



# Islamabad POST

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**WHO chief says reasons US gave for withdrawing 'untrue'**

Detailed News On Page-06

**Mbappe takes Real Madrid top of La Liga**

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**Pakistan values relations with Italy: Gilani**

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**After Bangladesh's exit**

## Pakistan under pressure to opt out of T20 WC

Now that Bangladesh has been excluded, sources suggest Dhaka is urging Islamabad to follow suit and opt out of the tournament as a gesture of solidarity. For Pakistan, the dilemma is profound: on one hand, moral and diplomatic courtesy demands standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Bangladesh; on the other, the financial stakes are enormous

**ANSAR MAHMOOD BHATTI**

ISLAMABAD: The upcoming ICC T20 Cricket World Cup has taken a dramatic turn following the exclusion of Bangladesh from the tournament. The International Cricket Council (ICC) recently confirmed that Scotland will replace Bangladesh, after the latter refused to play in India citing security concerns. This decision has triggered a wave of controversy, particularly in Pakistan, which had openly backed Bangladesh's stance. Now, with Bangladesh officially out, Pakistan finds itself under mounting pressure to demonstrate solidarity by reconsidering its own participation. Bangladesh's refusal to play in India was rooted in security apprehensions. The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) had repeatedly raised alarms over the safety of its players and staff, insisting that the environment in India was not conducive to hosting their matches. Despite these concerns, the ICC opted to remove Bangladesh from the tournament altogether, replacing them with Scotland. This move has been criticized by many observers as insensitive to legitimate security fears, and it has left Bangladesh feeling sidelined. Pakistan had strongly supported Bangladesh's position, with officials and cricketing voices emphasizing the importance of player safety over commercial interests. Now that Bangladesh has been excluded, sources suggest Dhaka is urging Islamabad to follow suit and opt out of the tournament as a gesture of solidarity. For Pakistan, the dilemma is profound: on one hand, moral and diplomatic courtesy

demands standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Bangladesh; on the other, the financial stakes are enormous. The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) and team management are reportedly keen to participate, given the lucrative sponsorships, broadcasting rights, and prize money tied to the World Cup. Gambling interests also play a role, with betting markets reportedly heavily invested in Pakistan's participation. This financial dimension complicates the moral obligation, creating a tug-of-war between principles and profit. PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi has made it clear that the final decision rests with the government. He stated that the Prime Minister will decide Pakistan's course of action once he returns from the United Kingdom. This underscores the political weight of the issue, as opting out would not only affect cricketing revenues but also send a strong diplomatic signal to the ICC and India. Observers argue that Pakistan has two choices: either withdraw from the tournament to honor its commitment to Bangladesh or push the ICC to reconsider its decision and reinstate Bangladesh. Both options carry significant consequences. Withdrawal would mean forfeiting millions in revenue and disappointing fans, while challenging the ICC to strain Pakistan's relations with the governing body and other cricketing nations. Amid this cricketing controversy, diplomatic channels between Islamabad and Dhaka remain active. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar recently held a telephonic conversation with Bangladesh's Foreign Adviser, Md. Touhid Hossain.

Continued on Page 06

**Minister says Pak should stand with Bangladesh****FAISAL SHEIKH**

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister's Adviser on Political Affairs Rana Sanaullah on Saturday called for Pakistan to "stand with Bangladesh" after its decision to avoid travelling to India for the T20 World Cup 2026, noting the possible long-term advantages. "I think we need to stand with Bangladesh on this. It will be in our interest in the long run," he said while speaking on Geo News programme 'Naya Pakistan'. The senior Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader, however, acknowledged the financial repercussions for Pakistan cricket in the event of a potential boycott of the tournament. "Maybe we will get less money. We can manage with

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**French navy diverts oil tanker****NEWS DESK**

PARIS: The French navy has diverted an oil tanker, suspected of being part of Russia's sanctions-busting "shadow fleet", towards the port of Marseille-Fos for further investigation, according to reports. The office of the prosecutor in the southern French city of Marseille, which handles matters related to maritime law and is investigating the case, said on Friday that the ship had been diverted, but did not specify where to. The 'Grinch' tanker was intercepted by French naval forces on Thursday while on the high seas in the western Mediterranean, between the southern coast of Spain and

Continued on Page 06



**LANDIKOTAL:** People enjoying snow in the border area of Landikotal. The Met office has forecast more rains and snow. - APP

**Antonio Costa in New Delhi**

## EU, India all set to have a free trade pact

While the EU eyes India as an important market for the future, New Delhi sees the European bloc as an important source of much-needed technology and investment to rapidly upscale its infrastructure and create millions of new jobs for its people

**NEWS DESK**

NEW DELHI: European Council president Antonio Costa arrived in India on Sunday, as the EU and New Delhi seek to seal a free trade pact, capping nearly two decades of negotiations between the economic behemoths. Costa and European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen are chief guests for this year's Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi on Monday before an EU-India summit on Tuesday, where they hope to shake hands on the accord, described as the "mother of all deals". "President Costa is in New Delhi for the 16th EU-India summit taking place on Tuesday," the EU Council said on X.

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## Last Pakistan-EU summit held in 2010

**SAIFULLAH ANSAR**

ISLAMABAD: The last formal EU-Pakistan Summit was held more than fifteen years ago, on June 4, 2010, in Brussels. That meeting marked the second high-level summit between the two sides, following the inaugural session in 2009. Since then, no formal summit has taken place, but bilateral engagement

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## Briefs

**Naqvi meets Chinese Consul General****ABID RAZA**

LAHORE: Federal Interior Minister and Chairman Pakistan Cricket Board, Mohsin Naqvi, met the Chinese Consul General Zhao Shiren. Mohsin Naqvi paid tribute to Zhao Shiren for his services as Chinese Consul General and extended best wishes to him. While speaking to Federal Interior Minister and PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi, Chinese Consul General Zhao Shiren said that everyone acknowledges his remarkable pace. He added that Mohsin Naqvi has played a valuable role in strengthening Pakistan-China bilateral relations. He said that first as Chief Minister Punjab and now as Interior Minister, Mohsin Naqvi has done extraordinary work to further strengthen Pakistan-China friendship. He also stated that his stay in Pakistan was extremely pleasant.

**Pak Army evacuates stranded people****DNA**

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Army has successfully carried out timely rescue and relief operations to evacuate citizens stranded due to heavy snowfall, restoring the Kotli-Nakyal Road for traffic. During the snowfall, rescue and relief operations were conducted in Jandrott and Pir Nasoorah. As a result of the Army's effective efforts, the Kotli-Nakyal Road has been fully reopened for vehicular movement. The Pakistan Army provided food and other relief items to the affected people. Several families were rescued and given necessary assistance in Pir Nasoorah.

## In Balochistan

### Security forces kill three Indian-proxy terrorists in operation

Weapons, ammunition and explosives were also recovered from the terrorists, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area

**DNA**

RAWALPINDI: Security forces conducted an intelligence based operation in Panjgur District of Balochistan, on reported presence of terrorists belonging to Indian proxy, Fitna al Hindustan. During the conduct of operation, own forces effectively engaged the terrorists' location, and after an intense fire exchange, three Indian sponsored terrorists were sent to hell (including Local Area Terrorist Commander Farooq alias Soro, Terrorist Adeel & Terrorist Waseem). Weapons, ammunition and explosives were also recovered from the terrorists, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area. Sanitization operations are being conducted to eliminate any other

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## President, PM laud security forces

**FIAZ CHAUDHRY**

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif have commended security forces for their successful operation against Fitna al-Hindustan terrorists in Panjgur. In their separate statements today, they said the entire nation stands with the armed forces in this war against terrorism. President Asif Ali Zardari said operations against Fitna al-Hindustan are indispensable for national security.

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## Trump threatens Canada with 100% tariff on goods

*At the time, Trump called the move "a good thing". But tensions between the US and Canada have grown in recent days, after Carney said in a speech in Davos that the US-led world order had been ruptured*

**NEWS DESK**

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump has threatened to slap a 100% tariff on Canadian goods if the country strikes a trade deal with China. "If Canada makes a deal with China, it will immediately be hit with a 100% Tariff against all Canadian goods and products coming into the U.S.A.," Trump said on Truth Social. It is unclear what deal Trump is referring to in his social media post. Last week, Canada's Prime Minister Carney announced a "strategic partnership" with China, and agreed to reduce tariffs. At the time, Trump called the move "a good thing". But tensions between the US and Canada have grown in recent days, after Carney said in a speech in Davos that the US-led world order had been ruptured. Carney also urged other "middle powers" to band together in the face of economic coercion by "greater powers", though

Continued on Page 06

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### Governor KP, Sindh MPA discuss minorities' rights

ISLAMABAD: Sindh Member of Provincial Assembly Lal Chand here on Sunday called on Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi and discussed matters of mutual interest and the overall political situation of the country. Speaking on the occasion, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi highlighted the historic and effective role of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in the protection and promotion of minority rights. He said that the PPP had always taken practical steps to ensure constitutional rights for religious minorities, integrate them into the national mainstream and address their issues. The Governor said that from Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto to Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the leadership of the Pakistan Peoples Party had consistently promoted a policy of equality, respect and tolerance for minorities. He reaffirmed the Party's commitment to continue playing a proactive role in safeguarding minority rights and ensuring their welfare in the future as well. —APP

### 10 eateries and shops sealed in Karachi

KARACHI: City administration's drive against roadside soft encroachments and eateries continues in the city on the directives of Commissioner Karachi Syed Hassan Naqvi. According to a press release issued by the Commissioner's Office, Deputy Commissioners of Central and Keamari districts have submitted reports on the operation carried out against road side encroachments in their districts. As per details submitted 10 eateries and shops were sealed, and 2 were warned in a crackdown on 12 roadside encroachments. Deputy Commissioner Central, Taha Saleem, said a pan shop and 2 photocopy cabins were sealed near Board of Intermediate office, while 5 shops were sealed in North Nazimabad and Paharganj areas, including Taj Hassan Pakwan, Chay Dhabba, MashaAllah Car Gas, Hassan Zai Auto, Rent-a-Car, and a puncture shop. Deputy Commissioner Keamari, Raja Tariq Chandio, said 2 eateries in Rashida Baldis and Saeedabad were warned against future encroachments. —APP

### Power supply to be temporary suspended on various feeders

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) on Sunday announced that power supply will be temporary suspended on various feeders/areas due to system maintenance and development work. According to IESCO spokesman, on 26th January 2026, from 09:00 am to 02:00 pm, Islamabad Circle, TDCP, MCM, Gharial, Upper Topa, Patriata, PAF, and Kuldana Feeders, Rawalpindi City Circle, Raja Sultan, New Mulpur, Muzammil Town, Al-Noor Colony, Tariq Shaheed, Nawaz Colony, B.N. Hospital, Zafar-ul-Haq, Dhoke Khabba, Major Masood, Sarafa Bazar, Gawalmandi, Westridge, Khayaban-e-Sir Syed, Bagh Sardaran, Madina Colony, People Colony, Chearing Cross, Radio Pak-Bajnai, Bajnai-II, Noon. —APP



ISLAMABAD: Families enjoying at Monument on clear sunny day after rainy days in Federal Capital.

## Development work kicks off in 51 cities of Punjab

Chairing a special meeting here on Sunday, Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif directed that the first phase of the project be completed by June 2026, with a focus on sewerage systems and other essential infrastructure in every city

LAHORE: Development work under the flagship programme "Maryam Nawaz Ka Sona Punjab" has been formally launched in 51 cities across Punjab, marking a major step towards improving urban infrastructure and civic facilities. Chairing a special meeting here on Sunday, Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif directed that the first phase of the project be completed by June 2026, with a focus on sewerage systems and other essential infrastructure in every city. The chief minister personally assumed direct monitoring of the Punjab Development Plan to ensure transparency, efficiency and timely completion. To ensure effective implementation, provincial and district-level control rooms are being established for real-time monitoring of projects and swift resolution of public complaints. Under the plan, 5,887 kilometres of sewerage lines and 181 drainage lines will be constructed across 51 cities.

Over 33,000 new manhole covers will be installed, while production of high-density polyethylene (HDPE) pipes for sewerage is underway. Deputy Commissioners of Multan, Dera Ghazi Khan, Bhakkar, Vehari, Wazirabad, Gujranwala, Sheikhupura and Kasur briefed the chief minister on progress and city-specific plans. In Multan, 232 km of sewerage lines, 81 pumps, 51 generators and 64 km of urban roads will be constructed, alongside expansion and beautification of Boson, Khanewal, Shujabad and Nishtar Roads. Gujranwala will see 131 km of sewerage lines, 2 km of drainage lines, a wastewater treatment plant and 16 machinery units, marking the city's largest-ever development package. In Dera Ghazi Khan, sewerage and drainage systems worth over Rs12 billion are being completed in two zones, the Manika Canal is being converted into an agricultural canal, and 140

km of sewerage lines are being constructed and rehabilitated. Bhakkar will get a 42-inch sewerage line, 100 new manholes, solar-powered dispensing stations, as well as parks, walkways and public washrooms. Vehari is receiving projects worth Rs6.7 billion, while Sheikhupura is seeing 95 km of sewerage lines laid along with expedited completion of beautification projects. The chief minister directed improvements in cleanliness and civic management in Sheikhupura, praised the revamping of District Headquarters Hospital Kasur, and ordered further enhancement of sanitation services and urgent restoration of sewerage systems in Pattroki. CM Maryam Nawaz emphasized that every project under the Punjab Development Plan must be completed transparently and on time, ensuring development reaches every street and neighborhood across the province. —APP

## CDA organizes community market to boost entrepreneurship

DNNA

ISLAMABAD: In line with the direction of Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, the successful organization of unique community markets continues in the Federal Capital Islamabad. In this connection, a special community market for students and citizens has been organized at Fatima Jinnah Park, near Gandhara Citizen Centre, F-9. The primary objective of organizing this community market is to promote a trend of business and entrepreneurship among the youth. Similarly, the purpose of this market is to nurture the creative and constructive abilities of the youth so that young people and the coming generation can be encouraged and the spirit of business can be promoted. Further-

more, this Community Market aims to provide citizens with direct access to quality and unique products. Young students from various universities and other educational institutions of the Federal Capital Islamabad participated in this special community market. A large number of citizens, especially families, participated in this special market organized under the administration of CDA. Similarly, handmade products, art and crafts, creative designs and modern technology-based projects are also being presented to the general public. This special market is receiving particular appreciation from students, citizens, and families. On this occasion, Chief Officer MCI, Dr. Anam Fatima, said that such events are being held regularly at various community spaces and locations within Islamabad city. The timings for this special market are set

from 01:00 PM to 05:00 PM. On the instructions of Chairman CDA, the Environment Wing distributed environmentally friendly plants among the citizens at this special market to run an awareness campaign for promoting tree plantation among citizens and to highlight the importance of tree plantation. Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa said that the model of such community markets should be extended to other parks and public places in the Federal Capital Islamabad so that not only do young people get more opportunities, but quality entertainment and shopping opportunities for citizens can also be established. He further said that the purpose of these measures is to promote new business ideas among the youth, highlight their creative abilities, and promote recreational facilities in the Capital City Islamabad. —APP

### More people, fewer options: The human cost of population explosion

PESHAWAR: As dusk settles over a small village in Nowshera, 25-year-old Shagufta Bibi lights an oil lamp in the corner of her modest home. Its faint glow falls on schoolbooks spread before her children and on a faded photograph resting on a mud wall being the only picture she has of her late mother. Her eyes fill with tears as she recalls the price her family paid for a deeply rooted desire about the birth of a son "I have three sisters." Shagufta says quietly in Mohib Banda village. "My parents wanted a son. My mother died during her fifth pregnancy." Her voice trembles. "That desire took her life and deprived us of her love forever." Shagufta's story is not an isolated tragedy. It reflects a much larger, quieter problems unfolding across KP driven by unchecked population growth, entrenched cultural norms, and shrinking resources. —APP

## Nayyar terms India's claim of largest democracy a fraud

MUZAFFARABAD: Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Minister for Information, Augaf and Religious Affairs, Chaudhry Rafique Muhammad Nayyar has reiterated Kashmiris' pledge to continue the ongoing liberation struggle till they achieve the long cherished goal of freedom from India. In his message issued on the eve of January 26, he said that Kashmiri people observe India's Republic Day as a Black Day as a mark of their resent-

ment and anguish against the India's imperialistic occupation of the region. He said that the Kashmiri people have made immense sacrifices in their struggle to achieve the right to self-determination, a right guaranteed to them by the international community through numerous United Nations resolutions. Describing India's claim of being the world's largest democracy as the biggest fraud, Mr. Rafique Nayyar said that India, under the RSS-driven

Modi regime, has descended into a fascist state where minorities are facing a grave and existential threat. The Minister emphasized that the people of Pakistan and Azad Kashmir will continue to provide moral, political, and diplomatic support to the people of occupied Kashmir and will never retreat from this principled stance. Rafique Nayyar said that every effort aimed at resolving the Kashmir issue through meaningful. —APP

## New poverty graduation programme to be launched

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety has planned to launch a new Rs39 billion Poverty Graduation Programme, aimed at expanding Pakistan's efforts to move deserving families from cash assistance to sustainable livelihoods. The four-year programme, running from 2026 to 2029, will be implemented in 25 districts across the country with a strong focus on transparency, accountability and measurable impact. The Ministry also revealed the successful completion of the National Poverty Graduation Programme in 21 underdeveloped districts across all four provinces, which facilitated the transition of vulnerable families from Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) cash

support to dignified and sustainable sources of income. Under the completed programme, beneficiaries were provided productive assets, interest-free loans, livelihood training and skills development, resulting in the creation of 179,000 new employment opportunities, while 96,000 families permanently graduated out of poverty, according to the ministry. The Ministry said that the new initiative would be monitored through independent evaluations, third-party audits and an effective grievance redressal system to ensure credibility and transparency. It said that in collaboration with the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, a Digital Social Protection Dashboard had been developed to strengthen reporting, transparency and evidence-based

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## Youth, education and media key to Pakistan's climate resilience

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination has reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to placing climate education, communication and youth-led advocacy at the heart of national climate policy, describing education as a critical driver of resilience, sustainable development and social transformation. To mark International Education Day 2026, observed globally on January 24, the ministry told APP that for climate-vulnerable countries like Pakistan, education plays a central role in strengthening preparedness as climate shocks increasingly intersect with development pressures, inequality and governance challenges. International Education Day, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2018, recognises education as a fundamental human right and a shared global responsibility essential for peace, dignity and sustainable development. This year's theme, "The power of youth in co-creating education," highlights young people as active partners in shaping education systems amid rapid technological, social and environmental change. With people under 30 accounting for more than half of the global population, the theme underscores youth as key stakeholders in policies that will shape future livelihoods, resilience and climate outcomes. Mohammad Saleem Shaikh, Climate Change Education, Communication and Advocacy Outreach Specialist and senior media spokesperson of the ministry, told APP that the government viewed climate education as a strategic investment rather than a standalone sectoral intervention. "Education is the backbone of Pakistan's climate response. From classrooms to communities, climate literacy is empowering citizens, especially young people and the media, to understand risks, adopt sustainable behaviours and contribute meaningfully to mitigation and adaptation efforts," he said. He said the media played a decisive role in shaping public understanding of climate change. "Responsible and sustained coverage helps translate climate science and policy into public awareness, counters misinformation and keeps climate risks visible beyond disaster moments," he added. Pakistan remains among the countries most exposed to extreme weather events, including floods, heatwaves, droughts and glacial lake outburst floods. In this context, the integration of climate change education, awareness, advocacy and media engagement into both formal and informal learning systems has emerged as a key policy priority. Shaikh stressed that

young people were not merely beneficiaries but partners in the design and delivery of climate education. "Our youth are innovators, communicators and community mobilizers. Their involvement strengthens local ownership of climate action and ensures solutions are inclusive and context-driven," he said. He noted that the theme of International Education Day 2026 closely aligns with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change's Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) framework, which promotes education, public awareness, participation and access to information. He added that Pakistan's National Climate Change Policy places strong emphasis on public education and outreach to build awareness of climate risks and protect the country's natural resources, including water, forests and biodiversity. —DNA

## National Days and Armed Forces Days

### JANUARY

Jan 01 / CUBA Revolution Day
Jan 01 / Palestine Palestine Revolution Day
Jan 01 / Sudan National Day
Jan 04 / Myanmar Independence Day
Jan 06 / Iraq Armed Forces Day
Jan 12 / Tanzania Armed Forces Day
Jan 14 / Uzbekistan Armed Forces Day
Jan 15 / Nigeria Armed Forces Day
Jan 20 / Mali Armed Forces Day
Jan 20 / Laos Armed Forces Day
Jan 25 / Thailand Armed Forces Day
Jan 26 / Australia National Day
Jan 26 / India Republic Day

Turkish Airlines.....8494949



### Emergency

Rescue (Police).....15
Bomb Disposal.....15
Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad.....1122 & 16
Emergency Ambulance.1122 & Rescue Services.445112
Motorway Police.....9266044
Motorway Police.9270601-20
Women Police Stations Islamabad.....9222596
Rawalpindi.....9270601-20



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PIA Flight Info.....114
PIA Cargo.....9280979
Railway Inquiry.....117
Railway Exchange9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi.....5555489
CAA.....9281092



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



### Departments

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



### Islamabad Metropolitan

Corporation.....9209224
Potwar Town.....9209224
Rawal Town.....5773343

### Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480
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## Aleem Khan commands NHA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Communications, Abdul Aleem Khan, has praised the National Highway Authority (NHA) teams for their exceptional performance in keeping national highways and motorways operational despite severe snowfall and challenging weather conditions. The Minister stated that the dedication shown by NHA staff in ensuring uninterrupted connectivity is truly commendable, said a press release. In a special statement, Federal Minister Abdul Aleem Khan paid tribute to the field staff working in the most difficult terrains of Murree, Chitral, Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Azad Jammu & Kashmir. "Our hardworking workers and field staff are the true assets of our organization, ensuring road restoration through their tireless efforts," the Minister remarked. He added that timely interventions, including continuous salt sprinkling and the strategic deployment of heavy machinery on the Murree Expressway and other key arteries, played a vital role in preventing accidents and maintaining safety. Looking ahead, Abdul Aleem Khan has issued strict directives to the NHA to remain fully prepared and on high alert for the upcoming spell of snowfall expected across the country. He emphasized that providing uninterrupted access to highways and ensuring the convenience of the public is a top national priority. The Minister also urged travelers and tourists to cooperate fully with the field staff in difficult areas to ensure a safe and smooth journey for all. APP

# Major anti-encroachment operation in Sector G 14/1

The action was carried out on the special instructions of Director General (FGEHA) Captain (Retd.) Muhammad Zafar Iqbal. Supervised by a magistrate, the operation was led by the Assistant Commissioner of Islamabad and the Deputy Commissioner (LAC) of FGEHA

### DNA

ISLAMABAD: The district administration of Islamabad carried out a large-scale operation against illegal encroachments in Sector 14/1G, reaffirming its commitment to reclaiming government land from unlawful occupation and ensuring transparency in urban management. The operation was launched on the special instructions of Director General of the Federal Government Employees Housing Authority (FGEHA), Captain (Retd.) Muhammad Zafar Iqbal. Acting under his directives, the Assistant Commissioner of Islamabad and the Deputy Commissioner (Land Acquisition Collector) of FGEHA supervised the proceedings, with a magistrate present to guarantee that all legal protocols were strictly observed. Senior officials including Tehsildar Mudassar Mehmood, Tehsildar Muhammad Ali, and Patwari Syed Khurram Naqvi were actively involved in overseeing the demolition process. Their presence ensured that the operation was conducted in a transparent manner, leaving no room for allegations of bias or irregularity. The primary objective was to clear valuable government land that had been illegally occupied and to send a strong message that encroachments will not be tolerated. During the course of the operation, approximately 15 illegally constructed properties and structures were demolished. Heavy machinery was deployed to dismantle the encroachments swiftly and effectively. To maintain peace and order, police contingents were stationed at the site, ensuring that the process remained smooth and free of confrontation. Notably, no unpleasant incident was reported, reflecting



the careful planning and coordination between the district administration, FGEHA, and law enforcement agencies. The administration emphasized that this was not an isolated effort but part of a broader campaign to eliminate encroachments across Islamabad. Officials reiterated that indiscriminate actions will continue in all sectors of the capital, targeting both small-scale and large-scale illegal occupations. They stressed that no leniency will be shown to individuals or groups who attempt to seize government land for personal gain. Encroachments have long been a

challenge in Islamabad, contributing to urban disorder, obstructing development projects, and depriving the government of land meant for housing schemes and public facilities. The latest operation highlights the administration's resolve to restore order and protect public resources. By reclaiming land, the government aims to ensure that it can be utilized for planned development, housing projects, and infrastructure that benefits the wider population. The district administration also underscored the importance of public cooperation in this campaign. Citizens were urged

to refrain from supporting or engaging in illegal construction and to report any instances of encroachment to the authorities. Officials noted that transparency and accountability would remain central to all future operations, with strict adherence to legal procedures. This decisive action in Sector 14/1G serves as a reminder that the rule of law will be upheld in Islamabad. The administration's message is clear: encroachers will face demolition and legal consequences, while government land will be safeguarded for legitimate and constructive use.

# Pak, China witness sharp expansion in bilateral agri-food trade

### DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan, China have recently witnessed a sharp expansion in bilateral agri-food trade, reflecting China's growing appetite for diversified, halal-certified protein products. According to a Gwadar Pro's report, Pakistan's exports of boiled meat to China surged 177 percent year on year in export value in 2025, according to data released by China's General Administration of Customs (GACC). Chinese customs data shows that Pakistan shipped 2.38 million kilograms of boiled beef under HS code 16025090, with exports valued at \$14.52 million. Exporters said the sharp rise reflects improved market access for Pakistani meat processors, stronger compliance with Chinese sanitary and halal standards, and rising demand across China's major consumption centres, Gwadar Pro reported. Within China, the top destinations were primarily economically advanced, high-consumption regions. Jiangsu Province emerged as the largest market for Pakistani meat products. Improvements in cold-chain logistics, smoother customs procedures and

the use of bonded trade channels—particularly through Hainan—have also reduced delivery time and costs. Compared with other suppliers, Mongolia remained China's largest import source of prepared bovine meat in this category, shipping 4.37 million kilograms valued at \$18.53 million, largely benefiting from geographic proximity and border trade with Inner Mongolia. By contrast, the United States exported only 18,099 kilograms worth \$68,033, reflecting a different market focus and product mix. Industry observers noted that Pakistan has substantial room to further expand its footprint in the Chinese market. Moving up the value chain through seasoned and portioned products, investing in cold-chain infrastructure, strengthening branding partnerships with Chinese distributors, and accelerating certification of additional processing plants could significantly boost exports in the coming years. Abdullah, a Pakistani meat exporter to China, said demand is rising across China's coastal and inland provinces alike.

## Call for expansion of Pakistan-China coop in traditional medicine

ISLAMABAD: Prof. Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Choudhary, Coordinator General OIC-COMSTECH, has emphasized the expansion of Pakistan-China cooperation in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and broader scientific collaboration while addressing the closing ceremony of the Pakistan TCM Practitioners Training Program. He termed the completion of the first phase of the training as a historic milestone for Pakistan-China scientific and healthcare cooperation. He congratulated Pakistani doctors on the successful completion of the six-month intensive training program conducted at the prestigious Hunan University of Chinese Medicine and Huaihua University of Medicine. Dr. Choudhary highly appreciated the outstanding hospitality, mentorship, and academic support extended by the Chinese universities, stating that the training has laid a strong foundation for introducing age-old Chinese healing practices in Pakistan, the world's fifth most populous country. He described the initiative as a major step towards integrating TCM into Pakistan's healthcare system. Paying special tribute to Prof. Dr. Ximin Liu, WHO Expert and COMSTECH Coordinator for China, Dr. Choudhary called him a key ambassador of Pakistan-China cooperation in traditional medicine, neuropharmacology, and biomedical sciences, whose exceptional services have been recognized at the highest level by the President of Pakistan. He also expressed deep gratitude to Sindh Minister for Health and Population Welfare, Dr. Azra Fazal Pechuho, for supporting the launch of the first phase of the program. Dr. Choudhary acknowledged the vital role of the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine (NATCM) for its generous support, including assistance in establishing the Sino-Pakistan Centre. The Coordinator General OIC-COMSTECH further appreciated the support of the Chinese Embassy in Islamabad, the Pakistan Embassy in China, and the International Center for Chemical and Biological Sciences (ICCBS) in overcoming challenges during the program's launch and implementation. APP

# Sixth edition of 'Run With Us' Marathon

### DNA

ISLAMABAD: Sunday in Islamabad was a live-streamed celebration of fitness as the sixth "Run With Us" Marathon unfolded, with runners from every background racing together and residents applauding the healthy spirit of the digital era. The sixth edition of the "Run With Us" Islamabad Marathon took place in the federal capital on Sunday, 25 January, featuring a range of race distances including 5 km, 10 km, the half marathon (21 km) and the full marathon (42 km), drawing athletes from across Pakistan and abroad as well as enthusiastic local residents eager to take part. Participants from across Pakistan and various other foreigners took part in the vibrant race, which showcased Islamabad as a hub of fitness and endurance while promoting healthy living. Runners competed with determination through the city streets, reflecting the growing popularity of running culture and community spirit in the digital era. In today's digital era, where screen time often dominates daily routines, events like the Islamabad Marathon offer a welcome shift toward healthier lifestyles, said a group of youngsters, adding, with the increasing concerns around sedentary habits and the impact of prolonged screen use, initiatives that promote outdoor activities are more crucial than ever. The marathon, by encouraging people to take a step toward physical fitness, presents an opportunity to reduce the harmful effects of excessive screen time while fostering a sense of community through shared experiences, said a children aged 10 year. Many local residents and participants expressed their appreciation for the event, noting the positive impact it could have in inspiring more people to embrace active living. Citizens and participants were full of praise for the event. a local female resident, commented, "It was so refreshing to see people of all ages come together for a healthy cause. I am inspired to make fitness a regular part of my life." David Smith, a foreign participant from the UK, said, "It is wonderful to see such international collaboration and to be part of an event that promotes wellness in the digital age." We need more initiatives that encourage healthy living and



## Briefs

**"Hangeng"**  
obtains  
license to  
export donkey  
meat to China

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Gwadar North Free Zone's Chinese company, Hangeng, finally acquired a formal license to export donkey meat to China from the General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China (GACC), Gwadar Pro reported. GACC conducted an online inspection of Hangeng to approve its processes and procedures under prescribed laws. Following the fulfillment of the licensing requirements, exports are set to begin next week. A Hangeng official told Gwadar Pro that it is a matter of immense satisfaction that all inspection criteria, certifications, and regulations have been successfully completed. He stated that the first shipment will be sent to China from the company's infrastructure, including a recently established slaughterhouse in the Gwadar North Free Zone. He added that approximately 50 containers carrying donkey meat will sail from Pakistan to China on a monthly basis.—APP

**PPAF, CSAIL**  
sign grant  
agreement

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) and China Three Gorges South Asia Investment Limited (CSAIL) signed a grant agreement to renovate and rehabilitate Government Primary School Daad Bux Chang in Jhimpur, Thatta, Sindh, under TGW's corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative. The 12-month project will include the construction of new classrooms and a toilet block, development of a boundary wall, tree plantation, installation of a reverse osmosis (RO) water filtration system, hiring of teachers, and the implementation of community mobilisation and enrolment campaigns, Gwadar Pro reported on Sunday. Speaking at the signing ceremony, Chief Executive Officer PPAF, Nadir Gul Barech, said the agreement formalises a meaningful partnership between the two companies, reflecting a shared commitment to sustainable development, community wellbeing, and inclusive growth. He noted that the Chinese investment firm's engagement in Pakistan extends beyond renewable energy generation to responsible corporate citizenship. "Supporting education infrastructure is a strategic CSR priority, as it lays the foundation for human capital development and intergenerational progress," he said. Highlighting the importance of the initiative, the CEO stated that the reconstruction of the school addresses a critical gap in educational infrastructure in a remote and underserved area.—APP

**Murree entry**  
points partially  
reopened after  
heavy snowfall

ISLAMABAD: After heavy snowfall blocked roads leading to Murree, the district administration has partially reopened entry points to manage traffic and ensure safety. Authorities said access to the hill station will be allowed in stages for local residents and tourists while road clearance work continues. Heavy snowfall in Murree led to the closure of several key roads, causing travel problems for commuters and visitors. The Islamabad district administration said that some entry points to Murree have now been partially opened. The decision was taken after initial clearance work and an assessment of road conditions. According to the administration, local residents and tourists will be allowed to enter Murree in phases. This step aims to prevent traffic congestion and reduce the risk of accidents on snow-covered roads. Officials said that controlled entry will remain in place until conditions improve. —DNA

# Multilateralism not option but strategic necessity: IRS seminar

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The China Program at the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS), Islamabad, hosted a seminar titled "Protecting Shared Interests through Multilateralism: An Imperative for Global Peace and Stability," aimed at examining the importance of reinforcing multilateralism amid an increasingly fragmented global order. In his welcome remarks, Ambassador Jauhar Saleem, President of IRS, highlighted the growing trend among traditional powers toward unilateral actions, protectionism, conditional diplomacy, and transactional approaches, which he noted are undermining international law and the rules enshrined in the UN Charter. Referring to India's proclivity for military aggression as reflective of this trend, he emphasized that the protection of shared interests cannot rest on the discretion of a single power. Instead, it requires global cooperation and adherence to multilateral mechanisms. In this context, he noted that China's expanding institutional engagements are rooted in a quest for shared prosperity and reflect concrete contributions toward strengthening the UN-based international order. In the keynote address, Senator Musahid Hussain Sayed underscored the centrality of multilateral engagement in safeguarding global peace and stability. He praised China's various global initiatives, describing them as core frameworks for protecting shared interests within the existing international system. Calling China a flag bearer of multilateralism and globalization, he cited the broad participation of countries in the Belt and Road Initiative as evidence. He further noted that Pakistan has consistently advocated mediation and dialogue as tools for conflict resolution, emphasizing that multilateralism has been a foundational pillar of Pakistan's foreign policy since its inception. He concluded by stating that multilateralism is no longer a policy option, but a strategic necessity. Highlighting



the erosion of the contemporary international order, Ambassador Naela Chohan cited unilateral actions such as Indian military aggression against Pakistan, the Russia-Ukraine war, U.S. actions in Venezuela, and ongoing tariff wars as stark examples of decisions that have destabilized peace and security. She observed that the current global order is under severe strain and viewed Chinese-led alternatives as more inclusive, noting their role in strengthening regional and international institutions and revitalizing multilateral diplomacy. Professor Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, Meritorious Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Quaid-i-Azam University, expressed concern over intensifying strategic and great-power competition, warning that its impact is increasingly spilling over into middle powers. Against this backdrop, he highlighted the significance of China's initiatives in promoting peaceful dialogue and multilateral cooperation. Presenting a Chinese perspective, Professor Qian Feng, Director of the Research Department at the National Strategic

Technology Institute, Tsinghua University, stated that China's approach seeks to accommodate diverse viewpoints and promote equity-based global governance frameworks. He emphasized that China's position on multilateral institutions is grounded in the principles of universal security, inclusivity, and building a shared future for mankind, in contrast to unilateralism and protectionism. Addressing multilateralism from the standpoint of the Global South, Dr. Manzoor Khan Afridi, Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the International Islamic University, Islamabad, noted that platforms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and China's development initiatives demonstrate a cooperative approach to international relations. He asserted that the Global South has benefited significantly from these initiatives, contributing to sustainable and long-term development. Similarly, Dr. Noor Fatima, Associate Professor and Chairperson of the Department of Politics and International Relations at the International Islamic

University, Islamabad, emphasized that China's initiatives prioritize human security and development rather than ideological or geographical considerations. She highlighted the people-centric and inclusive nature of these initiatives, noting that they lend legitimacy to China's advocacy for multilateralism and reforms in global governance amid shifting power dynamics. She further observed that China's approach is pluralistic and outcome-oriented, promoting participation, capacity building, and tangible results. Dr. Talat Shabbir, Director of the China-Pakistan Study Centre at the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad, described China's inclusive governance model and its four major global initiatives—the Global Development Initiative (GDI), Global Security Initiative (GSI), Global Civilization Initiative (GCI), and Global Governance Initiative (GGI)—as deeply rooted in the principles of multilateralism. He argued that the erosion of trust due to veto politics and selective engagement necessitates the reinvention of mediation mechanisms that are inclusive.

**PN** evacuates  
Sri Lankan  
sailor in  
high-seas  
rescue

ISLAMABAD: In a swift humanitarian operation, Pakistan Navy Ships TABUK and MOAWIN have successfully conducted medical evacuation (MEDDEVAC) of a Sri Lankan national requiring urgent medical attention on an Indonesian flagged, MV GREY PALM on the high seas at 800 Nautical Miles (approximately 1500 KM) off Pakistan's coast. The operation was initiated following a formal request from Sri Lankan Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) for provision of medical assistance to a Sri Lankan national crew member in critical condition onboard MV GREY PALM positioned 800 Nautical Miles (approximately 1500 Kilometres) from Pakistan's Coast. Pakistan Navy dispatched its ships as a first responder and evacuated the sick crew member along with attendant. Subsequently the patient was immediately provided with necessary treatment onboard PN Ship. The Sri Lankan authorities and family of the individual thanked Pakistan for prompt response and support. The successful medical evacuation is yet another testament to operational readiness and long-standing commitment of Pakistan for the safety of life at sea, irrespective of nationality.—DNA

**IGP makes**  
surprise visit  
to Traffic  
HQs

ISLAMABAD: Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi paid a surprise visit to the Traffic Headquarters, Faizabad, to review the provision of quality facilities to citizens and ensure effective monitoring of traffic police services. A police spokesperson told APP on Sunday that during the visit, the IGP met citizens present at the facility, obtained their feedback regarding driving licence services, and conducted a detailed inspection of the facilities and services being provided in the licensing branch. The spokesperson said that IGP Rizvi also visited the driving test area and closely observed the driving test process of citizens who had come to obtain driving licences. On the occasion, the IGP issued clear directions to traffic police officers, stressing that transparent and quality services must be provided to citizens within the shortest possible time. He directed that the driving licence issuance process should be made more simple, fast and effective to avoid inconvenience to the public. IGP Rizvi specifically instructed officers to deal with citizens politely, provide complete guidance and ensure the best possible facilities for all visitors without any discrimination. —DNA

## BMP slams energy mismanagement

DNA

ISLAMABAD: As Pakistan's circular debt in the energy sector continues to swell and policy fragmentation deepens, institutional paralysis, the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry's Businessmen Panel (BMP) has strongly criticised the government's handling of the sector, warning that repeated policy blunders and delayed structural reforms are pushing the economy towards prolonged instability. Former FPCI President and Chairman of the Businessmen Panel, Mian Anjum Nisar, said the government's renewed push for an Integrated Energy Plan may sound promising on paper, but without correcting long-standing policy distortions, the initiative risks becoming yet another bureaucratic exercise detached from economic realities. He said Pakistan's energy crisis was not the result of a lack of plans, but of persistent disregard for implementation, coordination and market-based principles. Nisar said circular debt, which has crossed alarming levels, is the clearest indicator of governance failure in the energy sector. According to him, years of politically motivated tariff controls, inefficient power procurement, over-estimation of demand and unchecked capacity payments have created a vicious cycle in which liabilities are simply rolled over instead of resolved. He noted that interest payments to state-owned entities may temporarily ease balance sheets, but they do nothing to prevent the debt from re-

surfacing. He criticised the absence of a unified policy approach among key ministries, stating that power, petroleum, water resources and finance continue to operate in silos. This lack of coordination, he said, has resulted in contradictory decisions that inflate costs, distort supply chains and weaken investor confidence. The business community, he added, often becomes the ultimate casualty of these inconsistencies. Mian Anjum Nisar pointed out that energy prices in Pakistan are now significantly higher than those in competing regional economies, eroding the competitiveness of local industry and exports. He said manufacturers are facing unpredictable tariffs, frequent fuel price adjustments and unreliable supply, forcing many to reduce operations or shut down entirely. This trend, he warned, is accelerating deindustrialisation and unemployment at a time when the country can least afford it. Referring to the government's decision to establish new steering committees, secretariats and planning frameworks, Nisar questioned whether additional layers of administration would deliver results. He said Pakistan already suffers from excessive committee culture, where reports are produced but accountability remains absent. Without clear targets, timelines and consequences for failure, he added, structural changes will remain cosmetic. He stressed that any credible Integrated Energy Plan must be anchored in economic growth objectives and aligned with industrial, trade and export policies. Energy planning, he said, cannot be isolated from demand realities of

## Pakistan's meat exports to China jump 177% in 2025

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's exports of boiled meat to China surged 177 percent year on year in export value in 2025, according to data released by China's General Administration of Customs (GACC), highlighting a sharp expansion in bilateral agri-food trade and China's growing appetite for diversified, halal-certified protein products. Chinese customs data shows that Pakistan shipped 2.38 million kilograms of boiled beef under HS code 16025090, with exports valued at \$14.52 million. Exporters said the sharp rise reflects improved market access for Pakistani meat processors, stronger compliance with Chinese sanitary and halal standards, and rising demand across China's major consumption centres, Gwadar Pro reported on Saturday. Within China, the top destinations were primarily economically advanced, high-consumption regions. Jiangsu Province emerged as the largest market for Pakistani meat products, importing nearly 1.0 million kilograms worth \$5.08 million. It was followed by Zhejiang Province, which imported 458,595 kilograms valued at \$3.66 million, and Tianjin, with 510,520 kilograms worth \$3.50 million. Significant volumes also entered Guangdong Province, China's largest consumer market, along with smaller but growing shipments to Xinjiang, Shandong, Hainan and Hunan. On average, Pakistan's meat exports to China were priced at approximately \$6.1 per kilogram, positioning the country competitively while supplying value-added products rather than low-margin raw meat. Industry analysts said this price-quality balance has made Pakistani products attractive to Chinese importers serving food processing, catering and retail segments. Experts attribute the rapid increase to multiple factors. Chinese consumers are increasingly shifting toward ready-to-cook and processed meat products, while Pakistan has expanded the number of export-approved slaughterhouses and processing facilities that meet Chinese regulatory requirements. Improvements in cold-chain logistics, smoother customs procedures and the use of bonded trade channels—particularly through Hainan—have also reduced delivery time and costs. Compared with other suppliers, Mongolia remained China's largest category, shipping 4.37 million kilograms valued at \$18.53 million, largely benefiting from geographic proximity and border trade with Inner Mongolia.—DNA

## Pak, Kazakhstan chart action plan ahead of president visit

In his opening remarks, Ambassador Jauhar Saleem, President of the Institute of Regional Studies, welcomed H.E. Yerzhan Kistafin, Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Pakistan, and highlighted the significance of President Tokayev's forthcoming visit

DNA

Yerzhan Kistafin highlighted the long-standing friendship between the two countries and recalled that Pakistan was among the first states to recognize Kazakhstan following its independence in 1991. He referenced early high-level exchanges that laid the foundation for decades of robust diplomatic relations. The Ambassador outlined Kazakhstan's strategic focus on regional connectivity and economic cooperation, underscoring initiatives aimed at enhancing business-to-business collaboration, infrastructure development, and trade facilitation. He highlighted Kazakhstan's ambition to transition from a landlocked to a land-linked country through regional infrastructure connecting Central Asia with the Middle East, Europe, and China, and underscored the importance of the Karakoram Highway and potential railway linkages in strengthening Pakistan-Kazakhstan connectivity. Ambassador Kistafin also identified promising avenues for cooperation in sectors such as textiles, pharmaceuticals, finance including Islamic banking, education, tourism, sports, and culture to strengthen people-to-people ties. He stressed the importance of addressing shared regional challenges, including security concerns, drug trafficking, and language barriers, through constructive dialogue and cooperation, while emphasizing youth engagement, cultural exchanges, and academic

collaboration as key drivers of mutual understanding. He reaffirmed

Kazakhstan's commitment to

stan, noting that shared prosperity and regional stability depend on

close collaboration between Astana and Islamabad.



## US shift in Syria signals new era in ties with Turkiye

DR. SINEM CENGIZ

**S**INCE 2015, US support for the Syrian Democratic Forces in Syria has bedeviled relations between Washington and Ankara. Regardless of which administration occupies the White House, this issue has continued to plague Turkish-American relations. Ankara has long maintained that successive US administrations have disregarded the security concerns of a NATO ally, opting instead to partner with forces affiliated with an organization Turkiye designates as terrorist in the fight against Daesh. This perception has led Ankara to launch three military operations in northern Syria to eliminate the elements it considers threats to Turkish security and stability.

Washington's policy of supporting the SDF – formed from the Syrian affiliates of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK – even led Ankara to enhance its cooperation with Russia. For many years, Moscow has weaponized the PKK, which was ideologically attractive to Russia due to its Marxist-Leninist roots, for its own geopolitical interests. Moscow also provided the PKK affiliates with a large amount of military support to help fight Daesh in Syria. Yet, when the PKK affiliates reached out to Russia to back the establishment of an autonomous Kurdish region in northeastern Syria, the Kremlin declined to offer support. The positive track in Turkish-Russian ties influenced Moscow's strategic calculus toward the SDF, but concerns over US and Western dominance in Syria also played a role.

Then, the SDF turned to Israel for support. This was not surprising, since Israel was the only country in the region to openly support the independence referendum held by the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq in 2017. Israel wanted to use the SDF to undermine Turkiye, the new leadership in Damascus, and regional states that support Palestinian rights. However, the Israeli backing of the SDF for its own geopolitical interests has also failed. As a result, the status quo won in Syria, and the US, which was once the main backer of the SDF, played a critical role in this. After the Syrian army pushed back SDF forces during a recent military operation, Syrian President Ahmad Al-Sharaa announced that a truce had been reached with the SDF in northeastern Syria. According to the ceasefire agreement, the SDF will hand over control of all the areas it had held for a decade, including oil and natural gas fields, and its forces will be integrated into the Syrian national security structure.

Ankara used the threat of military action as a diplomatic tool. US Ambassador to Ankara and Special Envoy for Syria Tom Barrack said that his country no longer needed the SDF as the "primary ground force" in the fight against Daesh in Syria, and that its original purpose had "come to

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an end." Barrack's shuttle diplomacy played a great role in reaching this agreement which was delayed since March 10 last year. Turkiye and Syria have accused Israel of backing the SDF, and during talks in Paris between Israeli and Syrian officials, Israel was urged to stop encouraging the SDF to delay integrating. Three key factors related to Turkish, Syrian, and US roles have played a part in reaching the current situation. First, since late 2024, Ankara has been pursuing a "terror-free Turkiye" strategy to end the long-standing conflict with the PKK. This process is not only confined to Turkish territory but aims to extend beyond its borders, including Syria. As the SDF delayed steps toward implementing its agreement with Damascus, Turkiye moved closer to considering a new military operation against the SDF. The prospect of such an operation, in turn, pressured Washington to reconsider its SDF policy. Without an operation, Turkiye instead used the threat of military action as a diplomatic tool to pressure the US. Second, the determination of the Al-Sharaa government also played a significant role. Since the ousting of Bashar Assad, Al-Sharaa has pledged to bring all Syrian territory under the authority of the new government, including areas administered by the SDF. By pursuing the unification of Syria under a single leadership, he emerged as a more favorable partner for the US under President Donald Trump. This development also benefits Syria as it restores territorial unity because a single army and administration was the essential element of post-war state recovery. It addresses not only Syria's stability, but also the security of neighboring countries, particularly Turkiye and Iran, which are concerned over Kurdish separatism. In the face of firm and converging Turkish and Syrian positions against the SDF, the Trump administration signaled a willingness to move forward in Syria in coordination with Damascus and Ankara. With the shifting US position and Trump's support, Ankara and Damascus emerged as the winning sides of the recent agreement. Trump, having Al-Sharaa and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan as partners in Syria, made it clear that he had no further interest in maintaining a separate role for the SDF in Syria. In Syria, the US directly instrumentalized and supported the SDF under the pretext of partnership in the fight against Daesh. It provided arms, training, financial support, and even protection. However, the SDF used this backing to establish an autonomous enclave, with separate civilian and military institutions. However, the SDF, which was described as a "100,000-strong army," failed to respond to the Syrian army, which itself was weak after losses from Israeli attacks. Moreover, it proved that without a US, Israeli, or any backing from local entities, the SDF lacks military capability. Moreover, during the Syrian army's offensive, which radically altered Syria's balance of power, the US did not lift a finger to support the SDF. The trajectory of Washington's shifting SDF approach once again shows that global powers prefer states, rather than non-state actors, as a credible partner in the region, especially with a leader like Trump, who respects power. Trump wanted to end the lingering issue between Ankara and Washington – US support for Turkiye's number one security threat – and he did. By preferring the geopolitical value of Turkish alignment and the stability of Syria and its neighbors, he aims to open a new era in Turkiye-US relations.

## Trump's Naval Push Toward Iran

Qamar Bashir



The specter of broader involvement looms as well.

China and Russia, both significant players in global energy markets and strategic rivals of the United States, have their own stakes in the stability of the Gulf.

Disruptions to Iranian oil exports or regional shipping would affect their economies

and their geopolitical calculations. While direct military intervention by these powers may be unlikely, their diplomatic, economic, and possibly covert responses could further complicate an already crowded chessboard.

Beyond strategy and statecraft lies the human cost. The last decades of conflict in the Middle East have produced waves of refugees, shattered cities...

PRESIDENT Donald Trump's casual but chilling reference to an "armada" of US warships heading toward the Middle East has once again pulled the world into a familiar but deeply unsettling theater of power, pressure, and peril. Speaking aboard Air Force One, he framed the movement of naval force as a precaution—"just in case"—while pointing to what he called a "good sign" that Iran had paused the hanging of protesters. Yet behind this language of conditional restraint lies a strategic pattern that many across the developing world, and especially in the Middle East, recognize all too well: the choreography of threat, softening, and sudden strike.

The USS Abraham Lincoln carrier strike group, with its five thousand sailors, squadrons of fighter jets, electronic attack aircraft, and escort ships, was already moving through the Indian Ocean as Trump spoke. It will soon join destroyers and littoral combat ships in a region that has rarely gone long without a U.S. aircraft carrier patrolling its waters. The official justification is deterrence—ensuring Iran does not escalate its response to mass protests that erupted in late December over worsening economic conditions.

There is a deeply rooted memory, especially in countries that have lived through the consequences of great-power intervention, of how negotiations and reassuring rhetoric can unfold alongside active military preparation. In Pakistan's case, assurances were once delivered at the highest levels even as U.S. forces were already in motion—American cruise missiles crossed Pakistani airspace and struck targets inside Afghanistan, despite parallel diplomatic engagements and the presence of senior U.S. generals in Islamabad offering guarantees that Pakistan's territorial integrity would not be violated. A similar pattern, in this view, emerged during periods when Iran was engaged in nuclear negotiations and discussions over its regional role, only to face sudden, precision strikes against sensitive military and nuclear-related sites under the cover of diplomatic dialogue. For many in the region, these episodes have fused into a collective perception that threats, softening gestures, and sudden force are not separate phases, but part of a single strategic sequence—one designed to lower vigilance before the moment of decisive action.

This is why Trump's "armada" comment resonates far beyond Washington or Tehran. It revives fears of a scenario in which the visible calming of tensions becomes the prelude to a more devastating

escalation. The strategic geography makes those fears sharper. The Middle East is not just a battlefield of ideologies and alliances; it is the heart of the global energy system. The Strait of Hormuz, a narrow maritime artery through which a significant share of the world's oil supply passes, lies within the range of any serious confrontation between the United States, Iran, and their respective allies.

From a military perspective, the asymmetry of power is stark. The United States and Israel possess unmatched capabilities in intelligence, cyber operations, satellite surveillance, and precision strike. Carrier-based aircraft, submarines, and long-range missiles offer the ability to hit multiple targets across Iranian territory within hours. Analysts often point to the vulnerability of fixed installations—nuclear enrichment sites, command centers, and air defense systems—to such a coordinated assault. The possibility of decapitating strikes against senior leadership, a tactic seen in other conflicts, adds another layer of volatility to the equation.

Iran, for its part, is not without options. Its strategy has long relied on a combination of conventional forces, missile capabilities, and a network of regional allies and proxies across Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. Any large-scale attack on Iranian soil would almost certainly trigger responses against U.S. bases in the region and against Israel, potentially pulling multiple states into a widening conflict. Even limited engagements could spiral rapidly, driven by miscalculation, domestic political pressures, or the simple momentum of retaliation. Yet the most complex challenge Iran faces today is not purely military. The protests that have shaken the country since late December represent a profound internal strain. Managing unrest at home while confronting external pressure stretches any state's capacity. Energy, attention, and resources must be divided between maintaining domestic order and preparing for potential confrontation abroad. This dual-front reality complicates decision-making in Tehran and increases the risk of unintended escalation.

The specter of broader involvement looms as well. China and Russia, both significant players in global energy markets and strategic rivals of the United States, have their own stakes in the stability of the Gulf. Disruptions to Iranian oil exports or regional shipping would affect their economies and their geopolitical calculations. While direct military intervention by these powers may be unlikely, their diplomatic, economic, and possibly covert responses

could further complicate an already crowded chessboard. Beyond strategy and statecraft lies the human cost. The last decades of conflict in the Middle East have produced waves of refugees, shattered cities, and generations marked by trauma. A new, large-scale war involving the United States, Israel, and Iran would not be confined to military targets. It would reverberate through civilian populations, sending millions fleeing across borders and deepening humanitarian crises in countries already struggling with displacement and poverty.

This is why Trump's offhand phrase—"just in case"—carries such weight. It suggests a readiness to cross a threshold that, once crossed, cannot easily be uncrossed. The movement of an armada is not a symbolic act; it is a material commitment of lives, resources, and global attention. It signals to allies and adversaries alike that the option of force is not theoretical but operational.

Yet there remains another path, one that history shows is harder to sustain but far less costly in the long run. Diplomacy, backed by genuine multilateral engagement rather than unilateral pressure, offers a way to address both Iran's internal crisis and the region's broader security dilemmas without lighting the fuse of a wider war. Such an approach requires patience, restraint, and a willingness to accept outcomes that may fall short of maximalist goals. The world now watches as warships move across the Indian Ocean and protesters continue to fill Iran's streets. Between these two forces—one internal, one external—lies a fragile moment in which choices made in Washington and Tehran will shape not only their own futures but the stability of the global system. An armada can project power, but it cannot rebuild trust, heal societies, or secure lasting peace. In the end, the true test of leadership will not be measured by the number of ships deployed or the range of missiles at the ready, but by whether this moment of tension becomes another chapter in a long history of devastation or a turning point toward a more durable, if imperfect, equilibrium. The stakes are not just regional. They are global, and they will be felt in the lives of millions who have no voice in the decisions now being made over the waters of the Gulf.

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

## When Presence Speaks Louder Than Words

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



The recent gathering at Davos offered such moments. As global political and economic leaders converged once again, Pakistan's presence stood out with unusual clarity and confidence. The Pakistani leadership appeared active, engaged, and assured, projecting seriousness rooted in purpose rather than showmanship.

TODAY, media—especially social media—despite its flaws, has become a powerful force that shapes our reality and influences our lives. Every individual, armed with a device small enough to fit in the palm of a hand, now possesses the power to capture a moment and transmit it across continents within seconds. This unprecedented reach has altered the grammar of diplomacy itself. It has also generated myths, distortions, and manufactured narratives that often travel faster than truth. Yet within this vast digital noise, certain moments carry an authenticity so evident that they speak more convincingly than the longest speeches.

The recent gathering at Davos offered such moments. As global political and economic leaders converged once again, Pakistan's presence stood out with unusual clarity and confidence. The Pakistani leadership appeared active, engaged, and assured, projecting seriousness rooted in purpose rather than showmanship. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's interactions with heads of state, leaders of international financial institutions, and corporate executives reflected a pragmatic, solution-oriented approach. His engagements centered on economic stabilization, investment opportunities, climate resilience, and regional connectivity, presenting Pakistan as a responsible partner rather than a passive recipient.

Alongside him, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar maintained sustained diplomatic engagement with his counterparts from Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. His exchanges reflected composure and experience, emphasizing balanced foreign relations, multilateral cooperation, and regional stability. These interactions reinforced the impression that Pakistan understands the subtleties of modern diplomacy and conducts itself with restraint and consistency. Amid these engagements, the presence of Field Marshal General Syed Asim Munir quietly commanded particular attention. Seated without ostentation, his presence attracted visible interest from several global figures, including the President of the United States. Observers noted repeated glances and subtle gestures exchanged during the proceedings. In diplomacy, such unscripted moments often reveal more than prepared statements. They signal reassessment and recognition shaped by conduct rather than rhetoric. Honor, as faith reminds us, is bestowed by Allah upon whom He wills, and on that occasion, Pakistan appeared to stand at a rare intersection of dignity and global regard. Equally compelling was the visual of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, and Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir seated together. In a political environment often portrayed as fragmented, this image conveyed maturity and unity on matters of national interest. Captured and shared instantly, it achieved what lengthy declarations often fail to convey. The positive perception surrounding Pakistan's inclusion in peace-oriented discussions at Davos further strengthened this image. Yet it is notable that several influential countries have chosen not to formally join the Peace Board. Their hesitation reflects complex strategic calculations, domestic political constraints, and concerns about being bound by collective moral commitments in an increasingly polarized world. Even the United Kingdom, despite its long diplomatic tradition, has refrained from joining. This restraint appears particularly striking given that former British Prime Minister Tony Blair holds an important position within the Board. The paradox illustrates a broader reality of global politics: states often prefer influence without obligation, proximity without accountability.

In contrast, Pakistan's potential association with such a forum is being viewed through a different lens. Its growing credibility, earned notably during the decisive events of May 2025 through restraint, professionalism, and strategic clarity, has positioned it as a state capable of contributing constructively to peace deliberations. The continued international visibility of the Field Marshal reinforces this perception of discipline and coherence. At the same time, some school of thoughts suggested that if a discussion had been held in Parliament before any formal decision was made regarding Pakistan's inclusion in the Peace Board, it would have further promoted wisdom in this move and strengthened democratic traditions. It would also provide political comfort to the government by transforming a strategic choice into a collective national position rather than an executive decision alone. In a polarized political climate, parliamentary endorsement would strengthen institutional consensus and shield foreign policy decisions from unnecessary controversy. History offers instructive parallels for such an approach. Islamic political tradition provides enduring examples of principled engagement across faiths. There's no denying that the Quran gives clear guidance on building relationships with Jews and Christians. Along with this, the Charter of Madinah bound Muslims and Jews into a single political community with shared obligations. Treaties with Christian communities, including that of Nahrwan, guaranteed protection and religious freedom. Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab's covenant in Jerusalem and Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi's agreements with Christian adversaries reflected restraint, justice, and strategic wisdom. These precedents affirm that diplomacy rooted in moral clarity carries lasting influence. In this context, Pakistan's growing space within global peace forums enhances its capacity to advocate for oppressed peoples, particularly the Palestinians in Gaza. A credible and engaged Pakistan is better positioned to raise humanitarian concerns and protect Palestinian rights on influential platforms. Advocacy carries greater weight when it comes from a state perceived as united, responsible, and committed to peace rather than confrontation. In an age where perception often precedes policy, images and brief moments carry extraordinary power. Objectives that once required prolonged speeches can now be advanced through seconds of authentic presence. The scenes from Davos projected unity, seriousness, and quiet confidence. Ultimately, the significance of such moments lies not in fleeting applause but in sustained consistency. Prestige must be preserved through prudent policy, institutional harmony, and clarity of national interest. When civilian and military leadership move in disciplined coordination, the resulting image is one of stability and credibility. In a world where seconds matter and narratives shift rapidly, Pakistan's recent projection affirms a timeless truth; sometimes, history is advanced not by words, but by presence.

## Briefs

## Pak under pressure to opt out of T20 WC

FROM PAGE 01 The two sides reviewed bilateral relations, focusing on trade and economic cooperation, and reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening collaboration across multiple sectors. They also exchanged views on regional and international developments, underscoring the importance of sustained engagement to advance shared interests and promote regional peace and prosperity. This dialogue highlights that the cricketing issue is not isolated but intertwined with broader diplomatic ties between the two nations. As the cricketing world watches closely, Pakistan's decision will carry symbolic weight far beyond the boundary ropes. Opting out would be seen as a principled stand in defense of a fellow cricketing nation, reinforcing Pakistan's image as a steadfast ally of Bangladesh. Conversely, choosing to play could be interpreted as prioritizing financial gain over solidarity, potentially straining relations with Dhaka. The coming days will be decisive. With the Prime Minister expected to return soon, Pakistan must weigh its moral obligations against its economic interests. Courtesy and solidarity demand one course of action, while pragmatism and financial realities suggest another. Whatever path Pakistan chooses, the fallout will reverberate across the cricketing and diplomatic landscapes of South Asia.

## EU, India all set to have a free trade pact

FROM PAGE 01 "The summit will be an opportunity to build on the EU-India strategic partnership and further strengthen collaboration across key policy areas." India, the world's most populous nation, is on track to become the world's fourth-largest economy this year, according to International Monetary Fund (IMF) projections. While the EU eyes India as an important market for the future, New Delhi sees the European bloc as an important source of much-needed technology and investment to rapidly upscale its infrastructure and create millions of new jobs for its people. "We are on the cusp of a historic trade agreement," Leyen said ahead of the summit. Bilateral trade in goods reached 120 billion (\$139bn) in 2024, an increase of nearly 90 per cent over the past decade, according to EU figures, with a further 60bn (\$69bn) in trade in services. The pact would be a major win for Brussels and New Delhi as both seek to open up new markets in the face of US tariffs and Chinese export controls. "The EU and India are moving closer together at the time when the rules-based international order is under unprecedented pressure through wars, coercion and economic fragmentation," the EU's top diplomat, Kaja Kallas, said on Wednesday.

## Last Pak-EU summit held in 2010

FROM PAGE 01 has continued through structured dialogues and cooperation frameworks. Most recently, the 7th Round of the EU-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue was convened in Islamabad on November 21, 2025. The talks focused on strengthening trade ties, enhancing security cooperation, and reviewing Pakistan's participation in the EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+), which provides tariff concessions in exchange for compliance with international conventions. Relations between Pakistan and the European Union are currently guided by the Strategic Engagement Plan (SEP), signed in 2019. The SEP provides a comprehensive framework for cooperation across political, security, and economic domains, ensuring continuity in engagement despite the absence of formal summits.



RAWALPINDI: Captain and coach of the Mari Petroleum Hockey team presenting a souvenir to the High Commissioner of Brunei Kamal Ahmed on the occasion of a friendly match between Mari and Rising Stars Hockey Club. — DNA

## Haris Rauf axed as Pakistan name 15-member T20I World Cup squad

**Salman Ali Agha (captain), Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Faeem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Khawaja Mohammad Nafay (wk), Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Salman Mirza, Naseem Shah, Sahibzada Farhan (wk), Saim Ayub, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shadab Khan, Usman Khan (wk) and Usman Tariq**

DNA

LAHORE: Speedster Haris Rauf was the conspicuous absence as Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Sunday announced a 15-member squad for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 in India and Sri Lanka between February 7 and March 8, 2026. Pakistan are placed in Group A and scheduled to face Netherlands in their opening game on 7 February in Colombo.

The names were unveiled during a press conference addressed by the PCB Director High Performance and members' national selection committee Aqib Javed, Pakistan's T20I captain Salman Ali Agha and white-ball head coach Michael James Hesson at the Gaddafi Stadium here on Sunday.

Among the players, skipper Salman Ali Agha, Faeem Ashraf, Khawaja Mohammad Nafay, Mohammad Salman Mirza, Sahibzada Farhan and Usman Tariq

have received their maiden mega-event call-ups to the Pakistan squad.

Meanwhile, Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Fakhar Zaman, Mohammad Nawaz, Naseem Shah, Saim Ayub, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shadab Khan and Usman Khan have played in at least one or more editions of the tournament since 2021.

In the 20-team tournament, each team is set to play four group games before the Super Eight and Knockout Stage, all between 7 February and 8 March. Pakistan are also

set to face Australia in a three-match T20I series at Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore on 29, 31 January and 1 February with the preparation camp starting today.

**15-member squad for T20 World Cup:** Salman Ali Agha (captain), Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Faeem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Khawaja Mohammad Nafay (wk), Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Salman Mirza, Naseem Shah, Sahibzada Farhan (wk), Saim Ayub, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shadab Khan, Usman Khan (wk) and Usman Tariq.

## Josh Hoey breaks 800m indoor world record in Boston

NEW YORK: American Josh Hoey clocked 1min 42.50sec to break the 800m indoor world record at the New Balance Indoor Grand Prix meeting in Boston on Saturday. Hoey, the 2025 indoor world champion at 800m, broke the previous mark of 1:42.67 set by Denmark's Wilson Kipketer in Paris almost 30 years ago, on March 9, 1997.

The 26-year-old American had been closing in on Kipketer's mark, coming close last year when he clocked 1:43.24, then the second-fastest time in history, in New York.

On Saturday he settled in behind his brother Jackson Hoey, who acted as pace-setter, and sailed home without a hitch. "I just slotted in behind Jax and just tried to stay calm behind my brother and let him lead me," Hoey said. "The last 200 I could feel just the support of everyone, and the work of the last couple of months just bottomed out and I'm happy I got that time," added Hoey, who narrowly missed out the US teams for both the 2024 Olympics and last year's outdoor World Championships. — APP

## WHO chief says reasons US gave for withdrawing 'untrue'

GENEVA: The head of the UN's health agency on Saturday pushed back against Washington's stated reasons for withdrawing from the World Health Organization, dismissing US criticism of the WHO as "untrue". Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that US announcement this week that it had formally withdrawn from the WHO "makes both the US and the world less safe".

And in a post on X, he added: "Unfortunately, the reasons cited for the US decision to withdraw from WHO are untrue." He insisted: "WHO has always engaged with the US, and all Member States with full respect for their sovereignty." US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and US Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. announced in a joint statement Thursday that Washington had formally withdrawn from the WHO. They accused the agency of numerous "failures during the Covid-19 pandemic" and of acting "repeatedly against the interests of the United States". The WHO has not yet confirmed that the US withdrawal has taken effect.

The two US officials said the WHO had "trashed and tarnished" the United States, and had compromised its independence. "The reverse is true," the WHO said in a statement. "As we do with every Member State, WHO has always sought to engage with the United States in good faith." The agency strenuously rejected the accusation from Rubio and Kennedy that its Covid response had "obstructed the timely and accurate sharing of critical information that could have saved American lives and then concealed those failures".

Kennedy also suggested in a video posted to X Friday that the WHO was responsible for "the Americans who died alone in nursing homes (and) the small businesses that were destroyed by reckless mandates" to wear masks and get vaccinated. The US withdrawal, he insisted, was about "protecting American sovereignty and putting US public health back in the hands of the American people". Tedros warned on X that the statement "contains inaccurate information". — DNA

## Venezuela eyes 2026 oil boost, interim leader calls for opposition talks

CARACAS: Venezuela wants to boost oil production by at least 18 percent this year through reforms that will fully open the sector to private investors, the head of the state oil giant PDVSA said Saturday.

The country's interim president, Delcy Rodriguez, proposed the legislative reforms last week and it passed a first reading Thursday in parliament, which is headed by her brother.

Analysts say the reforms, expected to pass next week, were drafted under pressure from Washington after the US military raid that toppled president Nicolas Maduro on January 3.

"We had a law...that was not up to date with what we needed as an industry," PDVSA chief Hector Obregon said.

The proposed Hydrocarbons Law reforms would update the legal framework in the oil industry "to ensure that private investors can have legal certainty," Obregon said from the Puerto La Cruz refinery in eastern Venezuela. The South American nation produces around 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd), according to authorities, and sits on about one-fifth of the world's oil reserves.

Years of mismanagement and corruption have driven production down from a peak of over 3 million bpd in the early 2000s to a historic low of 350,000 barrels daily in 2020.

If adopted, the bill would roll back decades of state control over Venezuela's oil sector, which were tightened by

Maduro's late mentor, socialist firebrand Hugo Chavez, in the mid-2000s. US President Donald Trump has made no secret of his interest in Venezuela's oil. His administration has stated bluntly that it is taking over sales of the country's crude petroleum.

Rodriguez this week announced that the country had received an initial transfer of \$300 million after the sale of its oil by the United States.

She also spoke Saturday about starting a dialogue with the opposition party in Venezuela to reach a "common good."

"There can be no political or partisan differences when it comes to peace in Venezuela," Rodriguez said

on state television, speaking from the coastal state of La Guaira. — APP

Alcaraz has Djokovic on his case as Sabalenka faces teen prospect

MELBOURNE: Carlos Alcaraz has Novak Djokovic demanding payment after powering into the Australian Open quarter-finals on Sunday as Aryna Sabalenka set up a showdown against one of the brightest talents in tennis. Coco Gauff fought through in three sets at temperatures at Melbourne Park eased to 22C, after brutal heat a day earlier. Top seed Alcaraz was in ominous touch at Rod Laver Arena, dismissing the American Tommy Paul 7-6(8/6), 6-4, 7-5 in a masterclass. The 22-year-old Spaniard plays home hope and sixth seed Alex de Minaur or 10th seed Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan next. Alcaraz, who is yet to drop a set at this year's tournament, has never gone beyond the quarter-finals in Melbourne. If he can finally break his Australian duck he will become the youngest man in history to win a career Grand Slam of all four majors. Alcaraz has in the past struggled with precision and a lack of consistency in his serving technique. He is now sporting a new-look serve that has become a handy weapon – and been compared to Djokovic's serve. — Agencies

## Kylian Mbappe double at Villarreal takes Real Madrid top of La Liga

*The Senegal midfielder, a champion at the Africa Cup of Nations last weekend, powered narrowly wide of the post*

VILAREAL: Kylian Mbappe netted twice to claim Real Madrid a 2-0 win at Villarreal on Saturday and take his side top of La Liga. Alvaro Arbeloa's team moved two points clear of rivals Barcelona, who host Real Oviedo on Sunday. La Liga's top scorer Mbappe reached 21 goals for the season in the competition to help Madrid see off a spirited Villarreal side, now fourth in the table.

Arbeloa's side have won three consecutive matches across all competitions and victory at Villarreal could be a vital step in the revival of their season. After the shock

Copa del Rey defeat at second-tier Albacete in Arbeloa's first match at the helm, his Madrid have started to take shape. The coach has made clear how important his star players are and none has been more crucial this season than Mbappe, who has

netted 34 times across all competitions. (Mbappe and Vinicius) are the best players in the world, they are players who can really unbalance teams, we try to get the ball to them as much as possible," Arbeloa told Real Madrid TV. "They're two players who... I'm really happy to have in this state of form and above all, because of the great work they are doing.

"They are really committed to the team, they are the first who are pressing... they're giving this effort and solidarity that we need from them, so I'm very happy that their reward comes in the form of goals." It was a lively but imprecise start at Villarreal's Estadio de la Ceramica, as the game glowed but neither side was able to seriously threaten. Georges Mikautadze lashed a volley narrowly wide after veteran forward Gerard



## President, PM laud security forces

FROM PAGE 01 Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said that, under the vision of "Azm-e-Istiqamah", the security forces are achieving significant successes against terrorism.

## Security forces kill three Indian...

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

## French navy diverts oil tanker

FROM PAGE 01 the northern coast of Morocco, France's maritime police said in a statement. It added that navies of other countries, including Britain, supported the operation. Video footage released by the French military of the operation showed a unit of soldiers descending from a helicopter onto the deck of the Russia-linked ship. The boarding of the vessel involved a navy boat and two navy helicopters, according to reports. The Grinch, which was sailing under a Comoros flag, left the Russian Arctic port of Murmansk in early January and is suspected of operating under a false flag and of belonging to the secretive fleet of ships that enables Russia to export oil around the world despite international sanctions due to Moscow's war on Ukraine.

## Minister says Pak should...

FROM PAGE 01 less money, but the decision will have far-reaching impacts if Pakistan stands with Bangladesh today," he added. Earlier in day, the ICC replaced Bangladesh with Scotland in the T20 World Cup 2026 over Dhaka's refusal to send its team to India for the event. Soon after, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chief Mohsin Naqvi said that the board would decide about participation in the tournament in line with the government's directives. "Prime minister [Shehbaz Sharif] is currently not in the country. We will announce the final decision after he [PM] returns to the country," Naqvi added. Meanwhile, Sanaullah said that Pakistan's support for Bangladesh could help bridge the historical gaps between the two nations, dating back to the fall of Dhaka in 1971. "We may enter a new phase of relations where Pakistan and Bangladesh are like two brothers," he added. The PML-N leader emphasised that Pakistan's support should be for Bangladesh as a country, not for any particular political party or government.

## Trump threatens Canada...

FROM PAGE 01 Canada has been seeking to diversify trade away from the US, its largest trade partner, following the uncertainty caused by Trump's on-again-off-again tariffs. Under the agreement reached between Carney and Chinese President Xi Jinping last week, China will lower levies on Canadian canola oil from 85% to 15% by March, while Canada will tax Chinese EVs at the most-favoured-nation rate, 6.1% – down from 100%. The deal was seen as a breakthrough after years of strained ties and tit-for-tat tariffs, and could see more Chinese investments in Canada. Carney said the progress made with China sets Canada up "well for the new world order".

## Briefs

## Syria begins oil extraction at recently controlled fields

CAIRO: The Syrian Petroleum Company has begun extracting oil from recently controlled fields and sending output to the Homs and Banias refineries, the state news agency SANA reported on Saturday. One of those fields, Al-Omar oilfield, which is the country's largest, came under government control recently after a lightning offensive against Kurdish forces who had held the site for nearly a decade and used it as a military base.—APP

Govt aims to strengthen economy through exports: Qaiser

LAHORE: Federal Minister for Board of Investment Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh said on Saturday that government is taking all possible measures to strengthen country's economy through increasing exports volume, as millions of people are employed in this sector.

He was talking to media after attending a symposium held on the sidelines of 'Made in Pakistan Cluster Showcase Expo' organized by policies of Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) here at Expo Center.

He added that thanks to the leadership, vision and dynamic policies of Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif, the SMEDA has been reactivated and restructured, as a result of which micro enterprises have also been included in the stream of national development. Federal Minister said that SMEDA has now reached a point where it can play a key role in stabilizing the country's economy by bringing significant exports in the next one to two years with a modest handholding.—APP

Senator Jessica Ramos honors OPGF Chairman for community service

NEW YORK: New York State Senator Jessica Ramos visited the office of the Overseas Pakistan Global Foundation (OPGF) and a community centre in Jackson Heights, Queens, where she recognized the foundation's work for the Pakistani community in the United States. Accompanied by Sheikh Shakil, she met community members, volunteers and representatives of OPGF during the visit. Senator Ramos praised the role of OPGF in supporting immigrants and addressing local needs through community-based initiatives. She acknowledged the leadership of OPGF Chairman Zahir Akhtar Ahmad Maher for his continued efforts in community service and welfare activities. She said organizations like OPGF help connect immigrant communities with public institutions and ensure that their concerns reach decision-makers.—APP



SIALKOT: US charge d'affaires Natalie Baker with members of business community during her visit to Sialkot chamber of commerce (SSCI) on Sunday.

## ICCI President writes letter to PM Shehbaz

Says high taxes, KIBOR and energy costs hurting every sector. Seeks PM's intervention to reinforce investors' confidence

## DNA

ISLAMABAD: President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Sardar Tahir Mehmood, has appreciated the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visionary leadership and efforts for economic stabilization under the national vision of "Uraan Pakistan" by emphasizing that revitalization of the Real Estate Sector must be treated as a national economic priority. In a letter forwarded to Prime Minister, he urged and concrete measures to recognize the Real Estate Sector as an industry, stating that a vibrant, well-regulated real estate market is essential for strengthening the economy, attracting investment, and achieving sustainable growth.

He noted that structural challenges continue to impede business

activity, particularly due to the high cost of doing business. Excessive taxation, elevated KIBOR rates, and rising energy costs have placed significant pressure on investment-driven sectors. In this context, he said the Real Estate Sector, one of the country's largest employment generators, is facing serious operational and regulatory constraints.

Sardar Tahir Mehmood expressed concern that overlapping jurisdictions of multiple government departments have resulted in procedural delays, uncertainty, and compliance burdens, eroding investor confidence and prompting capital outflows to more facilitative regional markets.

Highlighting the sector's broader economic impact, the ICCI President said the Real Estate Sector has a strong multiplier effect, supporting nearly 100 to 150 allied industries, including cement, steel,

construction materials, transport, financial services, architecture, engineering, and skilled labor. He emphasized that global experience demonstrates how a well-regulated real estate sector acts as a backbone for economic growth in both developed and emerging economies.

To ensure sustainable development, he proposed organizing an annual National Real Estate Conference under the Prime Minister's patronage to institutionalize policy dialogue, enhance stakeholder coordination, and promote consistent and informed decision-making.

He stressed that Pakistan's export challenge at this juncture cannot be addressed through fragmented policy notifications, but requires a fundamental reset of the export facilitation system that places trade growth above revenue-driven enforcement. He underscored

that exports, being zero-rated by nature, must operate within a framework defined by speed, certainty, and transparency, backed by post-clearance audits and intelligent, risk-based controls.

Advocating the declaration of a National Export Emergency, he maintained that such a step would enhance—rather than dilute—compliance by introducing time-bound processes and digital oversight, ultimately boosting foreign exchange inflows, strengthening Pakistan's standing as a dependable global supplier, and restoring the confidence of exporters essential for sustained economic revival.

He also highlighted the concerns of Overseas Pakistanis, noting that regulatory ambiguities, inconsistent taxation, and limited facilitation have undermined their confidence. He stressed the need for clear, predictable, and inves-

tor-friendly policies to safeguard overseas investments and attract foreign direct investment.

Calling for rationalization of taxes, the ICCI President said that multiple and complex levies have significantly increased business costs. A simplified and transparent tax regime, he added, would encourage investment, promote documentation, and broaden the revenue base.

He further urged the government to ensure affordable energy tariffs and reduce the KIBOR rate to ease financing constraints and stimulate investment.

In conclusion, Sardar Tahir Mehmood expressed confidence that timely policy intervention under the Prime Minister's leadership would reinforce investor confidence, generate employment, and support Pakistan's path toward sustainable economic growth.

Iraqi lawmakers to elect president Tuesday, PM appointment next

BAGHDAD: Iraq's parliament will meet on Tuesday to elect the country's new president, who will then appoint a prime minister expected to be Nouri Al-Maliki after he was endorsed by the largest Shiite bloc. By convention, a Shiite Muslim holds the post of prime minister, the parliament speaker is Sunni and the largely ceremonial presidency goes to a Kurd. Parliamentary speaker Haibat Al-Halbussi announced on Sunday that the new parliament will convene on Tuesday to elect a president, according to the official INA press agency. The president will then have 15 days to appoint a prime minister, who is usually nominated by the largest Shiite bloc formed through post-election alliances. On Saturday, the Coordination Framework alliance—whose Shiite factions have varying links to Iran—endorsed former prime minister and powerbroker Al-Maliki as the country's next premier. The alliance, to which Al-Maliki belongs, spoke of his "political and administrative experience and his record in running the state." Kurdish parties have yet to agree on a presidential candidate, who must be endorsed by other blocs and win a two-thirds majority in parliament. The presidency is usually held by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). This year, the rival Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) named its own candidate: Although Maliki's endorsement effectively guarantees him the post, forming a new government remains a daunting challenge that could drag on for months and still fail. The designated premier has one month to form a government and present it to parliament for a vote of confidence. The 75-year-old Maliki, a shrewd politician, is set to return to power at a time of seismic changes in the Middle East, as Tehran's regional influence wanes and tensions with Washington rise.—APP

## Uzbekistan, Pakistan strategic partnership toward regional stability

ISLAMABAD: A roundtable discussion titled "Uzbekistan- Pakistan: Bridging regions and creating new opportunities" was held at the International Institute for Central Asia in Tashkent. The event, organized in cooperation with the Embassy of Pakistan in Uzbekistan, brought together representatives of relevant ministries, business circles, analytical centers, and the academic community. It is worth noting that in recent years, relations between the two friendly countries have risen to an entirely new level. In particular, the formalization of the strategic partnership in 2021 indicates that bilateral ties have reached a qualitatively new stage, said a release issued here on Saturday. Today, this cooperation is characterized by active political dialogue, expanded trade and economic relations, increased investment flows, and intensified cultural and humanitarian exchanges. In particular, the official visit of the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif to Uzbekistan in February 2025 provided strong momentum to this process. During the visit, important agreements were reached to deepen cooperation in trade, transport, science and education, culture, and security. The sides set clear targets to increase bilateral trade turnover to \$2 billion. Last year, the increase in mutual trade volume to \$400 million indicates that Pakistan is becoming an important foreign trade partner for Uzbekistan. As part of efforts to strengthen economic cooperation, the opening of the UzbekPak International Trading Centre and the UzbekPak Cultural Centre in Karachi became an essential institutional step. These platforms serve not only to promote industrial and agricultural products, but also to strengthen cultural ties between our peoples. Cooperation in transport and logistics is another priority area of Uzbekistan - Pakistan relations. The Uzbekistan - Afghanistan - Pakistan Trans-Afghan railway project has significant potential as a strategic transport corridor linking Central and South Asia. In addition, agreements reached to develop air cargo transportation between Tashkent and Karachi, including the delivery of agricultural products, are gaining practical importance. During the meeting, these pressing issues were discussed, creating a significant opportunity to develop approaches for a new qualitative stage of the strategic partnership and to advance concrete initiatives in trade, transport, education, science, culture, and tourism. Within the framework of the event, special attention was paid to strengthening ties among the analytical, academic, and business communities of Uzbekistan and Pakistan. In addition, practical recommendations were developed for inclusion in the agenda of the high-level dialogue, and new initiatives were put forward to enhance Pakistan's cooperation with Central Asian countries. In a word, cooperation between Uzbekistan and Pakistan is turning into a strong bridge built on trust, pragmatism, and shared interests. The roundtable discussion held in Tashkent has become an essential step toward further expanding and strengthening this bridge.—DNA

## Peace without justice is illusion

SADAF NOREEN AWAN



yet civil society, human rights advocates, and ordinary people see through its contradictions. A peace process designed without the meaningful participation of Palestinians cannot serve Palestinian interests, and a framework led by figures closely associated with their suffering cannot claim moral legitimacy. Rather than offering justice, the initiative appears to recycle old power dynamics under a new label, prioritizing geopolitical influence over human dignity. For Palestinians, who continue to endure displacement, blockade, and loss, this "Board of Peace" represents not pathway to freedom, but another chapter in a long history of externally imposed solutions that promise stability while denying sovereignty.

For decades, Palestinians have lived under occupation, blockade, displacement, and recurring cycles of violence, while the international community responds with statements, resolutions, and temporary ceasefires that rarely translate into lasting justice. Any framework that elevates powerful individuals while marginalizing the victims themselves

risks repeating history rather than correcting it. Donald Trump's effort to position himself as a central figure in global peacemaking exposes a troubling tendency to personalize diplomacy. Peace cannot be built around personalities, nor should any leader seek to present themselves as an "earthly god," determining the fate of nations from above. This approach is reflected in actions such as the reported military operation that led to the capture of Venezuela's President along with his wife, a move widely condemned for violating national sovereignty as well as his ambitions over territories like Greenland in Europe and repeated threats against Iran, signalling a worldview in which international borders and peoples are treated as extensions of personal authority. Such behaviour contradicts the very principles of justice, which demand humility, accountability, and collective responsibility. The Palestinian cause, by contrast, is not a platform for political legacy; it is a humanitarian crisis that requires genuine engagement, moral clarity, and the protection of human dignity. At the core of this crisis lies a sim-

ple truth: Palestinians are waiting for justice. They are not asking for charity or symbolic gestures, but for dignity, security, and the right to live freely on their own land. Thousands of lives have been lost, including the precious lives of innocent kids, families have been shattered, and entire communities reduced to rubble. Yet, in many international forums, Palestinian voices remain secondary to strategic calculations. Peace plans are drafted without their meaningful participation, while decisions about their future are shaped by those far removed from daily suffering. Such arrangements cannot deliver genuine reconciliation.

As for Muslim Ummah is concerned, Islam offers a powerful moral framework for understanding this moment. The Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) said: "The believers, in their mutual kindness, compassion and sympathy, are just like one body. When one part of the body suffers, the whole body responds with wakefulness and fever." This Hadith is not merely spiritual guidance; it is a call to collective responsibility. Palestine is in pain, then the entire

Muslim world must feel that pain. Silence, hesitation, or neutrality in the face of injustice contradicts this fundamental principle of unity. It is therefore imperative that Islamic countries move beyond fragmented responses and strengthen themselves politically, economically, and diplomatically. Unity is no longer optional; it is essential for survival in an increasingly competitive world. Muslim nations must invest in their own institutions, coordinate their foreign policies, and develop independent capacities in finance, technology, defense, and humanitarian action. Only through collective strength can they protect their people and advocate effectively for oppressed communities such as the Palestinians.

Saudi Arabia, under the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has adopted a notably proactive approach in redefining regional influence and modernization. This momentum carries responsibility. Economic reform and strategic diplomacy must be matched by moral leadership. Standing firmly with Palestine would not weaken Saudi Arabia's global standing; rather, it would strengthen it by aligning power with principle. A stable and respected

Middle East cannot be built while Gaza burns and Palestinians remain dispossessed. At the same time, Iran and especially Pakistan, a nuclear power, hold unique strategic weight within the Muslim world. With such capability comes obligation. These nations must play stronger, more constructive roles in advocating for Palestinian rights on international platforms. Their voices carry influence, and their actions can shape outcomes. Palestinians look toward Islamic countries not merely for statements of solidarity, but for tangible efforts that advance justice through diplomacy, humanitarian assistance, and coordinated pressure on global institutions. The broader global landscape is also changing. Power is gradually shifting from West to East, with countries like China rising rapidly across finance, science, and technology. This transformation signals the end of unquestioned Western dominance and opens space for a more balanced international order. In this emerging multipolar world, Islamic countries have an opportunity to redefine their collective role not as passive observers, but as active contributors to global stability and fairness.

Against this backdrop, policies driven by ego, unilateralism, and short-term political gain risk accelerating decline rather than securing leadership. The future belongs to cooperation, innovation, and moral credibility. Nations that ignore justice in favor of dominance may achieve temporary leverage, but they lose legitimacy in the long run. Ultimately, the Palestinian struggle is not only about borders or treaties; it is about humanity. It asks whether the world still believes that every life carries equal value. It challenges Muslim nations to embody their shared faith in action, not rhetoric. And it reminds global leaders that peace cannot be imposed from above; it must be built from the ground up, with the oppressed at its center. Palestinians continue to wait, not for sympathy, but for justice. They look toward Islamic countries with hope, trusting that unity will replace division and courage will overcome hesitation. History will judge this moment by who stood firm, who spoke truth to power, and who chose humanity over ambition.

## Israeli strike kills 2 teenagers in Gaza

GAZA: The Palestinian Health Ministry in Gaza said on Saturday that Israeli fire had killed three people, including two children, in two separate incidents in the northern Gaza Strip.

Gaza's civil defense agency said Israeli forces killed the two teenagers in a drone strike, while the military claimed it eliminated two "terrorists" who planted an explosive device near troops. The civil defense agency, which operates as a rescue service, said the drone killed the two near Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Lahiya, in northern Gaza. The territory's Al-Shifa Hospital said it received the two bodies, adding they were two boys aged 13 and 15. The military said the pair had posed an "immediate threat" to its soldiers. "Earlier today ... troops operating in the northern Gaza Strip identified several terrorists who crossed the Yellow Line, planted an explosive device in the area, and approached the troops, posing an immediate threat to them," the military said in a statement. Under a US-brokered ceasefire that came into effect on Oct. 10, Israeli forces have withdrawn to positions behind a so-called "Yellow Line" in Gaza, though they remain in control of more than half of the territory. "Following the identification, the (Israeli air force) struck and eliminated the terrorists in order to remove the threat," the military said in a statement.

A military press officer claimed that its troops had "killed two terrorists and not children," without specifying the ages of those killed.—APP

## Lebanon PM says int'l force needed after UNIFIL

PARIS: Lebanon will need some sort of international force after the withdrawal of the United Nations' Unifil mission scheduled for 2027. Prime Minister Nawaf Salam said during a visit to Paris. Some 10,800 UN peacekeepers have manned a buffer zone between Israel and Lebanon since March 1978, but they will have one year to leave Lebanon starting 31 December, under a resolution passed last August under pressure from the United States and Israel. "We will always need an international presence in the south, and preferably a UN presence, given the impartiality and neutrality that only the UN can provide," Nawaf Salam said the day after a meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron. The force would need a mix of observers and peacekeepers, largely because of a "history of hostility" with Israel, he added. UN peacekeepers current operate in southern Lebanon in cooperation with the Lebanese army, part of a ceasefire between Israel and the pro-Iranian Shiite movement Hezbollah in place since November 2024. While Israel was supposed to withdraw its forces from southern Lebanon, it has maintained them in five areas it considers strategic. It regularly conducts airstrikes in the country on what it claims are Hezbollah sites and members, whom it accuses of rearming.—APP

**Briefs**

**Cuba defends military drills**

NEWS DESK

HAVANA: Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel defended his country's military preparedness exercises on Saturday as a deterrent against potential aggression from the United States. US President Donald Trump this month warned that Cuba "is ready to fall" and told Havana to "make a deal" or pay a price similar to Venezuela, whose ousted leader Nicolas Maduro was taken to America by US forces in a January 3 bombing raid that killed dozens of people.

Venezuela was a key ally of Cuba and a critical supplier of oil and money, which Trump has vowed to cut off. Diaz-Canel on Saturday supervised military exercises that included a tank unit from Cuba's armed forces. He was accompanied by Cuban General Alvaro Lopez Miera, who is the minister of the armed forces, and other high-ranking military officials. "The best way to prevent aggression is for imperialism to have the price of attacking our country," Diaz-Canel said in remarks broadcast on Cuban television.

"And that has a lot to do with our preparation for this type of military action... This takes on significant importance in the current circumstances," he added. Cuba's National Defense Council, which is led by Diaz-Canel, recently met "with the objective of increasing and improving the level of preparedness and cohesion" among the country's leadership, according to an official government statement. The council met to "analyze and approve the plans and measures for transitioning to a State of War," the statement added, without providing further details.

**Donald Trump praises UK soldiers**

DNA

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump has praised UK soldiers who fought in Afghanistan after his claim that allied forces avoided the front lines prompted criticism from veterans and politicians. Earlier this week Trump angered US allies by downplaying the role of Nato troops in the war and doubted whether the military alliance would be there for the US "if we ever needed them".

Trump's words drew condemnation from international allies, while Sir Keir Starmer called them "insulting and frankly appalling". The UK prime minister spoke to Trump on Saturday, after which the US president used his Truth Social platform to praise UK troops as being "among the greatest of all warriors". Trump was criticised for remarks he made during an interview with Fox News on Thursday in which the president said of Nato troops: "We've never needed them. We have never really asked anything of them. "They'll say they sent some troops to Afghanistan... and they did, they stayed a little back, a little off the front lines."

# 'Depopulation' of Tirah Valley reports misleading: Info Ministry

It detailed that the KP's Relief, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Department issued a notification on December 26, 2025, releasing funds – reportedly Rs4 billion – for what it described as "anticipated temporary and voluntary movement of population from certain localities in Tirah (Bagh)"

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has rejected the misleading claims regarding the alleged depopulation from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Tirah Valley "on the orders of the army" amid reports of evacuation of families ahead of a planned operation. In a clarification issued late on Saturday, the ministry stated: "These assertions are baseless, malicious, and driven by ulterior motives aimed at creating alarm among the public, disinformation against security institutions and furthering vested political interest."

The statement came after evacuations began in Tirah's Maidan area on January 9 in preparation for a security operation, expected to conclude within two months, with rehabilitation and returns set for April 5. It read that no directives had been issued by the federal government or the armed forces to depopulate the area, which lies in the Khyber district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa near the Afghan border. The statement said

law enforcement agencies were routinely carrying out "targeted, intelligence-based operations" against terrorist elements. It added that these actions were designed in a manner to avoid "disruption to peaceful civilian life for which no depopulation or migration is needed or being undertaken". The ministry also referred to concerns among local people about the presence of militants, saying that the Tirah locals wanted peace and stability. It detailed that the KP's Relief, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Department issued a notification on December 26, 2025, releasing funds – reportedly Rs4 billion – for what it described as "anticipated temporary and voluntary movement of population from certain localities in Tirah (Bagh)". According



to the statement, the provincial government requested facilitation for advance preparedness and relief-related arrangements, including transportation, food support, cash assistance, and the establishment and management of transit and registration points.

Citing the document, the ministry said the deputy commissioner of Khyber conveyed that the proposed voluntary movement reflected the will of the local population, expressed through a representative jirga, while taking into account seasonal, logistical and contextual considerations, and adopting a non-camp-based modality.

The ministry strongly rejected any media statements by the provincial government or its officials linking the said

migration to the armed forces, calling such claims "false and fabricated" and alleging they were made with mala fide intent to gain political capital and malign security institutions. Meanwhile, on Friday, several families fleeing their homes in Tirah Valley were stranded on snow-covered roads as heavy snowfall and freezing temperatures gripped parts of the province, triggering rescue operations. Rescue 1122 said more than 25 vehicles carrying 65 people stranded in snow were safely rescued. Severe cold also led to multiple cases of hypothermia, particularly among children, an official at Hayatabad Medical Complex (HMC) said. "At least 20 children were shifted to HMC with symptoms including shivering, fatigue and low body temperature," the official added. The Pakistan Army also remained engaged in relief efforts, rescuing 20 stranded residents and relocating them to secure locations. A 200-bed facility was prepared at the Tirah Administrative Complex, where food, warm shelter and other basic facilities were being continuously provided to evacuating families.

## US storm leaves 160,000 without power

DNA

WASHINGTON: More than 4,000 flights were cancelled in the US on Saturday ahead of a monster winter storm that has already cut power to more than 160,000 electricity customers as far west as Texas, and threatened to paralyse eastern states with heavy snowfall. Forecasters said snow, sleet and freezing rain, accompanied by dangerously frigid temperatures, would sweep the eastern two-thirds of the nation on Sunday and into next week. Calling the storms "historic," President Donald Trump on Saturday approved federal emergency disaster declarations in South Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina, Maryland, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Indiana, and West Virginia. "We will continue to monitor, and stay in touch with all States in the path of this storm. Stay Safe, and Stay Warm," Trump wrote in a post on Truth Social.

Seventeen states and the District of Columbia have declared weather emergencies, the Department of Homeland Security said.

## 'Courts should not convert divorce cases into Khula'

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court has ruled that the family courts must not, on their own motion, convert a wife's demand for divorce into 'khula' proceedings, as doing so would deprive her of her right to dower.

Consequently, the apex court overturned the decisions of the lower forum and dissolved a marriage on the grounds of "talaq" (divorce) instead of khula, since the husband had contracted a second marriage. The Supreme Court also ordered awarding the wife her full unpaid dower of Rs1.2 million through the executing family court. "We have noted that where a wife expresses aversion, the family court dissolves the marriage on the grounds of khula and the wife is deprived of her dower," observed Justice Musarrat Hilali in a five-page judgment on Friday.

## Chairman Senate lauds Italy's role in Multan heritage revival

DNA

MULTAN: Chairman Senate Syed Yusaf Raza Gilani hosted a dinner in honour of Italian Ambassador to Pakistan Marilina Armellini, at Gilani House. Prior to the dinner, a meeting was held between the Chairman Senate and the Italian delegation, during which bilateral relations, economic cooperation, social ties and the preservation of historical heritage were discussed in detail. The Italian delegation included

Ambassador Marilina Armellini, Mr Domenico Polloni and First Secretary Mr Augusto Palmieri. Syed Yusaf Raza Gilani appreciated Italy's support for the restoration of Multan's historical status and said Italian assistance played a key role in the rehabilitation of several historic gates of the city, which reflect its ancient civilization and cultural identity. He added that the historical links between Multan and Rome further strengthen Pakistan-Italy relations.

Ambassador Marilina Armellini stated that Italy intends to recruit workforce from Pakistan and plans to issue around 10,000 visas in the next phase. She also announced that an Italian visa centre will soon be established in Multan to facilitate workers through NOC issuance and other related services, benefiting people of South Punjab. Later, a dinner was hosted by the Chairman Senate, which was attended by MNA Syed Abdul Qadir Gillani, MPA Syed Ali Haider Gillani, Makhdoom

Syed Abu-ul-Hassan Gillani, Sajida Nashin of Darbar Hazrat Musa Pak Shaheed, President Multan Chamber of Commerce and Industry Bakhtawar Tanvir, former MPA Ahmed Mujtaba Gillani, industrialist Chaudhry Zulfiqar Anjum, Khawaja Anis and other notable figures. Participants stressed the need to further strengthen bilateral ties, promote cultural heritage protection, enhance economic cooperation and expand workforce exchange between Pakistan and Italy.

## 'Many killed' in fresh conflict in S. Sudan

JUBA: Renewed fighting in South Sudan has displaced more than 180,000 people, with witnesses describing indiscriminate use of barrel bombs and civilians fleeing into swamps as the country's fragile peace unravels. The world's youngest country has been beset by war, poverty and massive corruption since it was formed in 2011, but violence is once again on the rise between rival factions, currently focused on Jonglei state north of the capital Juba. "I am stuck and if worse comes, the only safe place for me to go is the swamps," said Daniel Deng, 35, one of thousands displaced by fighting in Jonglei, speaking to AFP by phone. He described heavy fighting last week in Duk county where he lives, after opposition forces took control only to

be driven out by government troops. "Many people were killed," said Deng, estimating the number at around 300 fighters, which could not be verified by AFP. A power-sharing agreement between the two main factions is all but dead after President Salva Kiir moved against his vice-president and long-time rival, Riek Machar, who was arrested last March and is now on trial for "crimes against humanity". Their forces have fought several times over the past year, but the most sustained clashes began in late December in Jonglei. South Sudanese authorities estimate the number of displaced at more than 180,000 across four counties of Jonglei, the UN humanitarian agency OCHA said this week. – APP



ISLAMABAD: The Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, H.E. Than Swe, arrived in Islamabad for a four-day official visit. He was received at the airport by the Director General (East Asia Pacific Division), MoFA, and officials from the Myanmar Embassy. – DNA

## Second killing in Minneapolis by US federal agents

MINNEAPOLIS: The killing of a US citizen by federal immigration agents on Saturday – the second in Minneapolis this month – sparked new protests and impassioned demands by local leaders for the Trump administration to end its operation in the city. Federal agents shot dead Alex Prett, a 37-year-old ICU nurse, while scuffling with him on an icy roadway, less than three weeks after an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officer shot and killed Renee Good, also 37, in her car. The Trump administration quickly claimed, as it did after Good's death, that Prett had intended to harm the federal agents, even as video of the incident appeared to contradict their account. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) pointed to a pistol and ammunition it said was discovered on Prett. "He was there to perpetuate violence," Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem told a briefing, while White House deputy chief of staff Stephen Miller referred to Prett as an "assassin," in a post amplified on X by Vice President JD Vance. However, as with Good's death, cell phone footage of the incident raised serious questions about the federal government's description of the incident. Video aired widely by US media, which AFP has not verified, shows Prett fighting agents in the snow-lined street

and directing traffic. After an agent shoves a woman protester to the ground on the sidewalk, Prett steps in between them and is sprayed in the face by a chemical irritant. The agent then pulls Prett to the ground and several officers struggle to detain him on the icy roadway. Seconds later, as an officer apparently discovers and pulls a gun from Prett's pants, agents open fire, also shooting his motionless body several times from a distance. Prett's parents in a statement circulated by US media called him a "kindhearted soul" and accused the Trump administration of telling "sickening lies" about their son. Minnesota Governor Tim Walz called the shooting "horrible" and demanded state authorities lead the investigation. "The federal government cannot be trusted to lead this investigation. The state will handle it, period," Walz told a news conference. Federal authorities controversially blocked local investigators from jointly probing Good's death. One Senate Republican on Saturday called for a joint investigation into the shooting. "The events in Minneapolis are incredibly disturbing. The credibility of ICE and DHS are at stake," Senator Bill Cassidy, a Louisiana Republican, wrote on X. "There must be a full joint federal and state investigation. We can trust the American people with the truth." – APP

## Woman, boy drown off Greece after migrant boat sinks

NEWS DESK

ATHENS: A boat carrying over 50 migrants sank off the Greek coast, killing a woman and a boy and leaving three others missing, the coast guard said Sunday. "Fifty migrants have been rescued and are being cared for by the authorities," after the accident off the island of Ikaria in the northern Aegean Sea, a spokeswoman said. "A rescue operation with a coast guard vessel is underway, and a team of rescuers and divers is expected later today," she said. Strong winds were hampering rescue efforts, according to

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