalists' pending plot allotments

The secretary directed relevant officials to convene committee meetings daily from next week to address the issue promptly. It was also agreed that journalists who already own a plot or flat in Islamabad, or those who surrendered flats without reapplying, will not be eligible for new allotments

DNA

ISLAMABAD :The Ministry of Information has assured working journalists in the twin cities that the long-pending issue of residential plot allotments will soon be resolved. Starting Monday, the scrutiny committee will hold meetings on a daily basis to expedite the process. The ministry has also sought necessary records from the Capital Development Authority (CDA) to ensure that journalists who have already received plots

or flats in the past do not qualify for fresh allotments. A detailed meeting was held at the Ministry of Information with Federal Secretary Information, Ashfaq Ahmed Khalil, Principal Information Officer (PIO) Mubashir Hassan, and senior journalists. During the session, journalists briefed the secretary about the allotment cases that have remained pending for over a decade, and expressed concerns over repeated delays and postponements of committee meetings. PIO Mubashir Hassan explained the reasons behind the delays

and obstacles in the allotment process. Federal Secretary Khalil assured participants that the ministry is neither a hurdle in the allotment process nor intends to become one, emphasizing that allotments will be made strictly on merit and journalistic experience. The secretary directed relevant officials to convene committee meetings daily from next week to address the issue promptly. It was also agreed that journalists who already own a plot or flat in Islamabad, or those who surrendered flats without reapplying, will not be eligible for new

allotments. Similarly, journalists lacking at least 15 years of practice in Islamabad and 20 years of overall journalistic experience, or those who have left journalism for NGOs or other institutions, will not qualify. Participants thanked the secretary and PIO for announcing immediate steps to resolve the matter. A proposal was also presented to include the Parliamentary Reporters Association of Pakistan (PRA) in future committees, instead of "dummy" journalist organizations, as PRA is recognized as a key forum actively working for the rights of journalists across the country.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Petroleum, Ali Pervaiz Malik meeting with the Ambassador of Indonesia to Pakistan Chandra Warsenanto Sukotjo on Friday.

Traders firmly oppose demands for rupee devaluation

DNA

ISLAMABAD :Business leader and former president of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce, Shahid Rasheed Butt, has strongly rejected demands for further rupee devaluation, saying those offering such advice are not only unaware of ground realities but are also harming national interests. He said the rupee has already been severely weakened, and ordinary citizens are bearing the burden of inflation. If the currency is further devalued, prices of essential goods will spiral out of control. He warned that this would fuel economic uncertainty and raise the risk of social unrest.

In a statement issued here, Shahid Rasheed Butt urged policymakers to focus on increasing production and exports, and reducing business costs, rather than playing with the value of the currency. He said electricity prices for industries in Pakistan are nearly double those in competing countries. Taxes are excessive, interest rates are extremely high, and the law-and-order situation is poor, all of which are steadily worsening the business environment. As a result, capital, investors, and multinational companies are leaving the country. He declares it unacceptable that all sectors are being sacrificed solely to satisfy influential IPP owners. He asserts that whenever any industry attempts recovery, government agencies promptly tighten control. Pakistan's exports are stagnating at around 30 billion dollars, with textiles at about 19 billion. Despite the agricultural base, agricultural exports stubbornly remain under 5

billion, while other sectors also fail to exceed 5 billion combined. Shahid Rasheed Butt demanded an end to shifting the burden of electricity theft and poor political decisions onto the industrial and domestic sectors. He stressed that genuine reforms are needed to address Pakistan's economic problems, not cosmetic measures and repeated currency devaluation. He stated that to restore confidence and revive investment, the government should ensure policy stability, conduct credible reforms, and enforce policies consistently. He specifically recommended predictable taxation, affordable energy, and accessible finance, and further urged the government to consult with industry leaders before making major economic decisions to avoid shocks to businesses.

PNCA to host large-scale outdoor installation exhibition

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) is set to unveil a groundbreaking outdoor installation and sculpture exhibition titled "In the Meantime: An Installation Garden," marking a significant moment in Pakistan's contemporary art landscape. The opening ceremony of the exhibition is scheduled for February 06 (Friday) at PNCA. The exhibition is likely to be inaugurated by Aurangzeb Khan Khi-chi, Minister for National Heritage and Culture Division (NH&CD). Curated by Noor Fatima, the ambitious exhibition will transform the PNCA lawns and amphitheater into an immersive landscape where art, nature, and public space converge. The installation garden represents a bold departure from traditional gallery settings, inviting visitors to experience art within the natural environment. The exhibition brings together an impressive roster of 31 artists spanning multiple generations – from senior established names to emerging voices in Pakistani contemporary art. The participating artists include Abdul Jabbar Gull, Aam Tamkeen, Asjad Faraz, Azma Sarwar, Bilal Jabbar, Casim Mahmood, Ehtesam Jadoon, Faizan Naveed, Hafsa Nouman Qureshi, Hassan Ali, Hassan Mujtaba, Hassan Sheikh, Hidayat Marwat, Hussain Jamil, Imran Hunzai, Jamil Baloch, Maheen Riaz, Maha Sohail, Mis-haim Gardezi, Muhammad Ahsan, Nazir Hunzai, Neele Ahmed, Nol-wenn Keradren, Rafiqullah Khan, Suleman Faisal, Tayyaba Idrees Qureshi, Ubaid Tariq, Waheed Latif, Yahya Khan, Zahid-ul-haq, and Zahra Jadoon.

According to the exhibition concept, "In the Meantime" explores the intersection of time, memory, material, and nature, transforming the public space into a site of reflection. The outdoor setting allows the artworks to engage in dialogue with their natural surroundings, creating a dynamic environment that shifts with light, weather, and visitor interaction throughout the day. Following its inauguration, the exhibition will remain accessible to the public until February 18. The visitors will have the opportunity to experience the installation garden daily from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM, with the venue closed on Saturdays. The exhibition's design has been conceived by Momina Salman, whose visual identity for the show features dramatic monochromatic mountain imagery interwoven with vibrant striations of color – a visual metaphor perhaps for the exhibition's exploration of time, permanence, and transformation. "In the Meantime" represents PNCA's continued commitment to presenting innovative contemporary art experiences that engage diverse audiences and push the boundaries of traditional exhibition formats. By situating large-scale installations within the institution's outdoor spaces, the exhibition democratizes access to contemporary art, allowing it to be experienced freely within the public realm. This immersive landscape exhibition offers Pakistani audiences a rare opportunity to engage with contemporary sculpture and installation art in an open-air setting, where the boundaries between art, architecture, and nature dissolve into a unified experiential journey. –APP

Murder suspect arrested at Islamabad airport

ISLAMABAD :The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Immigration staff arrested a murder suspect at Islamabad International Airport while he was attempting to flee the country. An official told APP on Friday that the accused, identified as Qalandar, was arrested when he tried to travel to Thailand.

He said the accused was wanted by Dagar Police Station, Buner, in a murder case and his name had already been placed on the stop list, leading to his interception at the airport. The official added that after completing necessary legal formalities, FIA Immigration Islamabad handed over the accused to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police for further legal proceedings.

The FIA reaffirmed its resolve to prevent wanted criminals from escaping abroad and to assist law-enforcement agencies in bringing offenders to justice. The Federal Investigation Agency Anti-Human Trafficking Circle, Islamabad, has arrested two accused involved in visa fraud and migrant smuggling. An official told APP on Friday that the arrested accused were identified as Muhammad Farooq and Asif Mahmood. He said the accused allegedly deceived a citizen by offering employment in Azerbaijan and fraudulently obtained Rs 820,000 from him. –APP

Rs 1.5b bailout package proposed for FUUAST

ISLAMABAD :Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Dr Tariq Fazal Chaudhary informed the Senate on Friday that a bailout package worth Rs 1.5 billion has been proposed to address the financial crisis facing the Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science and Technology (FUUAST). Responding to a calling attention notice raised by Senator Sarmad Ali, the minister said that the Prime Minister had earlier approved a similar bailout package for Quaid-e-Azam University. He said that all financial issues of FUUAST would be resolved once the proposed bailout package is approved. –APP

16 held for drugs, illegal arms, liquor & cheque dishonour

RAWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi Police in operations across the district held 16 accused, including six for drug and liquor offences, nine for illegal possession of weapons, and a wanted person in a cheque dishonour case. A police spokesperson said on Friday that the Waris Khan Police detained two drug suppliers and recovered 1.76 kilograms of charas and 10 litres of liquor. Similarly, the Pir Wadhai and Taxila Police each arrested one individual with 10 litres of liquor, while the Sadiqabad Police detained two suspects with two bottles of liquor. Separately, nine individuals were arrested from the areas of Kahuta, Banni, Waris Khan, R.A. Bazaar and Jatti for possessing illegal weapons and ammunition. In another operation, the Sadiqabad Police arrested a wanted person in a cheque dishonour case. The individual had been wanted since October 2025. Police said human intelligence and all available resources were deployed to ensure his arrest. –APP

Efforts afoot to curb cars' Jumma Bazaar on Murree Road

RAWALPINDI, Jan 23 (APP): The City Traffic Police (CTP) Rawalpindi have put in place measures to curb illegal vehicles' Jumma Bazaar and prevent the resultant congestion on the Murree Road. Video Player City Traffic Officer (CTO) Farhan Aslam said on Friday that more than 50 personnel and two tow trucks had been deployed on the city's main artery to curb no-parking violations and ensure smooth traffic flow. He emphasised that the car market operating on the Murree Road had no legal status and that repeated warnings had been issued to the organisers. He said all available resources were being employed to maintain uninterrupted traffic in the city and that violators causing inconvenience to other road users would face heavy fines. CTO Farhan Aslam urged citizens not to create difficulties for others in pursuit of personal convenience and encouraged them to play their part in ensuring organized traffic management. –APP

Snowstorm strands thousands of vehicles in Murree

MURREE: The district administration, police and emergency services on Friday launched a large-scale rescue operation in Murree as heavy snowfall left more than 5,000 tourist vehicles stranded in the hill station. Deputy Commissioner Agha Zaheer Abbas Shirazi and District Police Officer (DPO) Dr Muhammad Raza Tanveer Sipra were present in the field to supervise the operation, which focused on clearing internal roads and ensuring the safe evacuation of stranded tourists. The deputy commissioner said snowfall had reached around one foot and was continuing. He said snowploughs, cranes and loaders were working round the clock to reopen main roads and restore mobility. He said the administration had mobilised all available resources to ensure public safety and was providing continuous guidance and assistance to tourists and residents. He appealed to visitors to remain patient, assuring them that all relevant departments were fully active. The DPO said visibility had dropped to near zero due to the intensity of the snowfall, creating life-threatening conditions. He said a complete ban had been imposed on the entry of further vehicles into Murree until the situation improved. He said the safety of tourists remained the top priority under the prevailing weather conditions and urged people to strictly avoid travelling towards Murree. He added that stranded tourists should not panic as police and the district administration were present on the ground. The DPO also advised people sheltering in vehicles to exercise caution while using heaters and to ensure adequate ventilation to maintain oxygen levels. He said police officers would remain deployed in the field until all tourists were safely evacuated and normal conditions were restored, a police spokesperson said. –DNA

MoU signed to build educational linkages

ISLAMABAD: The Consortium for Asia-Pacific & Eurasian Studies (CAPES) and the Indonesian Students Association Islamabad (PPMI) on Friday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to promote educational cooperation and strengthen people-to-people linkages between Pakistan and Indonesia. The Indonesian Students Association Islamabad (PPMI), representing more than 300 Indonesian students enrolled in various Pakistani universities, said a press release. Rehmat Hindriata Kusuma, Minister Counsellor for Information, Social and Cultural at Indonesian Embassy Islamabad attended the event as the chief guest. He acknowledged the central role of CAPES in strengthening People to People contacts between Indonesia and Pakistan. He said public diplomacy with brotherly countries like Pakistan is central to Indonesian foreign policy and events such as this compliment our long-term engagement with the country. He was of the view that building on this engagement, Indonesian embassy shall strive to connect CAPES with the Indonesian think-tanks and centers working on public diplomacy. Chief Organizer CAPES, Sardar Bakhsh, highlighted the organization's efforts in facilitating Indonesian students studying in Pakistan, terming youth engagement a vital tool for cementing enduring bilateral relations. Senior Vice President CAPES, Dr. Shoaiq, emphasized that bonds developed among youth tend to outlast those forged at the diplomatic level, underscoring the importance of student-centered collaboration. Chairman Indonesian Students Association Islamabad, Muhsin Al Fatihi thanked CAPES for connecting Indonesian students with the larger Pakistani society. This partnership helps Indonesian students to explore various facets of Pakistani culture to build long-lasting relations. –APP

Briefs

Murree Expressway partially closed

ISLAMABAD: Due to adverse weather conditions, the Murree Expressway has been partially closed to general traffic as a precautionary safety measure, according to a spokesperson for the National Highways and Motorway Police (NHMP). The public is advised to avoid unnecessary travel towards Murree in view of the prevailing weather conditions, the spokesperson said. Officers of the National Highways and Motorway Police are present on site to assist and guide commuters. All necessary machinery, equipment, additional personnel, and vehicles have been deployed for continuous traffic monitoring, he added. Travellers are advised to check weather conditions in Murree before starting their journey by contacting the Motorway Police Helpline 130, accessing travel advisories, or following official social media accounts of the Motorway Police.—APP

Speeding car claims four lives in Pattoki

ISLAMABAD: At least four people died on the spot while another was seriously injured after a speeding vehicle lost control and hit a tree while returning from a wedding party in Pattoki on Friday. According to rescue officials, the accident occurred on Chang Manga road due to over-speeding, causing the vehicle to veer off the road and crash into a tree, private news channel reported. Rescue 1122 officials said the victims, residents of Pattoki were returning from a friend's wedding party in Bhoya Aasal when the incident took place. Police confirmed that the driver survived the collision, while all four passengers identified as Malik Abdullah, Malik Kaif, Malik Rehmat, and Malik Mithu died on the spot.

Heavy rains cause mud house roof collapse

ISLAMABAD: At least five individuals sustained serious injuries after the roof of a mud-built house suddenly collapsed following heavy rainfall in Khyber district on early Friday morning. The incident occurred in the Bata Tel area of Khyber, where the roof of a mud-made house collapsed following heavy rainfall, a private news channel reported. Upon receiving the report, rescue teams rushed to the scene and, with the help of local residents, pulled five people trapped under the debris. The injured were later shifted to nearby hospital in critical condition for medical treatment.—APP

Pak, Somalia agree to boost security, border management

From Pakistan, Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry, Interior Secretary, Additional Interior Secretary, Chief Commissioner and IG Islamabad, DG FIA, and other senior officials were also present

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Monday met a high-level Somali delegation led by Somalia's Interior Minister Ali Yusuf at the Ministry of Interior on Friday. Minister Naqvi welcomed his Somali counterpart upon his arrival. During the meeting, both sides discussed bilateral relations and avenues for enhanced cooperation between Pakistan and Somalia. The two interior ministers agreed to strengthen collaboration in training, border management, and disaster management, while also adopting a joint strategy against terrorism and extremism. They further decided to deepen cooperation in internal security, counterterrorism, and overall security coordination. Both ministers stressed the need for improved coordination to advance shared interests in various sectors. Somalia's Interior Minister expressed a strong desire to benefit from Pakistan's experience, noting that Minister Mohsin Naqvi's initiatives for Islamabad's infrastructure development were "commendable." Minister Naqvi assured his counterpart of Pakistan's full support to Somalia in policing and counterterrorism. He added that Pakistan would extend complete cooperation to Somalia across multiple sectors, including counterterrorism. He also announced visa facilitation for Somali citizens traveling to Pakistan for medical treatment and education. Somalia's Interior Minister said his country was facing a difficult situation



and was actively fighting terrorists. He expressed hope that the visit would expand bilateral relations between the two countries. He also delivered a special message from the Prime Minister of Somalia for Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. The Somali Interior Minister formally

invited Minister Mohsin Naqvi to visit Somalia. The Somali delegation included Ambassador of Somalia to Pakistan Sheikh Noor Mohamed Hassan Hamza Adan; Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Osman Abdullahi; Deputy Police Chief, Leiban; Police Chief Advisor, Ms. Adal Abdi; Poli-

cy Advisor, Ministry of Interior, Ms. Asma Hagi, Diplomatic Coordinator, Embassy of Somalia. From Pakistan, Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry, Interior Secretary, Additional Interior Secretary, Chief Commissioner and IG Islamabad, DG FIA, and other senior officials were also present.

Up to 3 feet of snow blankets Galiyat

NATHIAGALI: The scenic Galiyat region has been gripped by intense snowfall since late last night, with up to 3 feet of snow recorded in Ayubia and nearly 2 feet in Nathiagali, bringing life to a standstill across major tourist destinations.

Nathiagali, Ayubia, Khanspur, and Changla Gali are completely covered in thick layers of snow, significantly affecting road connectivity and movement.

Director General Galiyat Development Authority (GDA), Muhammad Fawad, said that the authority has placed its entire staff on high alert, cancelled all leaves, and mobilized field teams across the region to respond to the situation promptly. He stated that heavy machinery has been deployed in all Galiyat towns, and snow clearance operations are in full swing to ensure public safety and restore traffic flow as early as possible. The Director General assured that roads across the Galiyat region will be reopened for traffic at the earliest, subject to weather conditions. Meanwhile, GDA has advised tourists to exercise extreme caution, strictly use snow chains, and adhere to all safety guidelines while traveling in snow-covered areas. GDA control rooms remain fully operational to assist tourists and residents in case of emergencies.—APP

Airport staff returned valuable belongings to passengers

Senator Sandhu reaffirms alliance unity

ISLAMABAD: Senator Khalil Tahir Sandhu of PML-N on Friday said he is confident the unity among all allied parties will last until 2029, and any reservations from the PPP or MQM on laws and amendments will be handled on priority. While speaking to a local news channel, PML-N Senator Khalil Tahir Sandhu stated that any reservations raised by allied parties will be treated as a matter of priority, adding unity among all allied parties will remain intact until the next general elections in 2029. Senator Sandhu expressed confidence that the government will complete its full tenure while implementing successful policies for the country's progress. He described the government's approach as proactive, referring to the immediate attention given to concerns of allied parties as a "fire-at-the-word" commitment. This, he said, demonstrates the administration's dedication to cooperation, consensus-building, and inclusive decision-making within the alliance. Senator Sandhu also highlighted Pakistan's recent achievements on the international stage, noting that the country has successfully emerged from global isolation. He added that the government has strengthened its position against India, improved bilateral relations with other nations and worked to revive and enhance diplomatic and economic ties worldwide. Responding on the 18th Amendment, Senator Khalil Tahir Sandhu stated that if any member expresses a personal opinion, it should not be considered the party's stance. He emphasized that his own view on the amendment is that certain changes are needed, particularly in areas where the federal government faces financial constraints, such as the NFC awards, to ensure a more balanced fiscal structure. He also highlighted the need for a more effective local body election system, one that can function fairly and consistently under any government. Senator Sandhu stressed that these reforms are essential for stronger governance, equitable resource distribution, and improved service delivery at the grassroots level.—DNA

Blood donation camp witnesses inspiring participation

ISLAMABAD: A remarkable display of humanitarian spirit was seen at a blood donation camp held at Sub-District Hospital (SDH) Sopore in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK), where renowned social workers Shabir Hussain and Bilques Ara once again led by example. According to Kashmir Media Service, Shabir Hussain donated blood for the 143rd time, while Bilques Ara marked her 43rd donation, once again highlighting their unwavering commitment to saving human lives through selfless service. Speaking to media persons, Shabir Hussain said he has been regularly donating blood for the past 45 years, having started this noble mission in 1980. He noted that his journey has been driven solely by humanitarian concern rather than any desire for recognition or awards. While emphasizing the importance of blood donation, he said it remains one of the greatest services to humanity. "If my blood can give someone a second chance at life, that itself is my reward," he remarked. His unparalleled dedication has earned him widespread respect across IOJK, inspiring countless people, particularly the youth, to voluntarily donate blood and serve humanity. The camp also highlighted the inspiring journey of Bilques Ara of Sopore, who donated blood for the 43rd time. She said she began donating in 2014 after her young son fell into a coma and faced an urgent need for blood, a painful experience that motivated her to ensure no family suffers due to blood shortages. Since then, she has remained committed to spreading awareness about voluntary blood donation, encouraging people especially women to participate in this life-saving cause. The camp saw enthusiastic participation and was widely appreciated by medical staff and the local community.—DNA

MPA hails Sindh-Punjab Katcha operation

ISLAMABAD: MPA Mumtaz Chang appreciated the firm action of the governments of Sindh and Punjab and praised police for the strict joint crackdown underway in the katcha areas of both provinces, urging that criminals as well as corrupt elements within official ranks who facilitate illegal activities be held accountable, while also appealing to the chief ministers to initiate uplift work in these areas. While speaking exclusively to a local news channel, he said the present government is ensuring that the protection of citizens' lives and property remains its top priority, which, he added was not the case previously. He further stated that full combat units have been deployed in selected zones after sealing the region. These measures, he said are part of a well-planned security strategy to restore law and order. He added that the operation is currently underway and progressing successfully, expressing confidence that the ongoing efforts will soon yield positive results. Mumtaz

Chang said that he truly appreciated both governments and appealed to them to focus on uplift work in the Kacha belt, particularly for better education, improved school road infrastructure and the promotion of peace in the area. He emphasized that development initiatives in the Kacha belt were essential for long-term stability and prosperity. He further appealed to the chief ministers of both provinces to ensure that officials involved in facilitating these criminal groups are identified and dealt with strictly. He stressed that no individual supporting or shielding such elements should be spared, adding, corrupt officials must also be held accountable, emphasizing that without action against internal facilitators, lasting peace and effective law enforcement efforts cannot be achieved. He said that black sheep within the department must be eliminated, stressing that internal accountability is essential to restore public trust and ensure effective governance.—APP



Federal Minister Rana Tanveer Hussain presenting a souvenir to Australian High Commissioner Timothy Kane.

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A woman's desperate cry for justice in Sargodha

In the quiet city of Sargodha, Punjab, a harrowing tale unfolded that exposes the rotten underbelly of Pakistan's law enforcement system. A woman, driven to the brink by relentless police highhandedness, ended her life in a gruesome act of despair. Before consuming poison that led to her agonizing death, she recorded a video message—a final testament to her suffering. In the grainy footage, shared widely on social media, she tearfully alleged that local police demanded 5 tola of gold and 2.5 million rupees in cash to pursue justice in her case. She had been knocking on the doors of senior police officials for months, pleading for help against an unspecified wrong done to her family. But her cries fell on deaf ears, met only with indifference and extortion demands. "I cannot live this miserable life anymore," she whispered, her voice breaking, before the screen went black. Her body was discovered hours later, convulsing in pain, a symbol of the ultimate price paid by the powerless in a system rigged against them. This incident is not an isolated tragedy but a grim reflection of Pakistan's pervasive "police terrorism," as critics aptly term it. Daily stories of police brutality and corruption flood the press, yet many more go unreported, buried under threats or fear of reprisal. According to Transparency International Pakistan's National Corruption Perception Survey 2025, 24% of respondents viewed the police as the most corrupt government department, with Punjab leading at 34%. International reports echo this damning verdict. The Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International ranks Pakistan 135th out of 180 countries, highlighting how police corruption erodes public trust and fuels societal decay. GAN Integrity's country risk report notes that Pakistan's police suffer from chronic corruption, poor training, and impunity, with three out of four citizens believing most officers are corrupt.

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No simple, honest person dares enter a police station; the treatment there is often disgusting—verbal abuse, physical torture, and blatant demands for bribes are commonplace. Yet, this same force bows obsequiously before the powerful. Landlords, politicians, and elites receive kid-glove treatment, while the poor are harassed and exploited. In Punjab, under prolonged PML-N rule spanning nearly two decades, police corruption has thrived amid favoritism and lack of accountability.

This double standard is a key reason Pakistan struggles to progress: a corrupt police force stifles justice, deters investment, and perpetuates inequality. The malaise extends even to the capital, Islamabad, where highhandedness persists unabated. Sectors like G-12, known as Mehra Abadi, have become notorious "no-go areas" where police fear to tread. Recently, the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency busted an ATM fraud gang operating from this sector, arresting a woman ringleader and accomplices who preyed on unsuspecting citizens at busy booths. G-12 is also a hub for drug peddling, with suppliers targeting nearby schools and colleges, darkening the futures of young children.

Reports from 2018-2019 indicate that areas like G-12, G-7, and G-8 are infamous for drug sales, contributing to an alarming 50% drug use rate among students in Islamabad's institutions. Despite anti-drug campaigns, the police's reluctance to enter these zones allows criminals to flourish, preying on the vulnerable. Why does this continue? The current police system suits those in power. Rooted in the colonial-era Police Act of 1861, it prioritizes control over service. Reforms, promised in over 21 reports since independence, remain unimplemented. Politicians and elites benefit from a pliable force that suppresses dissent and protects their interests. Consequently, the poor suffer most—extorted, beaten, or driven to suicide like the woman in Sargodha. Her death is a wake-up call. Pakistan cannot afford more such gruesome tales. True progress demands police reform: independent oversight, better training, and zero tolerance for corruption. Until then, the cycle of misery will persist, claiming more lives in the shadows of unchecked power.

Trump's Bid for Greenland at Davos

Qamar Bashir



The real tremor came not from his economic optimism, but from his vision of security. At the center of his message stood Greenland. For years, analysts speculated that American interest in Greenland stemmed from two forces reshaping the Arctic: the opening of polar shipping lanes as ice melts, and the presence of rare earth minerals essential for modern technologies. In Davos, Trump dismissed both assumptions outright.

He made it clear, in unusually direct terms, that he neither needs Greenland's minerals nor seeks control over emerging Arctic sea routes

DAVOS, the frostbitten alpine enclave carved into Switzerland's high mountains, has long been more than a resort town. Each winter, it becomes a political and economic marketplace where presidents, CEOs, scholars, and strategists trade contracts, alliances, and narratives of power. Temperatures plunge far below freezing, yet inside the halls of the World Economic Forum, the climate of international relations often burns far hotter than the Alpine air outside. This year, the world's attention did not rest on climate pledges or investment forecasts. It centered on the arrival of U.S. President Donald Trump, whose speech was anticipated less as an economic update and more as a declaration of how Washington now intends to shape the global order. Trump opened with triumph. He portrayed the United States as an economy in resurgence—investment surging, jobs expanding, inflation easing, and industrial capacity returning home. These claims are broadly aligned with recent U.S. data showing strong capital inflows into technology, defense, and energy sectors, alongside continued labor market resilience. But the applause quickly faded as Trump pivoted from domestic success to global power.

The real tremor came not from his economic optimism, but from his vision of security. At the center of his message stood Greenland. For years, analysts speculated that American interest in Greenland stemmed from two forces reshaping the Arctic: the opening of polar shipping lanes as ice melts, and the presence of rare earth minerals essential for modern technologies. In Davos, Trump dismissed both assumptions outright. He made it clear, in unusually direct terms, that he neither needs Greenland's minerals nor seeks control over emerging Arctic sea routes. Instead, he framed Greenland as a cornerstone of what he described as a continental missile defense shield—"Golden Dome" over the Western Hemisphere. In his telling, the United States is building a layered system designed to detect, track, and intercept missiles from any direction, and Greenland's geography, he argued, is indispensable to making that shield effective. Without Greenland, he suggested, the system would be incomplete—not only for the United States, but for Canada as well.

The message was stark: this was not about commerce or resources. It was about transforming the Arctic into a forward platform for hemispheric security. That declaration sent a ripple through European and North American delegations.

Denmark's government has long and consistently rejected any notion of transferring Greenland. Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen has publicly called the idea "absurd," emphasizing that Greenland is not

an object of transaction but a self-governing territory whose future lies in the hands of its people. Greenland's own leadership has echoed this position, welcoming cooperation and investment, but insisting that sovereignty is non-negotiable.

French President Emmanuel Macron has framed the Arctic question as part of a wider European responsibility. He has warned against turning the polar region into a theater of militarization and great-power rivalry, arguing that Europe must defend both its territory and its principles through collective security, not through the logic of dominance.

Germany's chancellor has taken a similar stance, stressing that the stability of the international system depends on respect for borders, multilateral institutions, and the rule-based order that emerged from the wreckage of the twentieth century. Berlin's Arctic policy, like much of Europe's, emphasizes environmental protection, scientific cooperation, and governance through international frameworks rather than unilateral security architecture.

Canada, placed directly under Trump's proposed "dome," found itself in an especially delicate position. Ottawa has repeatedly affirmed that Arctic defense must be managed through NATO, NORAD, and international law, not through territorial realignment. Canadian officials have consistently stated that security in the North is a shared responsibility among circumpolar nations, not a justification for redrawing sovereignty.

Even Russia, often cast as the primary strategic rival in the polar north, has responded with measured caution. While Moscow continues to expand its Arctic military and infrastructure footprint, its official statements warn against turning the region into a flashpoint for confrontation, arguing instead for stability through treaties and regional cooperation.

Trump's response to this resistance was neither conciliatory nor ambiguous. He described American military power in sweeping terms, emphasizing precision, reach, and technological dominance. He portrayed the U.S. defense system as unmatched—capable of neutralizing adversaries' air defenses, striking targets across continents, and shaping the battlefield before rivals can respond. The tone was not diplomatic. It was declarative.

Security, in this vision, does not flow from international law or collective institutions. It flows from capability. His criticism extended to the very architecture of global governance. He questioned the effectiveness of the United Nations, arguing that it has failed to prevent wars or enforce peace, and suggested that Washington would increasingly disengage from international bodies that do not align with U.S. strategic

priorities. This echoed earlier American withdrawals from multilateral agreements and institutions, reinforcing the image of a superpower stepping away from the system it once helped build.

Inside Davos, the contrast could not have been sharper. European leaders spoke of interdependence, shared security, and the dangers of a world governed by raw power rather than negotiated norms. Policy analysts warned that transforming sovereignty into a strategic variable—something to be adjusted for defense planning—could unravel decades of diplomatic precedent.

Beyond the speeches and symbolism, the implications run deep. If security becomes transactional—granted in exchange for alignment rather than guaranteed by law—then smaller and middle powers face a narrowing set of choices. They can align themselves with a dominant power's strategic architecture, or they can seek protection through alternative coalitions, regional defense pacts, and diversified economic networks. This shift is already visible. Countries across Europe, Asia, and the Global South are exploring ways to reduce reliance on single markets, single currencies, and single security patrons. New trade corridors, regional financial arrangements, and defense dialogues reflect a world quietly preparing for a future where power is more fragmented and competition more explicit.

Trump's Davos address suggested that the post-Cold War era of institutional globalism may be giving way to a new age of fortified blocs—where defense systems, trade networks, and political alliances align along hard lines of strategic interest rather than shared ideals. The world now stands at a crossroads. One path leads toward renewed commitment to multilateralism, where power is constrained by law and cooperation tempers rivalry. The other points toward a landscape of competing spheres of influence, where technological dominance and military reach define who sets the terms of global order.

Davos, once a forum for consensus, has become a stage for confrontation. And as snow continues to fall on the Alpine peaks, the chill spreading across international relations may prove far more enduring than the winter cold. The question now confronting the world is no longer whether a new order is emerging—but whether it will be shaped by dialogue, or by the silent geometry of missile shields drawn across the sky.

— Press Secretary to the President (Rtd)
 Former Press Minister,
 Embassy of Pakistan to France
 Former Press Attaché to Malaysia
 Former MD, SRBC
 Macomb, Michigan

Donald Trump's "Peace Board": parallel diplomacy or a challenge to the UN order?

Musab Yousufi



The central question remains whether such a board meaningfully advances the Palestinian cause. Experience suggests skepticism. While supporters argue that broader Arab-Israeli engagement could eventually create space for negotiations, critics counter that normalization without conditions.

THE reported revival of a Donald Trump-backed "Peace Board" has reopened an old but unresolved debate in global politics: is there a genuine need for alternative peace mechanisms outside the United Nations, or do such initiatives undermine the very architecture of international peace and security carefully built since 1945? The question is not merely institutional; it goes to the heart of how power, legitimacy, and conflict resolution operate in a rapidly splitting world order.

Is There a Need for a Peace Board?
 Proponents argue that a peace board is necessary precisely because existing multilateral institutions have failed to deliver timely and effective conflict resolution. From Palestine to Syria, Yemen to Ukraine, UN-led processes have often stalled due to veto politics, great-power rivalry, and bureaucratic inertia. In this view, a smaller, interest-driven peace board backed by U.S. leverage could act more decisively, bypass procedural paralysis, and deliver pragmatic settlements. Critics, however, see the need as artificial. They argue that peace does not suffer from a lack of forums but from a lack of political will particularly among powerful states. Creating parallel structures may address symptoms temporarily but risks eroding the legitimacy of universal institutions meant to protect weaker states.

Can the Board Address the Conflicts It Was Formed For?

Supporters claim the board is designed to focus on political normalization, economic incentives, and security cooperation especially in the Middle East. Drawing inspiration from the Abraham Accords, the initiative emphasizes state-to-state engagement rather than protracted ideological disputes. Yet this very design raises concerns: conflicts rooted in occupation, sovereignty, and self-determination must notably Palestine cannot be resolved through economic normalization alone. Without enforceable commitments, international legality, and inclusive representation, the board risks addressing only surface-level stabiliza-

tion while deeper injustices remain unresolved.

A Challenge to the United Nations?

The emergence of a U.S. backed peace board is widely seen as a political challenge to the UN peace architecture. While not a formal disqualification of UN forums, it effectively sidelines them by shifting diplomatic gravity elsewhere. This creates an uncomfortable reality for UN leadership: peace initiatives led by major powers can overshadow multilateral mechanisms, reducing the UN to a reactive or ceremonial role. Such developments reinforce the perception that the UN is strong in rhetoric but weak in enforcement particularly when powerful states choose unilateral or multilateral pathways.

Is It a Wise Decision in the Presence of the UN?

From a U.S. strategic perspective, establishing a peace board aligns with Washington's preference for results-oriented diplomacy and control over outcomes. However, from a global governance standpoint, the decision is problematic. It signals declining confidence in collective security and sets a precedent where powerful states create alternative institutions whenever multilateral ones become inconvenient. This trend risks normalizing fragmentation in global peace efforts, making conflict resolution contingent on power alignment rather than international law.

Middle Eastern Participation and Its Implications

Reports suggest that nine Middle Eastern countries have aligned themselves with the initiative, reportedly including the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. While the depth of participation varies, their motivation is broadly strategic: security guarantees, economic integration, access to U.S. markets and technology, and alignment with Washington's regional vision. For many of these states, joining the board is less about ideology and more about survival in a volatile regional environment. Normalization offers insulation against isolation and opens doors to investment and defense cooperation.

Does This Help Palestine or Marginalize It?

The central question remains whether such a board meaningfully advances the Palestinian cause. Experience suggests skepticism. While supporters argue that broader Arab-Israeli engagement could eventually create space for negotiations, critics counter that normalization without conditions weakens Palestinian leverage. Even if a majority of participating states are Muslim majority countries, their involvement may remain largely symbolic unless Palestinian statehood, borders, and rights are placed at the core of the agenda. Otherwise, the initiative risks becoming a formality in name, not in substance.

The Future of Global Politics and the UN

Looking ahead, global politics appears to be moving toward unipolarism, where small, power-driven groupings overshadow universal institutions. The UN may increasingly appear ceremonial issuing statements while real decisions are made elsewhere. Yet declaring the UN obsolete would be premature. History shows that multilateral institutions weaken and recover in cycles.

The UN's failure to restrain powerful states or protect weaker ones is undeniable. Still, no alternative offers the same global legitimacy. Whether this phase leads to the UN's marginalization or its eventual reform will depend on whether middle and small powers can reclaim multilateralism as a shared interest rather than a moral slogan.

Conclusion

Trump's peace board reflects a broader shift in world politics from rules to power. It may produce short-term diplomatic breakthroughs, but at the cost of undermining inclusive global governance. The real test will be whether it delivers justice alongside stability. Without that balance, it risks joining a long list of initiatives that promised peace but settled for convenience.

— The author is Associate Professor and Head of the Department of International Relations at Riphah International University Islamabad

Briefs

Snow
blankets
parts of KP...

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"The operation is ongoing in Tirah valley, Painda Cheena, Dawatoli and Bagh Maida on the directives of Rescue 1122 director general," he said in a statement. "Twenty-three operational vehicles of Rescue 1122 and rescue teams comprising more than 100 personnel are taking part in the rescue operation," he said. In an update at 5:30pm, Rescue 1122 said 50 stranded vehicles and around 100 affected people had been rescued in Tirah. "The affected people have been shifted to safer locations, and the rescue operation is ongoing," the Rescue 1122 statement said. It should be mentioned that the residents of Tirah have been vacating their homes amid a planned military operation against militants in the restive valley. Hundreds of displaced families were stranded on the road on Thursday due to the prolonged registration process, which was suspended in the evening due to heavy snowfall that began in earlier in the day. A statement issued by the Khyber Deputy Commissioner's (DC) office on Friday said efforts were underway under the directives of KP Chief Minister Sohail Afridi to shift internally displaced persons (IDPs) stranded due to recent snowfall to safe locations. "The stranded families were shifted to Painda Cheena School and hostel, and a consignment of relief goods was also delivered at the location during the night," it said. The statement further said that all the families were provided with blankets, while children were given sweaters and other essential items. "Due to timely relief operations by the provincial government, Pakistan Army, Frontier Corps and the district administration, all families remained safe. All affected families were provided immediate relief," the statement said. According to the DC office, relief activities continued from Nangroa to Dawatoli and from Dawatoli to Bagh Maida. "Under the supervision of Rescue 1122 teams, children and women were evacuated first, followed by men," it said. Rescue and relief operations continued late into the night to ensure that all families could be rescued, the DC office said. On Thursday night, KP CM Afridi had highlighted that the people of Tirah were stranded in the snowfall due to the "forced evacuation".

ICT admin
enforces
ban due...

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issued a clarification regarding the closure of entry points to Murree after weather conditions worsened. Officials said the decision was taken in response to snowfall and traffic pressure on access routes. Entry points were opened only for local residents. According to the administration, residents were allowed entry after identity cards were checked at control points. All other traffic, including tourist vehicles, was stopped from entering the city. The measure was intended to reduce congestion and support movement for essential needs. The administration appealed to tourists to cooperate with authorities and avoid travel to Murree until the weather improved. A spokesperson said the restrictions were temporary and aimed at public safety and traffic management. The district administration reported that traffic flow on the express highway was disrupted due to lack of cooperation from some road users. Authorities said vehicles ignoring instructions added to congestion and delayed clearance work. Traffic police and district officials jointly appealed to both residents and tourists to follow directions at checkpoints and on highways. They said cooperation would help restore traffic flow and allow faster reopening of routes. Heavy machinery has been deployed across Murree to remove snow from roads. Officials said clearance work is ongoing at multiple points to ensure safe passage once conditions allow.



ISLAMABAD: Players of Rising Stars Hockey Club posing for a picture during a match with Mari Petroleum. The team management is also seen in the picture. — DNA

Fifa president says he will visit Pakistan 'soon' to promote football

Infantino vows Pakistan visit soon as Fifa, Wenger back grassroots revival, youth development and governance reforms, signaling renewed international engagement and hope for lifting Pakistani football towards Asian competitiveness

DAVOS: Fifa President Gianni Infantino has said he will visit Pakistan "very soon", adding that he had promised Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif he would make the trip. "Well, I will come to Pakistan, actually, very soon. I promised the prime minister, because we now have a new president of the federation who is doing a fantastic job," Infantino said. Praising Pakistan's football potential, the Fifa chief said: "Pakistan is a great football country, and we need to bring Pakistan to the head, the top of Asia, for sure." "We are working on that. Give every talent a chance, especially Pakistan," he added.

Fifa's Chief of Global Football Development Arsene Wenger also highlighted Pakistan's population and the scope for grassroots investment through academies and youth football. "Look, Pakistan is a country of 250 million people, so that means there's a huge potential that we have to develop together," Wenger said. "And I met Pakistani people to develop an academy in Pakistan because I think that is the first step, and as well to develop youth football, you know, that's the second part of what we have to do." "With such potential, it is important that

you develop your game," he added. Asked about his own visit to Pakistan, Wenger said: "I don't know," before adding: "I have to see when I go, you know, we are 211 countries, so 365 days is very short, but I hope, I plan to go." Infantino and Wenger made the remarks on the sidelines of the 56th annual meeting of the World Economic Forum summit in Davos on Thursday. Pakistan football has faced prolonged setbacks in recent years due to internal disputes and administrative issues, which resulted in international isolation and re-

peated interventions by Fifa. However, the formation of a new leadership structure has helped restore confidence among stakeholders and opened the door for international engagement once again. Infantino's planned visit is expected to further strengthen ties between Fifa and Pakistan, with discussions likely to focus on grassroots development, youth programmes and improving football governance. Officials believe the visit could play a key role in revitalising the sport and unlocking new opportunities for Pakistani football at both domestic and international levels.

Al-Qadsiah stun Al-Ittihad as Al-Hilal lead grows

DAMMAM: Al-Qadsiah defeated Al-Ittihad 2-1 in the Saudi Pro League Matchday 17's headline fixture, as Julián Quiñones netted twice to cancel out Karim Benzema's opener. The battle of the tacticians was on full display between Al-Qadsiah and Al-Ittihad. Brendan Rodgers set his side up in a 4-3-2-1 defensively, with Christopher Bonsu Baah, Musab Al-Juwairi and Quiñones given the freedom to drift between the lines. In possession, the shape transformed. While Baah operated a left-sided central midfielder in the trio, he frequently stretched the pitch down the left as Al-Juwairi, Quiñones and Nahitan Nández threatened Al-Ittihad between the lines. Meanwhile, Sérgio Conceição set up his side quite differently. Reeling from a home defeat to Al-Ittihad in their previous outing, Al-Ittihad emerged in a 3-4-2-1, with Moussa Diaby and the returning Houssem Aouar operating behind Benzema. Aouar – absent since representing Algeria at AFCON – was inches away from netting on his return to the starting XI. In the 17th minute, he snuck in behind the defence to meet a floated cross from Danilo Pereira, only for his header to strike the post. Nine minutes later, Al-Ittihad took the lead. After a VAR review, the referee deemed Gastón Alvarez's challenge on Muhammad Al-Shanqeeti to be a penalty, and Benzema powered his effort down the middle to open the scoring. Al-Qadsiah did not back down. Baah and Al-Juwairi combined down the left before the former's low cross found Quiñones in the six-yard box, allowing him to equalise. Al-Ittihad continued to struggle down that flank, and in the 59th minute, Mohammed Abou Al-Shamat dribbled past their midfield before threading a through ball to Quiñones who turned and fired Al-Qadsiah into the lead. VAR was called into action once in the 64th minute for a potential Al-Ittihad penalty. Aouar's cross struck Jehad Thekri's knee before bouncing up towards his hand, but the referee waved play on. It wasn't Al-Ittihad's best day, as they failed to find an equaliser despite their late pressure and slipped to sixth place on 27 points, nine behind Al-Qadsiah, who leap into fourth. — APP

Alcaraz celebrates 100th Slam match with easy win at Australian Open

MELBOURNE: An ominous Carlos Alcaraz wasted little energy in his 100th Grand Slam match to sweep into the last 16 of the Australian Open on Friday with a straight-sets mauling of French showman Corentin Moutet. The 22-year-old six-time major winner was at a different level on Rod Laver Arena to book his passage 6-2, 6-4, 6-1 in 2 hrs 5mins. Victory thrust him into a clash for a place in the quarter-finals with American 19th seed Tommy Paul, who progressed when Spanish opponent Alejandro Davidovich Fokina retired hurt. Alcaraz has never gone past the last eight in his four previous trips to Melbourne Park, with the Australian Open the only Grand Slam missing from his burgeoning collection. He will become the youngest man to win all four majors should he push on and make his breakthrough. "It wasn't easy. To be honest, when you play someone like Corentin you don't know what's going to be next," said the Spaniard. — Agencies

U19 World Cup: Pakistan beat Zimbabwe by 8 wickets, advance into Super Six round



Pakistan U19 cruise into Super Six after 8-wicket win over Zimbabwe, Sameer Minhas stars with unbeaten 74 as bowlers dismantle hosts for 128 in Harare to finish second in group

DUBAI: Pakistan clinched a comfortable 8-wicket victory over Zimbabwe in Harare during the team's last group-stage match in the ongoing U19 World Cup, advancing into the Super Six round. After facing a 37-run defeat by England in their tournament opener, the Green Shirts made a comeback, beating Scotland and Zimbabwe in back-to-back matches. With the win, Pakistan has secured second place in the group rankings, with England on top. As per the tournament's format, the top three teams from the four groups will qualify for the Super Six round, where they will be divided into two groups of six teams, each playing two matches. This means that despite the loss, Zimbabwe will also advance into the Super Six stage. Pakistan U19 captain Farhan Younas had won the toss and elected to field first at Takashima Sports Club. Pakistan's bowlers maintained a strong grip over the Zimbabwean batters, with a dominating performance by Ali Raza, who took three wickets and bowled four maiden overs. Mohammad Sayyam, Abdul Subhan, and Momina Qamar also grabbed a couple of wickets each for Pakistan. For Zimbabwe, Nathaniel Hlabangana could only score 59 runs; no other batter could assist him in keeping the momentum and building the partnerships. Eight Zimbabwean batters could not even reach double figures. Pakistan bowled out Zimbabwe on a score of just 128 runs in 35.5 overs. While chasing the target, Pakistan's batters outshone the Zimbabwean bowlers by achieving the total in the 27th over, with the fall of two wickets. Sameer Minhas won the player of the match, with an unbeaten 74 off 75 deliveries, including six boundaries and four sixes. Minhas was aided by Usman Khan and Ahmed Hussain, who scored 26 and 24 runs, respectively. — DNA



PFF, US Embassy Unite to Advance Football Diplomacy

OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: In a significant step toward sports diplomacy and international collaboration, Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) President Syed Mohsen Gilani held a high-level meeting with Chargé d'Affaires of the U.S. Embassy in Pakistan, Ms. Natalie A. Baker, to explore avenues of cooperation through football as a catalyst for youth development, women empowerment, and Pakistan's positive global projection.

The meeting took place at the Freedom 260 Liberty Bell Initiative, themed "Let Freedom Ring", launched by the U.S. Mission in Pakistan. During the engagement, President Gilani shared the PFF's renewed vision under the current leadership, highlighting football's growing role as a bridge between nations and a powerful instrument for unity, youth engagement, and international goodwill.

President Gilani briefed Ms. Baker on the federation's reform agenda and the strong institutional backing it has received from the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Sports, particularly in advancing grassroots football initiatives nationwide. He emphasized that the alignment of domestic reforms with international standards is central to the PFF's revival strategy. "Our collaboration with the Prime Minister's Office is not merely about sport; it is a dedicated mission to empower the youth of Pakistan," Gilani said. "By strengthening our internal governance and aligning with global best practices, we are preparing a generation that can truly represent the vibrant spirit of Pakistan on the world stage." Ms. Baker commended the swift institutional progress achieved under President Gilani's leadership over the past six months, noting increased fan engagement, improved governance structures, and visible government support. The discussions concluded with a mutual commitment to prioritize three key pillars: the promotion of women's football, development of high-performance youth programs, and a coordinated promotional drive for the FIFA World Cup 2026, which will be co-hosted by the United States. Highlighting the global significance of the upcoming World Cup, President Gilani reaffirmed Pakistan's support for the tournament. "Pakistan is fully committed to supporting the United States in delivering a successful FIFA World Cup 2026. This campaign presents a golden opportunity to project a positive image of Pakistan through our shared passion for football," he stated. Beyond the World Cup initiative, the PFF President underscored that women's football remains a cornerstone of the federation's modernization agenda. He also expressed gratitude to the Pakistani government for providing a strong "administrative backbone" that has enabled the federation to achieve key milestones in a remarkably short period.

Trump claims NATO troops avoided Afghan...

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How dare he say we weren't on the front line," the Labour Party politician said on the BBC's Question Time program on Thursday evening. According to official UK figures, 405 of the 457 British casualties who died in Afghanistan were killed in hostile military action. The US reportedly lost more than 2,400 soldiers.

SBP to further cut policy rate

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the central bank to hold rates until July. The survey follows data showing inflation slowed to 5.6pc year-on-year in December, with prices falling on a monthly basis due to lower perishable food costs, though non-food inflation remains elevated. The SBP has said inflation stayed within its 5-7pc target range during July-November but warned core inflation remains sticky and headline inflation could rise temporarily toward the end of the fiscal year due to base effects. The International Monetary Fund, in a report, has cautioned against premature monetary easing under Pakistan's \$7 billion loan programme.

Gul Plaza death toll crossed 70

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Meanwhile, officials expressed the hope to complete their search efforts on Friday. South Deputy Commissioner (DC) Javed Nabi Khoso told reporters that the search operation was in the "final stages". "The search in the wreckage will be completed today," he said. Stating that a total of 77 missing persons had been reported, he said the recovery efforts were being made under the supervision of the Sindh Building and Control Authority's (SBCA) team. The director general (DG) of Sindh Rescue 1122, Brigadier (retd) Wajid Sibghatullah Maher, said rescue personnel were to continue their recovery efforts in "10 to 15 per cent" of the building's area that they had been unable to access before. "There are some concerns that we have not been able to reach the ground floor, where the fire erupted. We hope to find bodies from there," the Rescue 1122 DG told the media. Defending 1122's efforts, Maher asserted that the teams had modern equipment, the inferno had turned into a third-degree fire by the time rescue personnel reached the site. The official further said that 15 to 20 people were rescued and evacuated when the blaze erupted. "Either the fire safety system was not present in the building, or it was not activated," Maher said. He revealed that the latest technology had been used over the past three days to aid the search process, in order to locate any individual who survived the blaze. The Rescue 1122 DG added that based on the information so far, the fire erupted in a flower shop, from where it spread through the duct. However, he added, the police were still investigating why the fire spread quickly.

Briefs

BankIslami's digital platform launches

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's first digital Islamic banking platform, 'aik' by BankIslami, has launched aikPay—Pakistan's first Shariah-compliant Raast-enabled QR Payment Gateway. Built on the State Bank of Pakistan's Raast infrastructure, aikPay enables real-time online payments through dynamic QR codes, allowing customers to pay instantly from their bank accounts and enabling merchants to receive payments securely through a smooth checkout experience.

The launch follows an engagement session led by aik with representatives from the State Bank of Pakistan and Raast. The session was attended by Muhammad Imaduddin, Director of Digital Innovations & Settlement at SBP, and Ahson bin Saeed, CEO of Raast Payments Pakistan, along with Sohail Sikandar, Chief Operations Officer of BankIslami, Ashfaque Ahmed, Chief Officer of aik, and other team members, according to press release issued here on Friday.

Ashfaque Ahmed, Chief Officer of aik, commented: "The world is shifting rapidly with technology, and digital payments have become an everyday habit. At aik, we remain steadfast in our mission to promote Riba-free digital banking and support Pakistan's national direction towards a digital economy by offering innovative solutions that make everyday transactions smoother, faster, and more seamless." With aikPay, customers can shop and pay online with greater ease using any Raast-enabled mobile banking app, with instant transaction confirmation and a card-free checkout experience. Merchants benefit from a wider nationwide reach through Raast interoperability, real-time payment confirmation, instant settlement for improved liquidity, and low-cost payment acceptance through competitive MDR rates, making it a scalable solution for SMEs, online businesses, institutions, and government entities.—APP

Gold price surges Rs 9,100 per tola all-time high

ISLAMABAD: Gold prices surged to an all-time high in the local market on Friday as the price of 24-karat gold per tola jumped by Rs9,100 to settle at Rs14,662. The price of 10 grams of 24-karat gold also jumped by Rs7,802 to Rs441,239, while the price of 10 grams of 22-karat gold rose by Rs7,152 to Rs404,483, according to the All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association. Silver prices also witnessed an upward trend, with the price of 24-karat silver per tola increasing by Rs372 to Rs10,275, whereas the price of 10 grams of silver went up by Rs319 to Rs8,809. In the international market, gold prices climbed by \$91 to reach \$4,923 per ounce, marking a fresh record, while silver prices rose by \$3.72 to \$98.00 per ounce, the association reported.—APP

US urged to uphold int'l law in immigration crackdown

GENEVA: The UN human rights chief urged the Trump administration on Friday to ensure that its migration policies respect individual rights and international law, citing concerns over arbitrary and unlawful arrests and detentions. "Individuals are being surveilled and detained, sometimes violently, including at hospitals, churches, mosques, courthouses, markets, schools, and even within their own homes, often solely on mere suspicion of being undocumented migrants," the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Turk, said in a statement. US President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown has seen some 3,000 heavily armed masked federal officers deployed to the city of Minneapolis, rounding up suspects they say are dangerous criminal immigration violators, while sometimes ensnaring law-abiding US citizens and immigrants.—APP

Pakistan, Philippines explore expanded rice trade

To address this, the Government of Pakistan has developed a mechanism to ensure benchmark price competitiveness, including financial bridging where required, so that Pakistani rice remains competitive while assuring buyers of quality and quantity

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan held an important meeting with Dr. Emmanuel R. Fernandez, Ambassador of the Philippines to Pakistan, on the special directions of Prime Minister, Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, with a focus on enhancing Pakistan's rice exports to the Philippine market. During the meeting, the Commerce Minister conveyed the Prime Minister's keen interest in identifying priority markets for Pakistan's rice exports and formally requested the Philippine leadership to consider additional procurement from Pakistan, said a release issued here on Friday. He highlighted that Pakistan is currently on a strong agricultural output trajectory, with ample surplus rice stocks available for export, while maintaining consistent quality standards. Jam Kamal Khan noted that global market dynamics have evolved with the re-entry of major suppliers, intensifying price competition. To address this, the Government of Pakistan has developed a mechanism to ensure benchmark price competitiveness, including financial bridging where required, so that Pakistani rice remains competitive while assuring buyers of quality and quantity. He emphasized that if Pakistan is able to closely match prevailing market prices, there is strong scope for expanding bilateral rice trade through institutional engagement between relevant authorities of



both countries. The Commerce Minister further informed the Ambassador that, on the Prime Minister's instructions, Pakistan has identified the Philippines as one of the key partner countries for enhanced rice exports. He stressed that timely coordination between both sides would help materialize mutually beneficial arrangements, particularly in view of upcoming procurement tenders in the Philippines. Ambassador Dr. Emmanuel R. Fernandez welcomed Pakistan's proactive outreach, describing it as a positive step toward deepening bilateral trade and investment relations.

He acknowledged Pakistan's long-standing position among the top three rice suppliers to the Philippines and noted that Pakistan has strong potential not only to maintain but also to increase its market share. He informed that the forthcoming session of the Pakistan-Philippines Joint Economic Commission (JEC), expected to be held in February, would place rice trade high on its agenda. Both sides reviewed progress on a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) under negotiation between the Ministry of Commerce of Pakistan and the Ministry of Agriculture of the

Philippines, envisaging government-to-government procurement over a multi-year period. It was noted that technical teams are in close coordination, with a Pakistani delegation scheduled to engage with Philippine counterparts to expedite finalization of the MoU ahead of upcoming tenders. The meeting also discussed tariff-related considerations and the importance of addressing cost competitiveness to facilitate greater volumes of Pakistani rice exports. The Pakistani side underscored that early conclusion of the MoU would help manage surplus stocks and ensure continuity

China, Philippines launch rescue missions for distressed cargo ship

BEIJING: China and the Philippines said on Friday they launched rescue operations after receiving reports of a distressed cargo ship near the Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea which was carrying 21 Philippine crew members.

The Chinese military said two crew had died and 17 had been rescued, after a report around 1:30 a.m. on Friday (1730 GMT on Thursday) that a foreign cargo vessel had capsized in waters near the shoal. It dispatched aircraft to conduct searches and the Chinese Coast Guard sent two vessels for rescue efforts.

One person was receiving emergency medical treatment, it said, adding that China's maritime authorities were organizing additional rescue forces to head to the area.

The Philippine Coast Guard said it deployed two vessels and two aircraft to rescue the Philippine crew from a Singapore-flagged cargo vessel loaded with iron ore that was en route to southern Chinese city of Yangjiang. "The PCG Command Center acquired information from the Hong Kong Maritime Rescue Coordination Center that 10 of the 21 Filipino crew members were rescued by a passing China Coast Guard vessel," it said. Scarborough Shoal is one of Asia's most contested maritime features and a frequent flashpoint in disputes over sovereignty and fishing rights.—APP

Beijing remains top destination for Pakistani pine nuts

BEIJING: Beijing has continued to lead as the largest destination for Pakistani pine nuts in China in 2025, reflecting strong consumer demand, stable trade channels, and growing recognition of Pakistan's premium dry fruits in the Chinese market, according to trade data compiled by Gwadar Pro. Official figures from the General Administration of Customs of China (GACC) show that Beijing imported over 758,000 kilograms of Pakistani pine nuts in 2025, valued at US\$11.72 million, far surpassing other Chinese regions. Other regions also recorded notable imports, including the coastal Zhejiang Province with a combined 379,000 kilograms valued at approximately US\$5.95 million, followed by Shanghai with 8,720 kilograms worth US\$166,310. The Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region followed with smaller volumes. While diversified demand is emerging across China, Beijing's dominance remains clear in terms of both volume and value. This strong market presence was also visible on the ground. During the recent "New Year Good Fair" (also known as the "New Year's Gift Fair") held at the National Agriculture Exhibition Centre near the Pakistani Embassy in Beijing, Pakistani pine nuts stood out as one of the most popular products among Chinese consumers. Coinciding with the peak Chinese New Year shopping season, the fair saw visitors show keen interest in the taste, quality, and health benefits of Pakistani pine nuts, with many describing them as a "must-buy" festive item. Amjad Zarin, a Pakistani Associate Professor at China's Jilin University, visited the fair and told Gwadar Pro that its timing—when gift purchases and premium food consumption traditionally surge—played a crucial role in boosting visibility and sales. The professor noted that the price of Pakistani pine nuts at the fair was 280 RMB (around \$40.1) per kilogram, which is very competitive compared to the local market in Pakistan. He added that the showcase highlighted Pakistan's agricultural strengths and helped connect exporters with Chinese importers, retailers, and e-commerce platforms. "Even on the streets, this popularity was evident. I personally saw a vendor selling Pakistani pine nuts at around 80 RMB per 500 grams, vocally promoting them as 'Pakistani pine nuts at a cheaper price' to attract customers," he added. Trade experts believe that improved logistics, consistent quality standards, and targeted promotional activities in cities like Beijing can further expand Pakistan's share in China's lucrative nut market. The Pakistani embassy and consulates in China could consider organising roadshows to promote this high-value product, similar to initiatives undertaken for Pakistani mangoes and handicrafts. With rising health consciousness and demand for high-end imported foods, Pakistani pine nuts are well-positioned to strengthen their foothold in China in the coming years, Gwadar Pro reported.—DNA

Dedicated power line energised for Pak-China Friendship Hospital

GWADAR: A new, dedicated power feeder supplying electricity to the Pak-China Friendship Hospital Gwadar was successfully energised on Thursday, ensuring uninterrupted 24-hour power to the key healthcare facility, according to a statement by the Gwadar Development Authority (GDA). The feeder, connected via an underground cable from the Gwadar grid station, was energised under the supervision of Chinese experts and engineers. The GDA statement noted that the underground cabling will protect the line from humidity, adverse weather, and technical faults, ensuring a reliable supply. According to Gwadar Pro, the project was completed through a spe-

cial grant from the Government of Balochistan. Chinese technical teams worked alongside GDA officials for two days to complete the long-pending scheme, under the supervision of GDA Executive Engineer (Electrical) Sajjad Zaid. With the activation of the new feeder, sensitive heavy medical machinery has become fully operational, enabling improved modern healthcare services for Gwadar residents. The Pak-China Friendship Hospital, operated by the Indus Hospital & Health Network, is one of the largest public-sector healthcare facilities in Gwadar. It provides secondary and tertiary care, including emergency services, diagnostics, and maternal and child health.—DNA

Sudan's war robs 8m children of 500 days' education

PONT SUDAN: Almost three years of war in Sudan have left more than 8 million children out of education for nearly 500 days, the NGO Save the Children said on Thursday, highlighting one of the world's longest school closures. "More than 8 million children—nearly half of the 17 million of school age—have gone approximately 484 days without setting foot in a classroom," the children's rights organization said in a statement. Sudan has been ravaged by a power struggle between the army and the Rapid Support Forces since April 2023. This is "one of the longest school closures in the world," the British NGO said. "Many schools are closed, others have been damaged by the conflict, or are being used as shelters" for the more than 7 million displaced people across the country, it added. North Darfur in western Sudan is the country's hardest-hit state: Only 3 percent of its more than 1,100 schools are still functioning. In October, the RSF seized the city of El-Fasher, the capital of North Darfur, and the last of Darfur's five capitals to remain outside their control. West Darfur, West Kordofan, and South Darfur follow with 27 percent, 15 percent, and 13 percent of their schools operating, respectively, accord-

ing to the statement. The NGO added that many teachers in Sudanese schools were leaving their jobs due to unpaid salaries. "We risk condemning an entire generation to a future defined by conflict," without urgent investment, said the NGO's chief executive, Inger Ashing. The conflict, which has claimed tens of thousands of lives, has triggered the "world's worst humanitarian crisis," according to the UN. On Sunday, UN Human Rights commissioner Volker Turk condemned the increasing number of attacks against "essential civilian infrastructure" in Sudan, including hospitals, markets, and schools. He also expressed alarm at "the arming of civilians and the recruitment of children." The UN has repeatedly expressed concern about the "lost generation" in Sudan. Even as war rages in the southern Kordofan region, Prime Minister Kamil Idris has announced that the government will return to Khartoum after operating from the Red Sea city of Port Sudan, some 700 km away, for nearly three years. Main roads have been cleared, and cranes now punctuate the skyline of a capital scarred by the war. Since then, officials have toured reconstruction sites daily, promising a swift return to normal life.

Bangladeshi politicians hold rallies as campaigning begins for first post-Hasina election

DHAKA: Bangladeshi politicians held election rallies across the country on Friday, as campaigning began for the hugely anticipated polls in February, the first since the 2024 uprising that ousted longtime Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Bangladesh will hold general elections on Feb. 12, and the two main parties contesting it, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, kicked off campaigning with tens of thousands of supporters on Thursday in the northern city of Sylhet and the capital Dhaka, respectively. Nearly 128 million of Bangladesh's 170 million population are eligible to vote in polls that will decide on proposed political reforms and bring in new leadership after prolonged political turmoil that followed Hasina's ouster, reshaping domestic and regional dynamics. "We want to build a Bangladesh that is free from corruption, terrorism and extortion. Our dream is to build a Bangladesh where the grassroot-level working class people also can live with their rights, the women can move freely, (and) the youths will get enough employment opportunities," Jamaat's spokesperson Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair told Arab News on Friday. "We are expecting a beautiful and safe Bangladesh following the election next month. We want a free and fair election environment where people would be able to exercise their voting rights without any fear." After it was crushed during Hasina's 15 years in power, Jamaat-e-Islami is leading a 10-party alliance that includes the National Citizen Party, formed by student leaders who spearheaded the uprising. NCP's Nahid Islam launched their campaign urging voters to "carry forward the progress of reform." Tarique Rahman, BNP chairman and son of the late former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, is widely seen as a leading contender for prime minister. He has vowed to create jobs for "millions of unemployed youth" and support women's economic independence. More than 1,800 candidates are contesting for around 300 seats in the Bangladeshi parliament in the upcoming polls, which the country's interim leader Muhammad Yunus said will be a benchmark for future votes. "It will be a festive election. It will set the standard for good elections in the future. Let's keep our fingers crossed," Yunus said during a meeting with US Ambassador to Bangladesh Brent Christensen, his office said on Friday. Yunus, the 85-year-old Nobel Peace Prize laureate who has led Bangladesh's caretaker government since August 2024, will step down after the polls. The 2024 mass uprising that forced Hasina to resign from office and flee to India began in early July as peaceful student demonstrations, triggered by the reinstatement of a quota system for the allocation of civil service positions. Two weeks later, they were met with a communications blackout and a violent crackdown by security forces. A special tribunal in Dhaka found Hasina guilty of allowing lethal force to be used against the protesters, at least 1,400 people of whom died, according to estimates from the UN's Human Rights Office. After a months-long trial, she was sentenced to death in absentia in November for crimes against humanity.—DNA

Iraq says it will prosecute Daesh detainees sent from Syria

BAGHDAD: Iraq's Supreme Judicial Council said it would begin legal proceedings against Daesh detainees transferred from Syria, after the rapid collapse of Kurdish-led forces in northeast Syria triggered concerns over prison security. More than 10,000 members of the ultra-hardline militant group have been held for years in about a dozen prisons and detention camps guarded by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Syria's northeast. The US military said on Tuesday its forces had transferred 150 Daesh detainees from Syria to Iraq and that the operation could eventually see up to 7,000 detainees moved out of Syria. It cited concerns over security at the prisons, which also hold thousands more women and children with ties to the militant group, after military setbacks suffered by the SDF. A US official told Reuters on Tuesday that about 200 low-level Daesh fighters escaped from Syria's Shaddadi prison, although Syrian government forces had recaptured many of them. Iraqi officials said Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani mentioned the transfer of Daesh prisoners to Iraq in a phone call with Syrian President Ahmad Al-Sharaa on Tuesday, adding that the transfers went ahead following a formal request by the Iraqi government to Syrian authorities. Iraqi government spokesman Basim Al-Awadi said the transfer was "a pre-emptive step to protect Iraq's national security," adding that Baghdad could not delay action given the rapid pace of security and political developments in Syria.—APP

Algeria Senate demands changes to law criminalizing French rule

ALGIERS: Algeria's Senate demanded changes to a law criminalizing French colonial rule, including provisions on reparations, nearly a month after parliament passed the legislation. On December 24, parliament's lower house unanimously approved the law declaring France's colonization of Algeria from 1830 to 1962 a crime and demanding an apology and reparations. But the Senate said Thursday some articles of the text did not fully reflect the official approach set out by President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, who had said Algeria did not need financial reparations from France.—APP

Briefs

**Imaan
Mazari,
husband
arrested**

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Lawyer and rights activist Imaan Mazari and husband, Advocate Hadi Ali Chattha, were arrested by police on Friday, reportedly in a case related to an altercation case outside the Islamabad High Court (IHC). The couple was arrested from IHC Bar's van on their way to the district and sessions court in Islamabad from the bar's office. The police confiscated the phones of both Mazari and Chattha, and shifted them to women's police station. Sources said that they have been arrested in the case related to an altercation case outside the IHC. An anti-terrorism court (ATC) in the federal capital had dismissed the bail applications of Mazari and Chattha in this case on Thursday due to their absence in the hearing. The case was registered on the complaint of IHC Bar President, Wajid Ali Gilani, over a heated exchange of words during a protest outside the bar office. Both had filed pre-arrest bail applications in this matter.

Reacting to the development, IHC Bar gave a strike call to protest Mazari and Chattha's "illegal" arrest.

Moreover, the two had also been summoned by Additional District and Sessions Judge Muhammad Afzal Majoka in the controversial tweets case today. The local court judge had directed Mazari and Chattha to appear at 8:30am today upon their repeated absence in the past few hearings.

Old, used imported mobile phones' rates set to fall

MONITORING DESK

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Board of Revenue's (FBR) Directorate General of Customs Valuation in Karachi has updated customs values for old and used mobile phones imported into the country. The revision is expected to reduce the PTA tax on these imported devices. Under the new valuation, customs values for 62 models from four major brands – Apple, Samsung, Google Pixel, and OnePlus – have been lowered or set for the first time.

Under the new valuation rates, the valuation of the iPhone has been revised downward in the range of 32% to 89%, paving the way for the PTA tax to be reduced significantly.

For Apple devices, which dominate the used-phone market, customs values for models such as the iPhone 11, iPhone 12, and iPhone 13 series have been reduced significantly, bringing assessed values broadly into a range of around \$95 to \$295, depending on the model and generation.

Higher-end used models such as iPhone 14 and iPhone 15 variants have also been included, while older models nearing end-of-life have been given deeper depreciation.

Sindh CM says cleaning up pre-18th Amendment mess

Death toll from Gul Plaza blaze reaches 71, says Police Surgeon Dr Samia Syed as rescue operation continues

BUREAU REPORT

KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah on Friday stated that the provincial government was still addressing irregularities that predated the 18th Amendment, criticising calls to declare Karachi a federal territory following the deadly Gul Plaza fire. Speaking on the Sindh Assembly floor, he said that the Gul Plaza tragedy was being politicised unnecessarily, stressing that he was not questioning anyone's intentions while responding to criticism linked to Karachi and governance issues.

"This was a very big tragedy. I am not doubting anyone's intentions, but politics was done on it," CM Murad said, referring to calls about making Karachi a federal territory. Meanwhile, the death toll from the fire that erupted at the multi-storey building

on January 17 reached 71, as per Police Surgeon Dr Samia Syed.

In today's address, the Sindh CM expressed surprise over references to the 18th Amendment, saying he did not know where the Gul Plaza fire had been connected to the amendment. "We are still cleaning up the mess from before the 18th Amendment," the chief minister added. Detailing the construction and expansion of the shopping mall, the chief minister said that an application was submitted in 1979 to construct a building at the site now known as Gul Plaza, with its sale deed approved in 1983. According to him, the Karachi Building Control Authority permitted construction during the 1980s, and the lease for the plot was completed in 1983. He said that the lease was later renewed in 1991 by the mayor at the time, stressing

that this decision was taken before the enactment of the 18th Amendment.

The Sindh CM added that a fresh application was submitted in 1998 seeking permission to construct a third floor at Gul Plaza, and additional shops were regularised in 2003. All these approvals, he said, were granted before the 18th Amendment came into force. CM Murad rejected attempts to blame the 18th Amendment for the incident, questioning how it was being dragged into the debate. "To say that all this happened because of the 18th Amendment is akin to committing a serious wrongdoing."

The Sindh CM announced plans to rebuild shops on the site within two years, saying the remaining part of Gul Plaza would be demolished. The chief minister assured that owners would be provided with the same number of shops after reconstruc-

tion. "This is a very big tragedy. There is no price for a human life," the chief minister said, adding that families of those who lost their lives would receive Rs10 million each. CM Murad added that a committee had been directed to assess losses and that the Sindh government would pay the damage. "The Sindh government will give Rs500,000 immediately to every shopkeeper," he said, adding that lists of affected traders had been ordered to be compiled by Monday. As a temporary arrangement to keep shopkeepers' business going, the chief minister said that 500 shops in one building and 350 in another had been arranged, with owners agreeing not to charge rent for a year. He added that the provincial government would provide collateral for Gul Plaza shopkeepers to obtain loans of up to Rs10 million, with the government bearing the interest cost.



Group photo of Chairman Senate of Pakistan, Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani with the participants of the Global Muslim Business Forum (GMBF). – DNA

US, Denmark to renegotiate 1951 Greenland pact

Trump's threats to take Greenland have rocked the transatlantic alliance and plunged NATO into its biggest crisis in decades

DAVOS: The United States and Denmark will renegotiate a 1951 defence pact on Greenland, a source familiar with the talks between President Donald Trump and NATO chief Mark Rutte told AFP Thursday. The source said that European allies would also step up Arctic security, but insisted that placing American bases on Greenland under US sovereignty had not been discussed. "The 1951 agreement will get renegotiated," the source said. The defence agreement, updated in 2004, already gives Washington freedom to ramp up its troop deployments, provided it informs the authorities in Denmark and Greenland in advance. The US currently has one base on

Greenland – the Pituffik Space Base on the northwest of the island that constitutes a crucial link in US missile defence system. Trump on Wednesday announced a framework deal after talks with Rutte at the World Economic Forum in Davos, but the details of the purported agreement remained vague. Rutte said on Thursday one "work stream" to emerge from the meeting was "that we ensure that the Chinese and the Russians will not gain access to the Greenland economy" or militarily. Trump's threats to take Greenland have rocked the transatlantic alliance and plunged NATO into its biggest crisis in decades. Some European nations have pushed for NATO to launch a mission in the Arctic to try to shore up security in the region after Trump used it to justify his desire for Greenland. – Agencies

'NATO chief cannot negotiate for Denmark on Greenland'

"Of course it is only Denmark and Greenland themselves that can make decisions on issues concerning Denmark and Greenland," she said earlier in a statement. The United States and Denmark will renegotiate a 1951 defence pact on Greenland, a source familiar with the talks between Trump and Rutte told AFP on Thursday

COPENHAGEN: NATO chief Mark Rutte cannot negotiate on behalf of Denmark over Greenland, the Danish government said Thursday, a day after US President Donald Trump announced a deal following talks between the two men. Trump backed down on threats to seize Greenland by force after meeting Rutte on Wednesday, saying he had reached a "framework" of a deal on the Danish autonomous territory. Details of the agreement made at the World Economic Forum in the Swiss ski resort of Davos remain scant. "The position of Denmark and that of Greenland are the same, and no negotiations were held yesterday with NATO about our sovereignty," Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen told Danish television. "Of course it is only Denmark and Greenland themselves that can make decisions on issues concerning Denmark and Greenland," she said earlier in a statement. The United States and Denmark will renegotiate a 1951 defence pact on Greenland, a source familiar with the talks between Trump and Rutte told AFP on Thursday. Putting US military bases on Greenland under US sovereignty had not been discussed during the talks, the source said. Danish Defence Minister Troels Lund Poulsen said on social media Thursday that Rutte "cannot negotiate an agreement on behalf of Denmark or Greenland". However, he said Rutte had "worked loyalty to maintain unity within NATO" and it was "very positive" that the alliance wanted to do more to strengthen Arctic security. "We have a clear red line," he added. "We will not cede sovereignty over parts of the kingdom." – Agencies

US negotiators meet Putin

MOSCOW: Top US negotiators including Steve Witkoff met Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow late Thursday for talks on a US-drafted plan to end the Ukraine war, just as Kyiv announced it had agreed on post-war security guarantees with Washington. Diplomatic efforts to end Europe's deadliest conflict since World War II have gained pace in recent months, though both Moscow and Kyiv remain at odds over the key issue of territory in a post-war settlement. Talks concluded after stretching past the three-hour mark, the Kremlin said in a statement released early Friday. Witkoff had previously said he believed the two sides were "down to one issue", without elaborating. Video published by the Kremlin showed a smiling Putin shaking hands with Witkoff, US President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and White House advisor Josh Gruenbaum. Russian negotiator Kirill Dmitriev and Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov took part on the Russian side, the Kremlin said. The high-stakes meeting came just hours after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said a draft deal was "nearly, nearly ready" and that he and Trump had agreed on the issue of post-war security guarantees. Russia, which occupies around 20 percent of Ukraine, is pushing for full control of the country's eastern Donbas region as part of a deal. But Kyiv has warned that ceding ground will embolden Moscow and says it will not sign a peace deal that fails to deter Russia from launching a renewed assault.

After meeting Trump at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Zelensky said the security guarantees were "done", speaking in English to journalists. He said the UK and France had already committed to forces on the ground. Neither Witkoff nor Kushner will stay in the Russian capital overnight, instead flying straight to Abu Dhabi, where talks will continue in "military to military" working groups, Witkoff said. The details of the upcoming talks in the United Arab Emirates have not been released, and it is not clear whether Russian and Ukrainian officials will meet face-to-face. Zelensky said these talks would last two days. Trump repeated on Wednesday his oft-stated belief that Putin and Zelensky were close to a deal. – Agencies

Donald Trump revokes Canada's invitation to join Board of Peace

Trump's about-face follows Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney's speech at World Economic Forum in Davos

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump withdrew on Thursday an invitation for Canada to join his Board of Peace initiative aimed at resolving global conflicts.

Trump's about-face follows Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney's speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, where he openly decried powerful nations using economic integration as weapons and tariffs as leverage.

"Please let this letter serve to represent that the Board of Peace is withdrawing its invitation to you regarding Canada's joining, what will be, the most prestigious Board of Leaders ever assembled, at any time," Trump wrote in a Truth Social post directed at Carney. Neither Carney's office nor the White House immediately responded

to Reuters requests for comment on Thursday evening. Last week, Carney's office said he had been invited to serve on the board and planned to accept.

Carney received a rare standing ovation in Davos after the speech, in which he urged nations to accept the end of a rules-based global order.

Canada, which recently signed a trade deal with China, can show how "middle powers" might act together to avoid being victimised by American hegemony, he added.

Trump retorted that Canada "lives because of the United States," and told listeners in Davos that Carney should be grateful for the United States' previous largesse.

"Remember that, Mark, the next time you make your statements," he added, addressing Carney directly.

The withdrawal of Canada's invitation came hours after Trump officially launched the board, which was initially meant to cement a Gaza ceasefire.



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EU has 'serious doubts' about Trump's 'Board of Peace'

BRUSSELS: European leaders have serious doubts about the scope of President Donald Trump's "Board of Peace" but are ready to work with the United States and the newly founded body in Gaza, EU chief Antonio Costa said Friday.

"We have serious doubts about a number of elements in the charter of the Board of Peace related to its scope, its governance and its compatibility with the UN Charter," the European Council president said after an EU leaders' summit in Brussels. "We are ready to work together with the US on the implementation of the comprehensive Peace Plan for Gaza, with a Board of Peace carrying out its mission as a transitional administration". The founding charter of Trump's body for resolving international conflicts has a \$1 billion price tag for permanent membership.

Although originally meant to oversee Gaza's rebuilding, the board's charter does not seem to limit its role to the Palestinian territory and appears to want to rival the United Nations. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez told reporters after the summit that his country had "declined" the invitation to participate in the body. – Agencies

US, Ukrainian and Russian negotiators to meet in UAE

DNA

MOSCOW: Ukrainian, US, and Russian officials will hold security talks in the United Arab Emirates today (Friday), the Kremlin said, following a meeting of top US negotiators with President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on a US-drafted plan to end the Ukraine war. Diplomatic efforts to end Europe's deadliest conflict since World War II have gained pace in recent months, though Moscow and Kyiv remain at odds over the key issue of territory in a post-war settlement. US negotiators, led by envoy Steve Witkoff, talked with the Russian leader in Moscow into the early hours of Friday, according to a Kremlin statement.

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