



# Daily Islamabad POST

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**Marco Rubio says Iraq should not have ties with Iran**

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**Sindh govt to compensate Plaza victims**

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**Info minister greets press club office-bearers**

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## Briefs

**2 militants killed as police repel attack**

BANNU: The district police on Monday thwarted an attack on a police mobile van by militants of Fitratul-Kharaj within the limits of Domel Police Station. According to police, the Domel Police mobile van was on routine patrol near company road when militants, who were lying in ambush, opened indiscriminate fire on the police party. The police personnel responded with professionalism and bravery, leading to a fierce exchange of gunfire that lasted for approximately 20 minutes. As a result of the effective retaliatory action, two militants were killed. Weapons were also recovered from their possession. Following the incident, additional contingents, including an Armored Personnel Carrier (APC), Quick Response Force (QRF), and Rapid Response Force (RRF), were immediately dispatched from Police Lines Bannu to the scene. A search operation was launched in the area, during which the bodies of the two militants were recovered. The bodies were shifted to KGN Hospital for legal formalities. The area has been completely cordoned off, and search and clearance operations are ongoing.

**CM Afridi calls for federal dialogue**

"Over the last two decades, numerous military operations have proven meaningless,"



SHAMIM SHAHID

In the wake of controversy surrounding the Tirrah operation and the resulting displacement, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi has urged federal policymakers to abandon "closed-door experiments" and engage in sincere dialogue to resolve pressing national issues, particularly terrorism and extremism. Responding to recent statements by federal ministers about unrest in Tirrah Valley, located in the Khyber tribal district bordering Afghanistan, CM Afridi addressed the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly on Monday. In his speech, he strongly criticized the federal government and its state institutions for what he described as a "stepmotherly attitude" toward Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and its people. "Some in the federal government are reluctant to see Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as calm and peaceful," he said, adding that for the past 77 years, the province has repeatedly been kept in crisis and tension.

Afridi emphasized that all attempts by the federal government and its subordinate institutions to destabilize the province have failed. "As a result of these failed, outdated policies, the federal government has earned nothing but failure in both internal and external policies," he said. Rather than continuing such flawed approaches, the Chief Minister urged the federal government to come to the table if it genuinely seeks an end to turmoil. Highlighting ongoing political challenges, Afridi remarked, "Unfortunately, some in the federal

## Pakistan, Myanmar vow to make ties stronger

DPM Dar holds delegation-level talks with Myanmar officials led by Union Minister for Foreign Affairs Than Swe

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar, received the Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, H.E. Than Swe, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Islamabad. The meeting marks a key highlight of H.E. Than Swe's four-day official visit to Pakistan, which began over the weekend. The Myanmar Foreign Minister arrived in Islamabad late on January 24, 2026, and was received at the airport by the Director General (East Asia Pacific Division) of Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, along with officials from the Myanmar Embassy. This visit is described as rare, with the last high-level Myanmar delegation to Pakistan occurring in 2022. During the reception and discussions at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, both sides reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing bilateral cooperation across areas of mutual interest. The talks focused on deepening diplomatic, economic, and regional ties between the two nations. Pakistan and Myanmar share historical connections through shared regional forums and have expressed interest in expanding collaboration in trade, security, and people-to-people exchanges. This engagement builds on earlier diplo-

matic outreach. In early January 2026, Senator Ishaq Dar held a telephone conversation with H.E. U Than Swe, during which both ministers underscored the importance of bilateral relations and reviewed bilateral cooperation. The recent visit follows preparatory meetings, including one between Pakistan's Ambassador to Myanmar, Tariq Karim, and the Myanmar Foreign Minister in Nay Pyi Taw shortly before the trip. Analysts view the visit as part of Pakistan's broader efforts to strengthen engagement with Southeast Asian countries and neighboring regions. It comes at a time when Pakistan seeks to diversify its diplomatic partnerships and promote constructive dialogue in Asia. The four-day itinerary provides opportunities for further high-level interactions, potentially including meetings with other senior Pakistani officials, aimed at fostering goodwill and exploring pragmatic areas of cooperation. The meeting underscores the positive trajectory in Pakistan-Myanmar relations, with both countries expressing optimism for continued collaboration. Official statements from Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs have highlighted the visit's role in reinforcing longstanding ties and advancing shared objectives for regional stability and development.

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**Business Community not happy**  
**SBP keeps interest rate unchanged despite reduction pleas**

The MPC noted an increase in the trade deficit in the wake of a substantial rise in imports, particularly in import volumes, and a decline in exports

BUREAU REPORT

KARACHI: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on Monday decided against changing the interest rate and announced maintaining it at the existing 10.5%, defying market expectations. Addressing a press conference in Karachi, SBP Governor Jameel Ahmed said the policy rate would remain unchanged for the next two months. An analyst at Topline Securities said that the MPC's announcement came as a surprise as majority of the participants were expecting a rate cut. In a statement, the SBP said its Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) observed headline inflation of 5.6% year-on-year in December 2025 was in line with its expectation. "However, core inflation has steadied around a relatively higher level of 7.4% in recent months. Meanwhile, as reflected by the recent high frequency indicators (HFIs),

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**President approves seven bills passed by Parliament**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has approved seven bills passed by Parliament, completing the legislative process for measures spanning trade, taxation, social protection, education, railways and human rights. The approved legislation includes The National Tariff Commission (Amendment) Bill, 2026; The Export Development Fund (Amendment) Bill, 2026; The Transfer of Railways (Amendment) Bill, 2026; The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill, 2026; The National Child Protection Commission Bill, 2026; The National Commission for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2026; and The National Commission for the Protection of the Rights of the Elderly Bill, 2026.

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## T20 World Cup: Final decision on Friday or Monday: Naqvi

Bangladesh were replaced by Scotland on Saturday, which is scheduled to begin next month, following their refusal to tour India over safety concerns in the wake of soured political relations between the Asian neighbours



SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Monday said that he briefed Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on the "International Cricket Council (ICC) matter" saying, that a "final decision will be taken either on Friday or next Monday".

According to a handout by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Naqvi had called on the premier in Islamabad earlier today. "During the meeting, he briefed the prime minister on the recent developments between the ICC and Bangladesh Cricket Board (BC) regarding the T20 World Cup," the handout said. Subsequently, Naqvi, who is also the chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), stated that he had a "productive" meeting with PM Shehbaz. "[I] briefed him on the ICC matter, and he directed that we resolve it while keeping all options on the table. It was agreed

that the final decision will be taken either on Friday or next Monday," the post read. The development comes as questions have been raised about Pakistan's participation in the tournament following the ICC's decision to replace Bangladesh with Scotland. Bangladesh were replaced by Scotland on Saturday.

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**ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar, received the Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, H.E. Than Swe. – DNA**

### Tehran-Washington stand-off

**UAE will not allow attacks on Iran from its soil, says ministry**

UAE foreign ministry says "dialogue, de-escalation, adherence to international law" best way to address crisis

DNA

ABU DHABI: The United Arab Emirates (UAE) will not allow attacks on Iran to be launched from its territory, the foreign ministry said in a statement on Monday.

Last week, President Donald Trump said a US "armada" was heading toward the Gulf and that Washington was watching Iran closely after the protests subsided in the country. The foreign ministry said in a statement it "has reaffirmed the United Arab Emirates' commitment to not allowing its airspace, territory or waters to be used in any hostile military actions against Iran". The UAE hosts thousands of US personnel at Al Dhafra airbase near the capital Abu Dhabi, one of several American military sites in the Gulf. The UAE also refuses to provide logistical support for attacks, the statement said, adding that "dialogue, de-escalation, adherence to international law" is the best way to address the crisis.

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**Indonesia receives Rafale jets**

DNA

JAKARTA: Indonesia has received three Rafale fighter jets from France in the first deliveries from a multi-billion dollar defence deal between the two countries, a defence ministry official told Reuters on Monday, marking a major upgrade to the country's ageing military hardware. Jakarta, France's main arms client in Southeast Asia,

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**President Xi says India, China are 'partners'**

NEWS DESK

BEIJING: China's President Xi Jinping said Beijing and New Delhi were "good neighbours, friends and partners" as he wished Indian President Droupadi Murmu congratulations on the South Asian nation's Republic Day, the official Xinhua news agency reported on Monday. Xi said that over the past year, China-India relations have continued to improve and develop and are of "great significance for maintaining and promoting world peace and prosperity," according to Xinhua.

Xi said China has always believed that being "good neighbours, friends and partners" is the right choice for both China and India. He referred to China and India as the "dragon and the elephant dancing together," Xinhua said.

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**UK holds off joining Gaza Peace Board**

NEWS DESK

LONDON: Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper has said the UK will not yet be signing up to US President Donald Trump's Board of Peace over concerns about Russian leader Vladimir Putin's possible participation. Cooper told the BBC the UK had been invited to join the board but "won't be one of the signatories today" at a ceremony at the World Economic Forum in Davos. The board, which gives Trump wide decision-making powers as chairman, is being billed by the US as a new international organisation for resolving conflicts. Cooper described the board as a "legal treaty that raises much broader issues" than the initiative's initial focus on ending the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

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# Murad announces relief plan for Gul Plaza victims

KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah inaugurated the Rs6.1 billion Korangi Causeway bridge and reaffirmed his government's commitment to enhancing Karachi's infrastructure, while unveiling comprehensive relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction initiatives for those affected by the recent Gul Plaza tragedy.

Talking to the media at the inauguration ceremony of the Korangi Causeway Bridge, the chief minister began by offering prayers for those who lost their lives in the Gul Plaza incident and urged everyone to recite Surah Al-Fatiha and Surah Al-Ikhlas for the departed souls.

He said the tragic event had deeply saddened the entire province and reiterated that no compensation could ever truly compensate for the loss of human life.

Chief Minister Murad Shah, accompanied by Provincial Minister for Local Government Syed Nasir Shah, Provincial Minister for Labour Saeed Ghani, Mayor Karachi Murtaza Wahab, arrived at the Korangi Causeway, where he was received by Special Assistant Ali Rashid, Provincial Local Government Secretary Waseem Shamshad, and others.

Underscoring the importance of the Korangi Causeway project, Murad Shah said the bridge was a longstanding commitment, especially to the residents and industrial stakeholders

of Korangi and the surrounding areas. "This area used to be cut off whenever it rained, effectively dividing the city into two parts. To address this difficulty, we committed nearly three years ago to building a bridge here," he said. The Chief Minister stated that construction on the bridge commenced around one and a half years ago, but faced delays due to design-related issues. He said the newly inaugurated bridge is approximately 1.4 kilometres long, has six lanes – three on each side – and was built at a cost exceeding Rs6.135 billion.

Shah added that the project will greatly benefit the Korangi and Landhi industrial areas, daily commuters, and nearby facilities, including Indus Hospital, SIUT, educational institutions, and residential communities. According to him, nearly five million people are expected to use the bridge daily.

Murad Ali Shah stated that the Korangi Causeway bridge is part of a broader initiative to rehabilitate Karachi's deteriorating infrastructure. He noted that some ancillary construction work was still ongoing, including efforts to connect Shahrah-e-Bhutto with Korangi Road. "We aim to open Shahrah-e-Bhutto by Eid or immediately after. Although there has been a delay of about one and a half to two months, the road will be operational from Korangi Road to the M-9 after Eid," he said.

The CM was also briefed on the connecting loops and the grade-separated interchange being constructed under the Shaheed Bhutto Expressway project, which will link Korangi, DHA, and the Kathore (M-9) Highway. Two entry and two exit ramps have been built for Korangi and Qayumabad to ensure conflict-free traffic movement and reduce pressure on inner-city roads.

CM Murad Ali Shah stated that the Shaheed Bhutto Expressway would serve as Karachi's economic lifeline and help resolve chronic traffic issues through controlled-access corridors.

Turning to the Gul Plaza tragedy, the chief minister said more than a week had passed since the incident and outlined the government's response in detail. He reiterated that the Sindh government had announced compensation of Rs 10 million for each deceased person on the very first day, acknowledging that no amount could truly compensate for the loss of life. The CM recalled that during his address on the floor of the Sindh Assembly, he had also announced financial assistance for shopkeepers affected by the incident. "Until the shopkeepers stand on their own feet again, the Sindh government will not leave them alone," he said, adding that cabinet approval for these measures would be obtained shortly.—DNA

## KP govt respects state institutions: Afridi

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Muhammad Sohail Afridi said on that he respects all state institutions.

He rejected claims that his party is hostile to the military or state institutions, stating that they respect all institutions completely.

Addressing participants of a rally in Mingora Swat, he said Chief Minister derives legitimacy from people mandate. He emphasized that attempts to damage the party's image would not succeed. Upon reaching Barikot tehsil of Swat, the Chief Minister was received by party workers. He paid tribute to former MNA Murad Saeed for raising his voice during the early phases of terrorism in the region and expressed solidarity with him. He highlighted public enthusiasm witnessed in Sindh, Hazara, Peshawar Region, and Malakand. The rally subsequently entered Malakand, where supporters welcomed him. The Chief Minister acknowledged Malakand's positive role in supporting PTI during difficult periods and urged workers to remain disciplined, stating that there is no room for complacency or error. He vowed that the goal would be achieved, reiterating that decisions regarding negotiations or protest rest with Tehreek-e-Aain Pakistan's leadership and affirmed that the constitutional right to protest would be exercised if necessary.—APP

## PPP to continue struggle for people's rights: Governor

SARGODHA: Punjab Governor Sardar Saleem Haider Khan reiterated that the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) will continue to raise its voice for the rights of people, emphasizing the party's dedication to democracy and public welfare. He made these remarks during a visit to Sargodha, where he was warmly welcomed by a PPP secretariat by the Divisional President of the PPP Sargodha region, Tasneem Ahmed Qureshi. During his address, the governor highlighted the importance of democracy as a tool for giving

ing people a voice. He also underscored the hardships endured by PPP leadership, particularly their sacrifices and imprisonments, all for the cause of democracy. "The PPP is the only party that has consistently fought for welfare and rights of the people," said the governor. The governor's house in Lahore had now been transformed into the people's governor house, he added. He also praised the party for its legacy of sacrifices, stating that the PPP remains a party of martyrs who have contributed immensely to the country's democratic struggle. Later, Information Secretary of PPP Nadeem Afzal Chun also addressed the gathering, affirming that the PPP is the party of the middle-class and marginalized segments of society. He reiterated the party's long-standing commitment to advocating for the basic rights of laborers and the underprivileged. Tasneem Ahmed Qureshi, in his welcome address, praised the PPP as a role model party for workers and the poor.—APP

## GWM launches Tank 500 at Haval flagship dealership in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Great Wall Motor (GWM) has officially launched its premium off-road SUV, the Tank 500, at a Haval flagship dealership in Pakistan, marking a significant step in the company's expansion within the local automotive market. The launch was announced in January 2026, with the vehicle introduced in both Hybrid Electric Vehicle (HEV) and Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle (PHEV) variants. Positioned as a luxury full-size SUV, the Tank 500 combines rugged off-road capability with modern design and advanced technology. The vehicle features a powerful hybrid powertrain, an advanced four-wheel-drive system, and premium interior amenities, catering to customers seeking both performance and comfort. According to GWM, bookings for the Tank 500 will commence later this month, while deliveries are expected within the next few months. The company stated that the launch reflects the growing demand in Pakistan for technologically advanced, fuel-efficient, and premium SUVs. Speaking on the occasion, General Manager Rehan Zafar said that the launch of the Tank 500 at the Haval flagship dealership represents an important milestone for GWM in Pakistan. He added that the introduction of the premium SUV underscores the company's commitment to offering globally competitive vehicles equipped with advanced technology and sustainable mobility solutions. He further noted that the Tank 500 has been designed to meet the evolving preferences of Pakistani consumers who seek luxury, performance, and off-road capability without compromising on efficiency. With the introduction of the Tank 500 through its flagship dealership network, GWM aims to compete in the premium SUV segment and further strengthen its foothold in Pakistan's rapidly evolving automotive industry.—APP

## Local hunter hunts Himalayan Ibex in Chitral

PESHAWAR: Another positive chapter in the conservation and sustainable management of wildlife in the scenic Arkari Valley has been written, as local hunter Zeeshan Nasir from Lower Chitral successfully trophy-hunted a Himalayan Ibex in the Arkari Valley. According to the Spokesman Department of Climate Change, Forest, Environment and Wildlife, Latifur Rehman, the hunt is carried out under the rules, strict supervision, and transparent procedures set by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Wildlife Department during the ongoing trophy hunting season. The license fee for this hunt was Rs 25,000 while the trophy hunting permit fee was set at US \$ 550, the spokesman added. The age of the hunted Himalayan Ibex was about 10 years old, while its horns were recorded at 43.5 inches, which is considered a significant and remarkable size by international standards. The hunting of this type is limited to only old and relatively out-bred animals, so the natural balance of the population and genetic continuity can be maintained, he added.

The spokesperson further said that effective conservation measures, continuous monitoring, the activity of anti-poaching squads, and the partnership of the local community have resulted in a clear increase in the population of Himalayan ibex in the Arkari Valley. This progress is a testament to the fact that conservation and

partnership go hand in hand. Under the provincial trophy hunting policy, 80 percent of the revenue generated from hunting is directly transferred to the local village conservation committees. This money is spent on projects at the local level, such as education, health, clean water, road improvement, employment

opportunities, and other basic amenities, which not only enhances public welfare but also make the local people the practical guardians of wildlife conservation. Environmentalists and local elders have described the trophy hunting program as a successful and replicable model of sustainable tourism, rural

development, and biodiversity conservation. They say this model is a manifestation of the fact that when the value of nature is linked to economic stability, forests, mountains, and wildlife are all protected, and a new narrative of harmony between humans and the environment is born.—APP



ISLAMABAD: The Ambassador of Denmark to Pakistan, Ms. Maja Mortensen, called on the Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Dr. Musadik Malik.

## LHC CJ opens tehsil courts in Sharqpur Sharif

LAHORE: Lahore High Court (LHC) Chief Justice Aalia Naeem on Monday formally inaugurated the tehsil courts in Sharqpur Sharif, marking a significant step towards strengthening the judicial system at the grassroots level.

Registrar Lahore High Court Amjad Iqbal Ranjha and District and Sessions Judge Sheikhpura Muhammad Naeem Sheikh were also present on the occasion. Upon her arrival, the chief Justice was accorded a warm welcome by the District Bar Association Sheikhpura and a large number of lawyers, who presented bouquets. A special prayer was offered at the inauguration ceremony. Judicial officers, members of the legal fraternity, senior officials of the district administration and police, along with representatives from various walks of life, attended the event.

Speakers on the occasion, she termed the establishment of the tehsil courts a major development towards ensuring speedy and affordable justice for the local population.—APP

## Minister orders on the spot relief for public grievances

CHINOT: Federal Minister for the Investment Board Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh on Monday held an open court at his office in Chinot to ensure swift resolution of public issues, drawing large participation from citizens, heads of various federal institutions and senior administrative officers. During the open court, citizens highlighted issues related to electricity, gas supply, health, education, revenue and other basic civic matters.

Taking immediate notice, the Federal Minister issued on-the-spot directives to the concerned officers for prompt and effective redressal of complaints. He emphasized that timely resolution of public problems remains the government's foremost priority and stressed that elected representatives can truly understand ground realities only through direct engagement with the people. Addressing the gathering, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh said that the current government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, is taking serious and practical measures to provide relief to the masses. He highlighted key initiatives including a significant reduction in the policy rate to stabilize the economy, the establishment of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) to boost investment, development of industrial zones and wide-ranging regulatory reforms, noting that pos-

itive outcomes of these steps have already begun to surface. He further stated that service delivery is being improved through enhanced coordination between federal and provincial institutions, while the One Window Facilitation System is providing ease to citizens and investors alike. Reiterating his commitment, the Federal Minister announced that such open courts will continue in the future. At the conclusion of the session, citizens warmly appreciated the initiative, lauding the Federal Minister for listening attentively to their issues, issuing immediate orders and briefing them on ongoing government measures.—APP

## Policy rate decision contrary to FPCCI expectations

KARACHI: Saquib Fayyaz Magoor, Chairman of the Businessmen Panel Progressive (BMPP) and Senior Vice President of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), has expressed deep disappointment over the Monetary Policy Committee's decision not to reduce the policy rate. He termed this decision completely contrary to the expectations of the FPCCI and the broader business community.

In a statement, Saquib Fayyaz Magoor said that the move runs contrary to the expec-

tations of the country's trade and industry. "Inflation has gradually come down to 5.6 percent, leaving ample room for a reduction in the policy rate. The State Bank could have easily brought interest rates into single digits, but failing to do so is discouraging for the business community." The cost of financing is already unbearable, over-all business expenses have surged, and energy tariffs remain exceptionally high. Elevated interest rates are further squeezing industrial and commercial operations," he added.—APP

## National Days and Armed Forces Days

### JANUARY

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

Turkish Airlines.....8494949



### Emergency

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



### Enquiry

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



### Hospitals

CMH.....5611111
MH.....561116
Cantt Hospital.....9270907-11
DHQ.....5563114
RGH.....9290301-7
Holy Family.....9290322-7
PIMS.....9261170-79
Polyclinic.....9218300-09
Shifa International 4603666



### Departments

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



### Islamabad Metropolitan

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

### Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480
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# IRS, PKCERT to promote cyber security research

Ambassador Jauhar Saleem, President of the Institute of Regional Studies, underscored that cybersecurity has emerged as a critical pillar of national security, affecting not only state institutions but also economic stability, governance, and societal resilience



ISLAMABAD :The Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) and the Pakistan National Cyber Emergency Response Team (PKCERT) on Monday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to formalize institutional collaboration in the field of cybersecurity. The MoU signing ceremony was attended by senior officials from both organizations, including Director General PKCERT, Haider Abbas, said a press release. Speaking at the ceremony, Ambassador Jauhar Saleem, President of the Institute of Regional Studies, underscored that cybersecurity has emerged as a critical pillar of national security, affecting not only state institutions but also economic

stability, governance, and societal resilience. He noted that the partnership reflects a shared understanding of the need for closer cooperation between policy-oriented research institutions and technical organizations to effectively respond to evolving cyber threats. Ambassador Saleem highlighted IRS's commitment to advancing research, dialogue, and institutional partnerships to address emerging security challenges in cyberspace. In his remarks, Haider Abbas, Director General PKCERT, stressed that there can be no national security without cybersecurity, noting that modern intelligence and threat

landscapes have become increasingly sophisticated. He highlighted emerging cyber threats, including cryptojacking, explaining that such attacks can operate even when devices appear inactive, silently exploiting system resources. He noted that PKCERT is actively responding to a wide range of evolving cyber threats through technical coordination and national-level incident response. Abbas emphasized that the MoU represents a genuine and practical collaboration, stating that the partnership will focus on meaningful research initiatives while creating opportunities for university students to gain exposure to real-world cyber challenges and

contribute to strengthening Pakistan's cyber ecosystem. Under the MoU, both institutions will cooperate in areas including joint research, expert exchanges, training, and capacity-building initiatives, internships, and cybersecurity awareness programs. The partnership aims to bridge the gap between policy formulation and technical implementation, contributing to Pakistan's long-term cyber resilience and secure digital future. Both institutions reaffirmed commitment to ensure that the partnership remains productive and impactful. The collaboration would generate actionable research, strengthen institutional capacity, and contribute meaningfully to Pakistan's long-term cyber resilience and secure digital future.—APP

## Power Division denies Rs 224b circular debt

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Energy (Power Division) on Monday rejected media reports claiming that Circular Debt (CD) flow increased by Rs224 billion during the period from July to November 2025, despite the bank refinancing agreement signed in September 2025, terming the figures misleading, factually incorrect and based on incomplete data. Responding to a news item published in a section of the media, the Power Division spokesperson said the report failed to present up-to-date data, lacked proper factual linkage and was published without seeking the official version of the Power Division. The spokesperson clarified that it is imperative to note that the Circular Debt Stock on June 30th 2025 can not be compared with its stock at the end of November 2025 that is only three months. Furthermore the story totally on a wrong footing attributed and connected the Circular Debt variation with Banks Agreement which was primarily meant for PHL expensive debt replacement with much cheaper loan and that

too with a five to six years plan to repay the loan itself. Ideally, the spokesperson said, the period from July to November 2025 period could have been compared with July to November 2024. It has created misunderstanding. It is important to highlight that the said July to November 2024 increase is primarily attributable to seasonal factors that influence monthly Circular Debt movements and are typically reversed by the end of the fiscal year. It is very important to note that the circular debt flow declined in December 25, resulting in a net circular debt flow of less than Rs 80 billion for the period from July to December 2025, he added. The spokesperson also pointed out that the same news report acknowledged a significant reduction in circular debt during FY 2024-25, which stood at Rs1,614 billion as of June 2025. He said this reduction was achieved through improved operational efficiency of power distribution companies (DISCOs), strengthening of macroeconomic variables and waiver of late payment interest

following successful negotiations with Independent Power Producers (IPPs). It is expected that by the close of the current fiscal year, the Circular Debt position will be fully contained, with no net addition to the overall stock. This expectation is consistent with historical trends, wherein seasonal fluctuations typically normalize in the latter part of the fiscal year. The spokesperson emphasized that these seasonal variations in Circular Debt flow have no implications for consumer-end electricity tariffs and therefore do not impact end-user pricing. It is also pertinent to highlight that DISCOs' inefficiencies during FY 2024-25, as compared to FY 2023-24, were reduced by Rs 193 billion. Similarly, inefficiencies during Jul-Dec 25 further declined by Rs. 49 billion compared to the corresponding period of Jul-Dec 24. These improvements, he said, reflected the government's continued commitment to enhancing operational efficiency and maintaining financial discipline in the power sector.—APP

## Hearing of super tax case adjourned

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Constitutional Court of Pakistan (FCCP) on Monday heard the super tax case, with a three-member bench headed by Chief Justice Ameenuddin Khan presiding. After completion of arguments from the government side, the court adjourned the hearing until Tuesday, January 27. During the proceedings, Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) counsel Asma Hamid submitted a list of 150 writ petitions filed in various high courts challenging the super tax. She argued that once a high court has upheld the validity of a legal provision, the same law should not be challenged in other high courts. She also alleged that Fauji Fertilizer continues to file petitions to obtain favorable rulings. The FBR counsel rejected claims that legal requirements were not fulfilled, stating that such requirements are addressed during court proceedings rather than during the legislative process. She added that it is not constitutionally mandatory to hear taxpayers before imposing taxes at the lawmaking stage. She further noted that while petitioners cited US Supreme Court rulings, each country follows its own constitutional and legal framework.—APP

## SC issues ruling on delayed govt employees' promotions

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan has issued a major and precedent-setting ruling on delays in the promotion of government employees, declaring that an eligible officer has the right to promotion from the date of the first Departmental Promotion Committee (DPC) meeting, and cannot be penalized for administrative negligence or delay. Setting aside the decision of the Punjab Service Tribunal, the Supreme Court ruled that the promotion of government employee Fakhra Majeed will be effective from January 21, 2012. The tribunal had earlier dismissed his appeal, holding that an employee was not entitled to promotion from the date a vacancy arose. In its ruling, the apex court emphasized that timely consideration for promotion through the DPC is a fundamental right of eligible public servants. It stated that employees cannot be made to suffer due to administrative incompetence, carelessness, or institutional delays. The seven-page written judgment was authored by Justice Ayesha Malik. The case was heard by a three-member bench comprising Justice Ayesha Malik, Justice Muhammad Hashim Kakar, and Justice Iftiqaq Ibrahim. The court noted in its detailed verdict that promotion is a basic right of government employees, and that delays caused by administrative lapses cannot undermine this right. It clarified that if an employee meets all eligibility requirements, promotion must take effect from the date of the first DPC meeting, regardless of subsequent delays. The Supreme Court also directed government institutions to ensure timely processing of promotions and stressed that no employee should bear the consequences of bureaucratic inefficiency or institutional sluggishness. In its concluding observations, the court underlined that public servants cannot be punished for administrative failures, and reiterated that it is the responsibility of state institutions to maintain efficient, transparent, and timely systems for personnel management.—APP

## World must setup Board of Peace for Kashmir now: Mushaal

ISLAMABAD: Mushaal Husseini Mullick, wife of jailed Kashmiri leader Yasin Malik, strongly criticized India's celebration of Republic Day, declaring it a "Black Day" for the people of Kashmir, and appealed to the international community. U.S. President Donald Trump, and a proposed global "Board of Peace" to take urgent steps for Kashmir's inclusion on the global peace agenda and for her release as a goodwill gesture. She said that while India claims to be the world's largest democracy, Kashmir remains a land of prisons, chains, and denied rights, where the Kashmiri people's democratic demand for freedom is crushed daily by Indian forces. In an exclusive interview with APP, Mushaal Mullick said January 26 symbolized pain and injustice for Kashmiris rather than democracy. "Where democracy should exist, there are jails; where justice should prevail, there are chains," she said, adding that Indian forces continue to suppress what she called the Kashmiri people's legitimate and democratic right to self-determination. She welcomed what she termed renewed international efforts for peace, particularly referring to former U.S. President Donald Trump and Pakistan's Field Marshal Asim Munir, saying their joint initiatives under a proposed "Board of Peace" could become a major step toward global peace and stability. MS Mullick claimed that recent diplomatic developments had exposed "the true face" of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and weakened India's narrative on Kashmir. Praising Pakistan's military leadership, she said Field Marshal Asim Munir had shown courage and resolve in standing up to India and defending Pakistan's position on Kashmir. She alleged that India had suffered a humiliating diplomatic and strategic setback despite being a much larger power. Mushaal Mullick urged the world community and U.S. leadership to formally include Kashmir in the agenda of any future global peace framework. She proposed the creation of a special "Board of Peace on Kashmir" to address the long-standing dispute and the humanitarian crisis in the region. Making an emotional appeal for her husband, she called for Yasin Mullick's immediate release as a goodwill gesture to revive the peace process. She recalled that in 2000, global powers, including the United States, had persuaded Yasin Malik to abandon armed struggle and adopt a peaceful, political path. "He chose the path of peace at the request of the international community," she said. "Today, I hope those same powers will honor that commitment and restart the peace process." She further said that Yasin Mullick should be recognized as a key stakeholder in any future dialogue on Kashmir. MS Mullick concluded by reiterating her demand for the freedom of the Kashmiri people and urging the world not to remain silent on what she described as ongoing human rights violations in Indian-administered Kashmir. The statement comes as India marked its 76th Republic Day with military parades and official ceremonies, while protests and symbolic observances were held by Kashmiri groups and activists in different parts of the world to highlight what they call the continued denial of rights and freedoms in Kashmir.—APP

## NA body delays ICT Condominium Bill over ministry absences

The meeting was attended by Mr. Anjum Aqeel Khan, Mr. Ibrar Ahmad, Haji Rasool Bux Chandio, Dr. Darshan, Ms. Samina Khalid Ghurki (via Zoom), and Syed Sami Ul Hasan Gilani (via Zoom). Senior officers, including the Additional Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Works, and officials from attached departments, were also present

to formally convey their displeasure and stressed that regular and timely attendance of senior officials was essential for effective legislative scrutiny. While expressing support in principle for the proposed ICT Condominium Bill, 2026, members said they were not opposed to the legislation and broadly welcomed its objectives aimed at regulating ownership and management of condominium properties in the federal capital. However, they unanimously agreed that detailed clause-by-clause consideration could not proceed in the absence of both the Federal Minister and the Federal Secretary concerned. The Committee therefore deferred the Bill to its next meeting scheduled for February 9, 2026, when both officials are expected to be present. The Committee also censured the Federal Government Employees Housing Authority (FGEHA) for submitting outdated and insufficient data, which it said hindered informed deliberation on federal housing schemes. FGEHA was directed to furnish revised and up-to-date information at the next meeting. In addition, the Ministry of Housing and Works is instructed to submit a comprehensive list of its properties in Karachi, reflecting the Committee's broader push for transparency and accountability in the management of public assets. Earlier, the Committee confirmed the minutes of its previous meeting held on December 29, 2025. The meeting was attended by Mr. Anjum Aqeel Khan, Mr. Ibrar Ahmad, Haji Rasool Bux Chandio, Dr. Darshan, Ms. Samina Khalid Ghurki (via Zoom), and Syed Sami Ul Hasan Gilani (via Zoom). Senior officers, including the Additional Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Works, and officials from attached departments, were also present.—APP

## Export of sport goods increases to \$207m

ISLAMABAD: The export of sports goods from the country witnessed an increase of 11.10 percent during the first half of the current fiscal year (2025-26) as compared to the export of corresponding half of last year. The country exported sports goods worth US\$ 207.803 million during July-December (2025-26) as opposed to the export of US\$ 187.049 million during July-December (2024-25), showing a growth of 11.10 percent, according to the data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS). Among the sports products, the exports of footballs rose by 17.20 percent, surging from US\$ 111.520 million last year to US\$ 130.701 million during the current year. The gloves export, however, decreased by 13.70 percent, declining from US\$ 32.598 million last year to US\$ 28.131 million during the current year, the PBS data revealed. Likewise, the exports of all other sports goods surged by 14.07 percent to US\$ 48.971 million from US\$ 42.931 million last year. Meanwhile, on a year-on-year basis, the sports goods export witnessed a decrease of 11.74 percent in December 2025 as opposed to the export same month last year. The sports goods exports in December 2025 were recorded at US\$ 28.469 million against exports of US\$ 32.256 million in December 2024. During the month, the export of footballs and gloves decreased by 12.98 and 30.73 percent respectively, and all other sports products witnessed an increase of 5.65 percent.—APP

## FCCP suspends disqualification proceedings against MNA Sohail

ISLAMABAD :The Federal Constitutional Court of Pakistan (FCCP) has restrained the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) from taking any further action in the disqualification case against Member of the National Assembly (MNA) Sohail Sultan from Swat until further orders. The case was heard by a two-member bench comprising Justice Aamir Farooq and Justice Rozi Khan, which issued notices to the Election Commission and all other concerned parties. During the hearing, Barrister Gohar appeared on behalf of Sohail Sultan and argued that a writ petition can be filed under Article 199 of the Constitution once the election process is complete. He contended that the Speaker of the National Assembly did not have the legal authority to send the reference in the first place. Barrister Gohar further cited the Nawaz Sharif disqualification case, stating that the Supreme Court had already laid down clear principles that such references must be sent strictly within a defined constitutional framework.—APP

## Briefs

**NEOC warns of weather hazards across northern, western regions**

ISLAMABAD: The National Disaster Management Authority's National Emergencies Operation Center (NEOC) has issued a weather alert, warning of rain and snowfall across northern and western regions, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir. According to the advisory, rain is expected in several districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including Chitral, Dir, Swat, Kohistan, Shangla, Malakand, Kurram, Waziristan, Mansehra, Mohmand, Buner, Haripur, Abbottabad, Peshawar, Charsadda, Nowshera, Swabi, Karak, Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, and Kohat. Rain and snowfall are likely to make roads slippery and disrupt traffic flow. Authorities have urged the public to avoid unnecessary travel during the wet spell and to adopt safety precautions. Relevant departments have been directed to remain on alert for rescue operations and road restoration in view of potential risks. The NEOC is ensuring timely dissemination of information to the public and concerned agencies regarding the situation and possible hazards.

For verified updates, alerts, and safety guidance, the public has been advised to use the NDMA Disaster Alert app. Export-Led Growth Is Roadmap for Pakistan's Economic Revival: ICCI President Emphasizes trade diplomacy to explore new markets in Africa, Central Asia and ASEAN countries Islamabad: President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Sardar Tahir Mahmood, while talking to a visiting delegation of industry here on Monday, said that export-led growth is the only viable and sustainable path for Pakistan's economic revival. He emphasized that exports are not merely a source of foreign exchange but a key driver of productivity, competitiveness, and long-term economic stability.—APP

**AIOU hosts int'l science conference empowering young researchers**

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is organizing its first International Conference titled "Frontiers in Science (ICFS 2026)" on February 2-3, 2026, here at its main campus. The central theme of the conference is "Bridging Disciplines toward a Sustainable Future." The objective is to bring together diverse scientific disciplines on a common academic platform, promote interdisciplinary research, and align modern scientific knowledge with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The international conference is being organized under the auspices of the University's Faculty of Sciences. The Vice Chancellor of AIOU, Prof. Dr Nasir Mahmood will be the chief guest at the inaugural session and will highlight the aims and objectives of the conference. According to Conference Secretary Dr Saima Qadeer, the two-day conference will include keynote speeches by eminent national and international scientists, thematic sessions, research paper presentations and policy dialogues.—APP

**Meat exports grew 6.40%**

ISLAMABAD: Meat and meat preparations exports from the country during first half of the current financial year grew by 6.40 percent as compared to the exports of the corresponding period of the last year. During the period from July-December 2025 over 59,918 metric tons of meat and meat products valued at \$264.755 million were exported as compared to the exports of 58,608 metric tons worth \$248.859 million of the same period of the last year, according to the date of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. Meanwhile, country earned \$218.459 million by exporting about 94,978 metric tons of fish and fish products during first six months of the current financial year as compared to the exports of \$201,996 million by 94,746 metric tons of fish and fish products, it added.

# Women role Central to security, justice, and national resilience

A key panel on Breaking Barriers in Security Leadership, featured senior women officers from policing and provincial administrations who shared operational experiences demonstrating how women's leadership has improved investigations, strengthened community engagement, and increased trust in law enforcement institutions



SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The British High Commission in Pakistan today reaffirmed its leadership in advancing inclusive and effective security by convening the national conference Women as Architects of Resilience: Empowering Women in Security and Counterterrorism, held in collaboration with the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), Global Affairs Canada and with support from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Pakistan. The conference highlighted how women across Pakistan are shaping counterterrorism policy, strengthening institutions, and delivering tangible results at the community

level.

"The UK is committed to supporting women who are strengthening Pakistan's response to enhancing community safety, leading efforts to prevent violent extremism and terrorism. We are also supporting projects that improve women's access to justice, provide better support for survivors, and empower women-led organisations working to build resilient communities," said British High Commissioner Ms. Jane Marriott while opening the conference. Mr. Jawad Ahmad Dogar, National Coordinator NACTA, Mr. Tarik Ali Khan, High Commissioner of Canada, and Mr. Troels Vester, UNODC Representative emphasized the importance of international cooperation and government leadership in promoting gender-re-

sponsive security frameworks. UNODC Representative Mr. Troels Vester highlighted the progress already underway, noting that women across Pakistan are increasingly serving in leadership roles within law enforcement, financial oversight, and justice institutions, contributing directly to investigations, compliance, and terrorism financing disruption. Reaffirming the government's commitment, Mr. Jawad Ahmad Dogar, National Coordinator NACTA, stated that integrating women's perspectives into counterterrorism policy and practice is essential to strengthening prevention, deterring radicalization, and reinforcing community resilience.

The event brought together senior policymakers, law enforcement leaders, financial regulators, international partners, and civil so-

cieties to recognize the growing impact of women serving across security, justice, and prevention systems. Discussions emphasized that women are no longer peripheral to national security efforts but are central actors enhancing institutional effectiveness, accountability, and public trust. Setting the national policy context, Ms. Humaira Muffi, Secretary, National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), highlighted how women's participation in security and prevention strengthens resilience, safeguards rights, and reinforces long-term stability. A key panel on Breaking Barriers in Security Leadership, featured senior women officers from policing and provincial administrations who shared operational experiences demonstrating how women's leadership has improved investigations, strengthened community engagement, and increased trust in law enforcement institutions.

## Naqvi inaugurates advanced real-time passport monitoring system 'Shukra'

ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi visited the Directorate General of Immigration and Passports on Monday, where he formally inaugurated Shukra, a state-of-the-art monitoring system designed to track passport applications, printing, and departmental performance in real time. As part of the upgrade, a 24/7 Monitoring Room and a Call Centre have been made operational at the DG Immigration and Passports. On the minister's directives, the system for issuing Emergency Travel Documents has also been fully digitized. Officials briefed Minister Naqvi in detail on the new Secure Hybrid Intelligence for Knowledge-Based Response Analytics (Shukra) system. Mohsin Naqvi praised the performance of the DG Immigration and Passports and his team for introducing a modern, technology-driven monitoring network. He said Pakistan's passport system has now been aligned with those of the world's leading countries. "With this new system, real-time monitoring of passport applications and deliveries—both within Pakistan and abroad—will now be possible," the minister said. "Every stage, from application submission to final delivery, will be closely supervised." Naqvi added that the government's aim is to provide citizens with fast, safe, and globally standardized services. He noted that the upgraded monitoring framework would further enhance the department's efficiency. The interior minister also highlighted improvements in passport security features, which have been upgraded to meet ICAO international standards. He noted that new automatic German printing machines have increased production capacity, eliminated human intervention in printing, and improved overall reliability. During his visit, the minister toured the e-Monitoring Room, Call Centre, Forensic Lab, and the modern Production Unit. Officials briefed him on the Digital Integrated Dashboard, which enables daily operational monitoring and staff performance evaluation. Under the new system, passport office circuit levels will be detected automatically, while the Network Management System will track backlog and machinery status. The Director General of FIA, DG Immigration and Passports, Chief Commissioner Islamabad, IG Islamabad Police, and other senior officials were also present.—DNA

## Pak's Islamic finance sector gains momentum

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Islamic finance sector has witnessed strong growth momentum as the Central Directorate of National Savings (CDNS) recorded Rs 23.6 billion in Shariah-compliant investment inflows during the period from July 1, 2025, to January 23, 2026. The achievement brings CDNS close to its annual Islamic finance target of Rs 25 billion for the ongoing fiscal year 2025-26, reflecting rising investor confidence in interest-free savings instruments amid the country's evolving financial landscape. A senior CDNS official termed the progress a clear indication of the growing preference for ethical and Shariah-compliant investment options. "We have revived and reinforced our focus on Islamic finance during the current fiscal year, which is expected to support sustainable growth of Pakistan's Islamic economy," the official said. He added that the issuance of dedicated Islamic bonds and Shariah-compliant savings certificates played a key role in attracting investors seeking halal returns while simultaneously contributing to national savings. The latest performance builds on CDNS's strong track record in Islamic finance. During the previous fiscal year 2024-25, the directorate successfully achieved its target of

Rs 24 billion in Islamic investments. Earlier, in FY 2023-24, CDNS mobilized around Rs 75 billion through Islamic bonds alone, laying a solid foundation for expanding Shariah-compliant products and institutional reforms.

Highlighting the broader significance of the sector, the official noted that Islamic finance has become an integral part of the global financial system and constitutes a substantial share of the economies of several major countries. In Pakistan, these initiatives are aligned with efforts to diversify financial products, promote a savings culture, and strengthen economic stability.

Apart from Islamic finance, CDNS has also shown robust performance in overall savings mobilization. By the end of December 2025, it had secured Rs 700 billion in inflows toward its ambitious savings target for FY 2025-26.

Ongoing reforms within the organization are aimed at improving efficiency, digitizing services, and introducing innovative products to cater to changing market needs.

With nearly 94 percent of its annual Islamic finance target already achieved midway through the fiscal year, CDNS appears well-positioned to meet—and potentially exceed—its goals, reinforcing Pakistan's push toward a more inclusive and resilient Islamic economic framework.—APP

## Pakistan's seafood exports to China near \$255m in 2025

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's seafood exports to China continued their upward trajectory in 2025, reaching nearly \$255 million, according to data from the General Administration of Customs of China (GACC). The gains were driven by sustained demand for frozen fish, cephalopods, and a growing range of processed seafood products in both coastal and inland markets. China Customs data show that Pakistan's seafood basket has diversified beyond traditional frozen fish, reflecting broader consumption channels and demand from foodservice and processing industries. Frozen fish remained the largest single export category, contributing about \$64.6 million to Pakistan's seafood exports to China. Imports of Pakistani frozen fish were concentrated in major coastal and metropolitan entry points. The southern province of Guangdong was the largest destination by value and volume, importing 8.48 million kilograms worth

strongly. Frozen sardines, sardinella, brisling, or sprats recorded imports of around \$14.9 million, supported by household consumption and demand from mass-market food manufacturers. In addition to core frozen seafood, Pakistan exported roughly \$14.4 million each in two higher value-added categories classified by China Customs as "fish" and "fish products," indicating a gradual shift toward processed seafood lines. These categories align with China's expanding market for convenience foods, e-commerce distribution, and ready-to-eat seafood products. Analysts attributed the overall growth to improved compliance with Chinese food safety requirements, expanded approvals for Pakistani processing facilities, and competitive pricing supported by Pakistan's marine resource base. Investment in cold-chain logistics and streamlined customs procedures also helped support higher volumes.—APP

## Info Minister felicitates newly elected office bearers

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar on Monday extended felicitations to the newly elected leadership of the Lahore Press Club. In his statement, the minister congratulated Arshad Ansari on being elected President of the Club. He also extended felicitations to Salman Qureshi on his election as Senior Vice President, Afzaal Talib as General Secretary, Nasira Ateeq and Madina Almas as Vice Presidents, Salik Nawaz as Finance Secretary, and Imran Sheikh as Joint Secretary of the Lahore Press Club. Tarar pledged all possible support for the welfare of journalists, emphasizing that the Press Club serves as a strong voice of the media fraternity and plays a vital role in promoting professional values and unity. He emphasized that press clubs serve a vital role in fostering professional values and enhancing unity among journalists. The minister voiced confidence that the new leadership of the Lahore Press Club will actively work to address journalists' concerns, strengthen the institution's welfare, and uphold press freedom.

The minister expressed hope that the new leadership would work with dedication for the promotion of professional journalism and the welfare of the journalist community.—APP

## Islamic finance sector gains momentum as CDNS achieves Rs 23.6b inflows

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## Thousands sit free skills entry test in Gwadar

GWADAR: Thousands of young men and women from Gwadar and surrounding villages gathered at Senator Ishaq Cricket Stadium to sit for the Bano Qabil entry test, turning the venue into a powerful display of hope, determination and ambition. Organized by the Alkhidmat Foundation, the test drew candidates from distant areas who arrived carrying admit cards and aspirations of building better futures for themselves and their families. Large sections of the stadium were filled with students seated in orderly rows, with young women making up a significant share of participants. Organizers said the Bano Qabil entry test represents the first step toward enrollment in free, market-oriented training programs designed to improve youth employability. Member of the Provincial Assembly Maulana Hidayat ur Rehman said education and skills are key to the region's development. "If our youth are equipped with education and skills, they will not only uplift Gwadar, Makran and Balochistan, but the entire country," he said. Hafiz Naem Ahmad described Bano Qabil as a "game changer," praising the strong participation of women. "I am happy to see so many people, especially the daughters of Gwadar, here in such large numbers," he said. "If women receive technical and vocational education, they will secure not only their own future but also that of their families." Students who qualify through the entry test will be offered free courses in information technology and vocational skills, including IT fundamentals, freelancing, graphic design and web development, along with other technical and professional training. Organizers said additional IT and vocational courses will be introduced in the region in future phases.—DNA

## Youth urged to play active role in inclusive governance

DNA

RAWALPINDI: The role of young people in strengthening inclusive governance and public decision-making was highlighted during a public dialogue held at Pir Mehr Ali Shah Arid Agriculture University (PMAS-AAUR). The event brought together a large number of students, faculty members, senior representatives of government institutions, and civil society leaders. The dialogue focused on how youth can move from being passive observers to active contributors in governance. Discussions centred on inclusive decision-making, integrity in public service, digital participation, and citizen-centred governance, while providing a platform for direct interaction between young people and public officials. Delivering the keynote address, Mukhtar Ahmad Ali, Executive Director of the Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI), said that inclusive governance lies at the heart of democracy and that youth have historically played a decisive role in Pakistan's political development. Referring to the Pakistan Movement, he said youth mobilisation was instrumental in the struggle for independence and that constitutional principles such as participation, equality, federalism, and fundamental rights continue to define democratic governance. He warned that growing disillusionment among young people could lead to disengagement and brain drain, stressing the need to restore public trust through democratic reforms, accountability, and adherence to constitutional values. The panel discussion was moderated by Mumtaz Mughal, Gender and Inclusion Expert and Director at the Aurat Foundation, and featured senior officials from federal, provincial, and local government institutions along with representatives from civil society. Qaiser Mehmood, Divisional Coordinator at the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women, highlighted Punjab's progress towards gender-responsive governance. He referred to initiatives including the Gender Parity Report, women-led district administrations, women police officers, gender cells in police stations, women helplines, virtual police stations, and regulatory reforms such as stricter controls on acid sales. He said inclusive governance requires shared responsibility between the state and citizens. Speaking from a disaster management perspective, Bushra Hassan Chaudary, Director Finance/ERRA Cell at the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), discussed the evolving role of youth in disaster preparedness and response. She said that since the 2005 earthquake, Pakistan has shifted from a reactive to a proactive disaster management approach, with emphasis on early warning systems, scientific forecasting, and community-based preparedness. Youth volunteers and interns, she added, often serve as first responders during emergencies. Addressing digital participation and civic engagement, Sadaf Khan, co-founder of Media Matters for Democracy, pointed to persistent gaps in digital access, particularly for women and marginalised communities. She cautioned that algorithm-driven platforms often reinforce polarisation and misinformation, underscoring the need for digital literacy, critical thinking, and responsible online engagement among young people. She said rebuilding trust between citizens and the state requires transparency and credible communication. Representing the local administration, Rabia Aurangzeb, Additional Commissioner and Director at the ICT Administration, emphasised the importance of inclusive governance at city and district levels, describing youth engagement as a key element of responsive public service delivery. Aliya Razak, Director Inclusion at the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), shared insights into initiatives aimed at improving access to legal identity for marginalised populations. She highlighted NADRA's efforts to strengthen inclusion and announced opportunities for youth engagement through outreach and facilitation mechanisms to expand identity registration services.—APP

## EU-India Partnership Blossoms

**I**n a vibrant display of diplomatic synergy, European Union leaders Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, and António Costa, President of the European Council, graced India's 77th Republic Day celebrations as chief guests. Their presence at the grand parade on Kartavya Path symbolized a deepening strategic alliance between the EU and India, culminating in the anticipated signing of a long-awaited Free Trade Agreement (FTA) tomorrow at the EU-India Summit. This milestone is poised to elevate bilateral relations to new heights, fostering economic growth and mutual prosperity in an era of global uncertainties. The FTA, negotiated over nearly two decades with renewed vigor since 2022, represents a triumph for free trade advocates. It aims to slash tariffs significantly – including India's reduction on EU cars from up to 110% to 40% – while addressing barriers in services, investments, and digital trade. Experts hail it as the "mother of all deals," especially amid rising U.S. tariffs under recent administrations, positioning the EU and India as counterweights in global commerce. The agreement is expected to boost trade volumes, create jobs, and enhance supply chain resilience, with projections of substantial cost reductions and expanded market access for both sides.

Bilateral trade between India and the EU already stands as a robust foundation for this partnership. In fiscal year 2024-25, merchandise trade reached approximately \$136 billion, with EU exports to India at around \$71 billion and imports at \$65 billion. Adding services, the total hovers near \$200 billion annually, encompassing sectors like IT, pharmaceuticals, and engineering. This figure underscores India's growing role as a key EU partner surpassing many regional ties and reflecting a decade of steady growth. India's proactive trade diplomacy extends beyond Europe, exemplifying its strategy to diversify partnerships and amplify exports. A prime example is the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the United Arab Emirates, formalized in 2022 but invigorated through high-level visits. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's trips to the UAE have catalyzed deals in energy, infrastructure, and fintech. Recently, during UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan's visit to India, both nations inked a 10-year LNG supply agreement and set an ambitious target of \$200 billion in bilateral trade by 2032. These moves align with India's broader push to reduce dependence on traditional markets, mitigate geopolitical risks, and position itself as a

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manufacturing hub under initiatives like "Make in India."

"In stark contrast, Pakistan's economic engagements with the EU and the United States reveal persistent challenges. EU-Pakistan trade totaled about €12 billion (\$13 billion) in 2024, with a €4.6 billion deficit for the EU, primarily in textiles and apparel. Similarly, Pakistan-U.S. trade stood at \$10.1 billion, dominated by exports like garments but showing limited growth despite historical alliances.

These volumes pale in comparison to India-EU figures, highlighting untapped potential amid strained relations. Foreign investment in Pakistan faces formidable barriers. European companies cite rampant corruption, bureaucratic red tape, and political instability as deterrents.

The IMF and World Bank reports emphasize how these issues erode investor confidence, with corruption perceptions ranking Pakistan low globally. Security risks, weak judicial systems, and infrastructure deficits further exacerbate the exodus of multinationals, with few American firms committing significant capital. U.S. investments remain minimal, reflecting broader hesitancy tied to governance concerns. Europe's skepticism extends to Pakistan's democratic processes. EU election observers have consistently flagged anomalies in polls, such as irregularities in vote counting and transparency lapses, straining bilateral ties. Reports from 2024 elections highlighted "glaring irregularities," prompting calls for reforms.

Pakistani authorities often contest these findings, viewing them as interference, yet they underscore Europe's emphasis on fair electoral systems as a prerequisite for deeper cooperation. Despite these hurdles, the EU has maintained Pakistan's Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) status since 2014, granting duty-free access for key exports. This decision, primarily political, aims to promote economic stability, human rights compliance, and good governance in vulnerable nations. It has boosted Pakistan's exports by 46% since inception, but ongoing scrutiny over conventions on labor and rights keeps the status under review.

The EU-India FTA and Republic Day festivities signal a pivotal shift in global trade dynamics, where strategic alignments reward stability and reform. For South Asia, this dichotomy underscores the dividends of robust governance: India's ascent as a trade powerhouse versus Pakistan's struggles with systemic reforms. Pakistan's top leadership is expected to visit the UAE to explore prospects for future business endeavors. The visit is also likely to focus on the Gaza Peace Board. Similarly, Pakistan is anticipated to play a role in defusing tensions between Saudi Arabia and the UAE, stemming from the UAE's proximity to Israel. As leaders toast to new beginnings, the region watches how these partnerships reshape economic landscapes.

## Pakistan's Choices as Iran Faces a New Encirclement

Qamar Bashir



This complexity is deepened by Pakistan's Middle East relationships. Beyond Saudi Arabia, Pakistan's economic and financial space has long been underpinned by Gulf cooperation through investment flows, energy arrangements, and vast remittance networks tied to Qatar, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates. Yet this support exists within a regional context where many Gulf states view Iran not only as a strategic competitor but also as a religious and political rival, accusing Tehran of deepening sectarian divides and projecting influence through proxies in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Palestine.

For Lana Pylaeva, a Komi human rights activist and analyst, 2026 will be shaped by a contradiction at the heart of state policy. On the surface, Moscow is paying unprecedented attention to Indigenous communities. Vladimir

Pakistan steered its ship with admirable composure during the "twelve-day war," which began with Israel-U.S. strikes on Iranian military and nuclear-linked targets in mid-June 2025 and escalated into sustained exchanges that lasted nearly two weeks, ending with a ceasefire around June 24. What made those twelve days unforgettable was not only the intensity, but the symbolism: Iran's missile and drone barrages repeatedly penetrated Israeli airspace, challenging the psychological aura surrounding Israel's multi-layered defense architecture – systems such as Iron Dome and David's Sling that the world had come to view as near-absolute protection. During that first phase, Tehran discovered that many relationships celebrated in peacetime become conditional in wartime. India – despite years of strategic engagement with Iran and the economic logic of connectivity projects designed to reach Central Asia – did not step forward in a manner Tehran expected. For Iranian observers, this was not merely silence; it felt like calculated distance, shaped by India's wider strategic alignments and its concern that any global momentum toward a Palestinian two-state framework could echo into renewed international scrutiny of Kashmir. The war thus exposed not only military fault lines, but diplomatic ones, revealing how quickly geopolitics can reorder loyalties when the costs of association rise. Pakistan, in that first phase, stood out as a notable exception. Islamabad's political and diplomatic signaling leaned toward defending Iran's sovereignty and opposing external aggression, a posture framed by regional media as meaningful support and a source of goodwill. Pakistan appeared willing to risk diplomatic discomfort to stand with a neighbor under direct attack, reinforcing a narrative of fraternal presence, signaling, and endurance. In this new moment, Pakistan's dilemma sharpens. The cost of being misunderstood becomes higher, the penalties of miscalculation more enduring. Islamabad must now decide how to protect its neighborhood, its economy, and its strategic credibility without turning itself into a battlefield, a base, or a bargaining chip in a contest far larger than any single state.

This complexity is deepened by Pakistan's Middle East relationships. Beyond Saudi Arabia, Pakistan's economic and financial space has long been underpinned by Gulf cooperation through investment flows, energy arrangements, and vast remittance networks tied to Qatar, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates. Yet this support exists within a regional context where many Gulf states

view Iran not only as a strategic competitor but also as a religious and political rival, accusing Tehran of deepening sectarian divides and projecting influence through proxies in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Palestine. In this environment, overt Pakistani alignment with Iran would be more likely to unsettle Gulf capitals than reassure them, potentially narrowing Pakistan's economic and diplomatic room for maneuver. Against this backdrop, Pakistan's first choice is open support for Iran – diplomatic, material, and, if forced by circumstances, kinetic. The appeal lies in moral clarity and neighborhood logic. Iran is a neighbor whose stability directly affects Pakistan's western frontier, border security, and internal cohesion. Open support would reassure Tehran that it is not alone again, strengthening long-term trust and potentially discouraging any future strategic drift that could expose Pakistan's flank. The cost, however, is immediate and tangible. Visible alignment against Washington risks economic retaliation, pressure through international financial channels, and political isolation in forums where U.S. influence remains decisive, while also unsettling Gulf partners who see Iran through a lens of rivalry rather than fraternity. The second choice is alignment with the United States and Israel – offering cooperation that could include intelligence sharing, logistical facilitation, or strategic access. This path promises short-term diplomatic favor and potential financial relief, but it is the most combustible domestically and regionally. It would inflame public sentiment, sharpen sectarian and political tensions, and almost certainly provoke Iranian hostility in ways that could destabilize Pakistan's western borderlands. The strategic blowback could be generational, recasting Pakistan's image across the Muslim world and entangling it in a conflict whose objectives and endgame are not of its own making. The third choice is declared neutrality. Pakistan would step back, deny its soil and airspace for conflict, and consistently call for de-escalation. The advantage is immediate insulation. Neutrality reduces the risk of becoming a direct target and preserves working channels with all parties. Yet neutrality in a pressure campaign can become a quiet punishment. Iran may still feel abandoned and revise its trust calculus. Washington may interpret restraint as passive resistance and still apply economic pressure. India could frame Pakistan as irrelevant or opportunistic while consolidating its own partnerships. Neutrality can be a shield, but it can also become an empty space others fill with their own narratives.

The fourth choice is calibrated dual-track strategy. Pakistan avoids loud, provocative rhetoric that triggers U.S. retaliation while quietly extending the maximum permissible support to Iran behind the curtain of diplomacy. This is survival statecraft in a world where economies can be choked without a single missile launched. The advantage is strategic breathing room: Pakistan preserves its financial and diplomatic channels while preventing Iran from feeling strategically orphaned. The risk is fragility. If exposed, secrecy can produce the worst of both worlds – U.S. anger without the protection of honesty and Iranian disappointment if the help appears too cautious or insufficient.

The fifth choice is multilateral internationalization – pushing the crisis into formal global forums such as the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and ad hoc contact groups involving China, Russia, Turkey, and key European states. Instead of positioning itself as a bilateral actor between Tehran and Washington, Pakistan frames itself as a convener and agenda-setter, shifting the burden of mediation, legitimacy, and pressure onto a wider coalition. The advantage is dilution of risk. Decisions and outcomes no longer rest on Pakistan's shoulders alone, and the crisis is embedded in a global framework that makes unilateral escalation politically costlier. The downside is loss of speed and influence. Multilateral processes are slow, consensus-driven, and often shaped by great-power rivalries that can stall momentum at the very moments when urgency is greatest. These five paths do not exist in isolation; they overlap, collide, and constrain one another. Pakistan cannot fully embrace one without partially touching the others. Open support for Iran strains Gulf and Western ties. Alignment with Washington risks regional backlash. Neutrality invites suspicion from all sides. Dual-track strategy demands discipline and secrecy. Multilateralization trades immediacy for legitimacy. The art of statecraft lies not in choosing a single lane, but in sequencing these options in a way that preserves room to maneuver as circumstances evolve. The most sustainable course for Pakistan lies in a disciplined blend of the fourth and fifth choices, anchored by the language of the third. Declared neutrality in public posture provides a shield against direct retaliation. Active, quiet stabilization with Iran preserves neighborly trust and reduces the risk of border spillover, refugee flows, and proxy escalation. Multilateral engagement internationalizes the crisis, embedding it in legal and diplomatic frameworks that slow the march toward unilateral coercion. At the same time, Pakistan must maintain cordial, pragmatic, and economically constructive relations with Washington, carefully calibrating its actions and rhetoric to avoid triggering sanctions or financial pressures that could further strain an already fragile economic landscape. The twelve-day war proved that old myths can break and that "friends" can vanish when bombs fall. The January 23 mobilization proves something else: pressure campaigns are built to last, and nations survive them through balance, not bravado. Pakistan's victory will not be found in loud slogans or reckless entanglement. It will be measured in its ability to protect its economy, preserve its Gulf lifelines, prevent western-border chaos, stand close enough to Iran to preserve brotherhood, far enough from provocation to deny adversaries a pretext for retaliation, and engaged enough with the world to ensure that when the region's future is negotiated, Pakistan is not merely present, but heard.

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

## What the Russia Reveal about 2026

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



For Lana Pylaeva, a Komi human rights activist and analyst, 2026 will be shaped by a contradiction at the heart of state policy. On the surface, Moscow is paying unprecedented attention to Indigenous communities. Vladimir Putin's declaration of 2026 as the "Year of the Unity of the Peoples of Russia" and the introduction of new official holidays project an image of cultural inclusion.

**A**s Russia enters 2026, attention is increasingly shifting away from the Kremlin's grand narratives towards the country's regions, republics and municipalities, where the long-term consequences of war, economic contraction and political centralisation are becoming harder to contain. From depleted regional budgets to simmering ethnic and social tensions, Russia's internal landscape is marked less by stability than by accumulated strain. Experts observing domestic politics, social movements and regional security point to a year in which financial stress, administrative reforms and grassroots responses will interact in unpredictable ways, shaping both political management and the possibilities of future transformation. According to András Tóth-Czifra, a specialist on Russia's domestic politics and political economy, the most immediate fault line in 2026 will run through regional and municipal finances. Most regions are beginning the year with lean budgets and exhausted fiscal reserves, the result of years of war-related spending, declining revenues and growing dependence on federal transfers. Yet while resources are tightening, social obligations are not diminishing. On the contrary, pressure on social policy including benefits, housing support and services for war veterans and their families is likely to remain intense. Early warning signs are already visible. In industrial regions such as Kemerovo and Irkutsk, authorities have been forced to juggle rising welfare commitments with weakening economic bases. Other territories dependent on extractive or declining industries may soon face similar crunches, as production slows, investment weakens and tax receipts fall. The political risk lies not only in unpaid bills, but in the erosion of governors' capacity to absorb shocks through discretionary spending and informal fixes. Tóth-Czifra also highlights the importance of the ongoing municipal administration reform. Designed to streamline governance, it has instead generated resentment among citizens and lower-tier elites who see it as another step towards the hollowing-out of local self-government. This backlash may not immediately translate into open protest, but it threatens to weaken the informal coalitions that have traditionally underpinned regional stability. With the 2026 State Duma election approaching, even limited disaffection within administrative layers could complicate electoral management and increase the costs of control. The reform carries another sensitive implication. By reducing the number

of lower-tier posts, it narrows the pool of positions into which returning war participants can be quietly absorbed. From the Kremlin's perspective, these appointments have served as a means of social pacification. Their contraction risks intensifying competition over resources and status, injecting further tension into already strained local political environments. While fiscal stress shapes the formal political arena, Iliuza Mukhamedianova, a Bashkir social researcher, argues that the deeper story of 2026 will unfold beyond official institutions. In the ethnic republics, she is paying closest attention to grassroots dynamics: local protests, cultural initiatives, educational projects and forms of low-visibility activism that rarely appear in national media but reveal the underlying condition of society. In Bashkortostan, this includes the aftershocks of the Baymak protests, which exposed the depth of resentment over environmental degradation, governance and cultural marginalisation. Environmental conflicts linked to resource extraction and land use remain particularly significant. In rural and Indigenous communities, disputes over quarries, forests and water systems often fuse economic grievances with questions of identity and dignity. These flashpoints are where social inequality, cultural survival and political resistance intersect most clearly. Mukhamedianova does not expect improvement at the institutional level. On the contrary, she anticipates a tightening of control, more repression and a narrowing of permissible public activity. Yet this does not imply social passivity. Across the republics, people are forming new informal networks, rediscovering mutual aid and experimenting with quieter forms of solidarity. These initiatives may lack the visibility of mass movements, but they cultivate skills, trust and narratives that could one day underpin broader change.

In the North Caucasus, the balance between containment and volatility remains particularly fragile. Harold Chambers,

who studied nationalism, conflict and security in the region, identifies three sets of variables to watch in 2026: socio-economic stress, extremist threats and the evolution of both peaceful and violent resistance. Economic pressures are likely to deepen. Infrastructure failures, inflation and unemployment continue to weigh heavily on republics already marked by demographic growth and limited opportunity. Against this backdrop, the risk of recruitment by extremist groups, including remnants of the Islamic State or more obscure violent networks, cannot be dismissed. Chambers also notes the symbolic and political importance of upcoming events, from Dagestan's parliamentary elections to the marking of five years since the killing of Aslan Byutukayev, the alleged Islamic State leader in Chechnya. Such anniversaries can serve as triggers, either for insurgent activity or for demonstrative security operations by the authorities. Two broader dynamics could drive instability. The first is the return of the Ukraine war to the domestic sphere: through the social consequences of mobilisation, the presence of traumatised veterans, and the extension of the conflict into Russian territory via drone attacks or sabotage. The second is the intensifying succession question in Chechnya. As Ramzan Kadyrov promotes his son Adam more openly, resistance is likely not only from within the republic but also from federal actors wary of hereditary rule. Efforts to undermine or bypass this succession plan could unsettle the delicate equilibrium that has defined Chechnya's post-war order. For Lana Pylaeva, a Komi human rights activist and analyst, 2026 will be shaped by a contradiction at the heart of state policy. On the surface, Moscow is paying unprecedented attention to Indigenous communities. Vladimir Putin's declaration of 2026 as the "Year of the Unity of the Peoples of Russia" and the introduction of new official holidays project an image of cultural inclusion. Internationally, Indigenous themes are increasingly woven into Russia's efforts to present itself as a decolonial alternative to Western powers. Yet this symbolic recognition is accompanied by intensifying repression. Indigenous activists were targeted in a new wave of arrests in December, and Pylaeva expects pressure to grow. Expressions of Indigenous identity are likely to be channelled into tightly managed festivals and exhibitions, while independent advocacy over land rights, language and self-determination faces shrinking space. At the same time, infrastructural and extractive projects in the Arctic and northern regions are accelerating. Pylaeva is closely monitoring plans ranging from open-air nature reserves and year-round resorts in the Northern Urals to prospective gold mining at the Chudnoe deposit. Particularly controversial are proposals to divert water from the Pechora and Northern Dvina rivers towards occupied Donbas projects that carry profound environmental and social risks. Against this backdrop, local activism in Komi, though constrained, remains a source of cautious optimism, sustaining the idea that resistance has not been extinguished.

## Briefs

### Indonesia receives Rafale jets

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has placed orders for as many as 42 Rafales, built by Dassault Aviation, as well as French frigates and submarines, as the archipelago steps up defence spending under President Prabowo Subianto, a former special forces commander. "The aircraft have been handed over and are ready for use by the Indonesian Air Force, Defence Ministry spokesperson Rico Ricardo Sirait said in a message in response to a Reuters query – the first confirmation that Indonesia has possession of the advanced military aircraft after striking an \$8 billion deal with France in 2022 and expanding it last year.

### T20 World Cup: Final decision...

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which is scheduled to begin next month, following their refusal to tour India over safety concerns in the wake of soured political relations between the Asian neighbours. The governing ICC rejected Bangladesh's request to move their matches to tournament co-host Sri Lanka, saying it was not feasible to change the schedule so close to the February 7 start of the tournament. Hours before the ICC had announced its decision, Naqvi had said that Bangladesh was being treated unfairly and should be allowed to participate in the tournament. At the time, he had said that Pakistan's participation was still not confirmed. "The prime minister is not in Pakistan right now. When he returns, I'll be able to give you our final decision," Naqvi had said.

### President Xi says India, China are...

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Xi said he hoped that both sides would expand exchanges and cooperation and address each other's concerns to promote healthy and stable relations. The nuclear-armed Asian neighbours share a 3,800 km border that is poorly demarcated and has been disputed since the 1950s. Ties between the countries were shaken by a 2020 clash in which 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers died in hand-to-hand combat. After that, the Himalayan border was heavily militarised by both sides. Both countries began improving ties last year after staging a series of high-level bilateral visits.

### UAE will not allow...

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adherence to international law, and respect for state sovereignty" were the best way to address "current crises". Iran has said it would treat any attack "as an all-out war against us", as the US dispatched a military aircraft carrier strike group and other assets in the Middle East earlier this month. US warships, including the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, several destroyers and fighter aircraft, started moving from the Asia-Pacific as tensions soared between Iran and the US in recent months.

### Saudi Arabia wants...

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leave Yemen, and I think that if indeed is the case and the UAE has completely left the issue of Yemen, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia will take responsibility," he added. "I think that will be the building block for making sure that the relationship with the UAE continues strong and continues to serve the interests not just of both countries but the region," he said. A public row had erupted between the two countries over Yemen after UAE-backed separatists seized swathes of land late last year, including areas along the Saudi border, infuriating Riyadh.

# Three Historic Monuments Unveiled at Lahore Fort



DNA

LAHORE: Sunday, 25 January 2026, historic monuments at Lahore Fort, the Sikh-era Hammam, the Athdara Pavilion, and the Loh Temple, were officially inaugurated following extensive conservation work funded by the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP). The restoration was carried out by Aga Khan Cultural Service – Pakistan (AKCS-P) in partnership with the Walled City of Lahore Authority (WCLA). The unveiling is part of a broader initiative, "Preservation and Promotion of Cross-Cultural Edifices of Lahore Fort," which aims to safeguard and celebrate the Fort's rich heritage. Previously, two other historic sites, the Sikh-era Temple and the Imperial Zenana Mosque, were restored under the same program. Together, these projects cover seven key monuments within the Fort, reflecting its layered history of Mughal, Sikh, Hindu, and British influences.

The Loh Temple complex, near the Alamgiri Gate, includes interconnected chambers that contain ritual features indicative of Hindu practices, alongside elements associated with the Sikh Era. The Athdara Pavilion, located in the northwest precinct of the Shah Jahan Forecourt Quadrangle, was built during the Sikh period and historically functioned as a public court. The Sikh Hammam, situated at the northeast corner of the Sheesh Mahal Quadrangle, was originally constructed during Emperor Shah Jahan's reign and later adapted as a hammam during the Sikh era. The inauguration ceremony, which took place at the Shah Burj Forecourt, was presided over by Provincial Minister for Minorities Affairs in Punjab, Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora, as the Chief Guest. Sandeep Paul, Public Affairs Officer of the U.S. Consulate in Lahore, was the guest of honour. The event brought together a diverse group of guests from academia, government, and the arts community. Opening remarks were delivered by Tausif Khawaja, CEO of AKCS-P, followed by speeches from Public Affairs Officer Sandeep Paul of the U.S. Consulate and Najamus Saqib, Director General of WCLA, highlighting the cultural significance of the Fort and the importance of its preservation. Speaking on the occasion, Sandeep Paul highlighted the strategic partnership between the United



States and Pakistan, noting heritage conservation as a key area of collaboration. "Preserving the past is not about nostalgia; it is about investing wisely in the future. These restored monuments will attract visitors, create economic opportunities, and stand as lasting symbols of what we can accomplish together," he remarked. CEO AKCS-P, Tausif Khawaja, stressed the cultural and historical importance of the sites. "The cross-cultural edifices of the Lahore Fort embody cross-cultural harmony. The Loh temple, which is being inaugurated today is a historically important monument and a sacred one that visitors from across the border come to visit. Similarly, the Athdara Pavilion may appear to be a simple structure, but of great significance within the Sikh community as Maharaja Ranjit Singh would hold his court here. Behind this structure is the Sikh Hammam made during the Sikh period, which has exquisite and delicate oil paintings visible on its surfaces," he said. The conservation process was highlighted in a presentation delivered by Wajahat Ali, Director of Conservation and Design at AKCS-P, detailing the initial condition of the sites, challenges encountered, and techniques used.

Director General Walled City of Lahore Authority, Najamus Saqib, described the Lahore Fort as a representation of notable periods of history, spanning the Mughal era and the British era with strong footprints of every time-period. "We, along with our partners, are working to preserve all these footprints so that generations to come can understand the importance of each era, which is distinct in its own way." Provincial Minister for Minorities Affairs in Punjab, Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora reflected over the history of Punjab's inclusivity, which the restored sites signified. "This project is significant not only for the conservation of the historic structures but also for what it represents: the recognition and protection of Punjab's pluralistic heritage. It stands as a powerful reminder that Lahore has long been a shared civilization of people of different faiths and cultures." The programme included ribbon-cutting ceremonies at the Loh Temple, Sikh Hammam and Athdara Pavilion, followed by site visits. The event concluded with the presentation of souvenirs to the attending dignitaries by Luis Monreal, General Manager, Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC).

## Timberwolves resume NBA play amid Minneapolis turmoil

MINNEAPOLIS: Minnesota Timberwolves coach Chris Finch said the NBA team was "heartbroken" by events unfolding in Minneapolis, where federal agents shot dead a second US citizen amid the Trump administration's mass immigration crackdown.

An emotional Finch spoke to reporters shortly before the Timberwolves took on the Golden State Warriors in Minneapolis on Sunday, a game postponed from Saturday when the city was sent reeling by the shooting death of Alex Petti, a 37-year-old ICU nurse, less than three weeks after an immigration officer fired on Renee Good, also 37, killing her in her car. "As an organization, we are heartbro-

ken for what we are having to witness and endure and watch," Finch said. "We just want to extend our thoughts, prayers and concern for Mr. Petti's family, all the loved ones, and everyone involved in such an unconscionable situation in a community that we really love."

The Timberwolves honored Petti with a moment of silence that ended amid explosive-laced chants against ICE (US Immigration and Customs Enforcement).

Warriors coach Steve Kerr called it "one of the most bizarre, sad games I've ever been a part of" after his team trounced the Timberwolves 111-85. Kerr, who said he felt the home team was "suffering," has been an outspoken critic

of President Donald Trump who had called the shooting of Good "shameful." On Sunday he said it was time for Americans to appeal to their "better angels" in a era of extremism.

"People are so angry. There should be an appeal to our better angels to look after one another and to recognize what's happening," Kerr said. "It's hard to decipher what's real and what's not, what's true and what's not true – people arguing over the exact same video and saying 'this happened, no, that happened.'" Kerr said the loss of life is "the number one concern." "When all the unrest settles down, whenever that is, those family members won't be returning home

and that's devastating," said Kerr, whose university president father was shot dead in Beirut by Islamic militants in 1984.

Both coaches praised the decision to postpone the game. "Playing basketball just didn't feel like the right thing to do," Finch said.

The NBA's Players Association issued a statement on Sunday saying players "stand in solidarity with the people in Minnesota protesting and risking their lives to demand justice." "The fraternity of NBA players, like the United States itself, is a community enriched by its global citizens, and we refuse to let the flames of division threaten the civil liberties that are meant to protect us all." – Agencies

## Major storm paralyzes life in eastern US

NEW YORK: More than 500,000 customers in the U.S. as far west as New Mexico were without electricity and over 8,000 flights were canceled on Sunday as a major winter storm paralyzed life in the eastern states with heavy snowfall. Forecasters said snow, sleet, freezing rain and dangerously frigid temperatures would sweep the eastern two-thirds of the nation on Sunday and into the 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 (DHS) said.

DHS Secretary Kristi Noem, at a news conference on Saturday, warned Americans to take precautions.

"It's going to be very, very cold," Ms. Noem said. "So we'd encourage everybody to stock up on fuel, stock up on food, and we will get through this together." The number of power outages continued to rise. As of 12 noon Sunday, more than 500,000 U.S. customers were without electricity, according to PowerOutage.us, with at least 200,000 in Tennessee and over 50,000 each in Mississippi, Texas and Louisiana. Other states affected included Kentucky, Georgia, North Carolina and Alabama. – APP

## UFC 324: Justin Gaethje dominates Paddy Pimblett to win lightweight title

Gaethje dominates Pimblett to win interim lightweight belt as O'Malley returns to form, Cortes-Acosta scores KO, Silva beats Namajunas and Cruz named to UFC Hall of Fame at UFC 324

LAS VEGAS: Justin Gaethje opened the Paramount era with a bang, dominating rising star Paddy Pimblett to win the interim UFC lightweight title belt at UFC 324 on Saturday. Gaethje's win gave him his second career interim lightweight championship and sets up an undisputed title fight against Ilia Topuria, who stepped away last November amid mounting personal issues but is expected to return at some point in 2026. The 37-year-old Gaethje (27-5-0) dominated the bout, landing 56% of his significant strikes while succeeding on all three of his takedown attempts.

Gaethje nearly finished Pimblett two minutes into

the first round before Pimblett miraculously found his way out. The second round saw Gaethje nearly finish the Englishman for a second time in the closing seconds before Pimblett was narrowly saved by the bell. Pimblett briefly found new life in the third, taking advantage of a tiring Gaethje, but the damage he suffered throughout the fight proved too much to overcome in the championship rounds as Gaethje eventually got his second wind in the fourth. The loss

## UN rights chief slams US treatment of migrants

UNITED NATIONS: The UN's top human rights official has raised alarm over what he described as the growing dehumanisation of migrants in the United States, warning that current immigration enforcement practices are undermining due process, family unity and basic human dignity. In a news release, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Turk, said individuals suspected of being undocumented migrants are being surveilled, arrested and detained – sometimes violently – in locations ranging from hospitals and places of worship to courthouses, schools, markets and private homes. The UN rights chief said he was "astounded by the now-routine abuse and denigration of migrants and refugees."

He warned that fear generated by such federal operations is rippling through communities, with children missing school and medical appointments, out of concern that their parents may not return. "Those who dare to speak up or protest peacefully against heavy-handed immigration raids are vilified and threatened by officials, and on occasion subjected to arbitrary violence themselves," Turk said.

He said numerous migration policies now being implemented by US authorities are resulting in arbitrary and unlawful arrests and detentions, as well as flawed removal decisions.

He expressed concern that enforcement actions often lacked sufficient individualized assessments. – APP



was Pimblett's first in UFC since joining from his native England, snapping a nine-fight winning streak and dropping him to 23-4-0 in his career. O'Malley ends losing skid Sean O'Malley, one of the company's biggest stars, ended a two-fight losing skid in the co-main event with a controversial unanimous decision victory over Song Yadong of China. The first two rounds could have arguably gone to Song, but the third round made all the difference on the cards as O'Malley (19-3-0) finished strong with a convincing third round against Song (22-9-1), which proved to be the difference. – APP

## Hockey clubs scrutiny; PHF elections generate debate

Pirzada added that the PSB is now formulating a proper procedure and methodology for scrutinizing hockey clubs to ensure transparency and fairness ahead of any elections. The session witnessed heated exchanges between MNAs Khawaja Iftikhar ul Hassan and Shehla Raza. Khawaja Iftikhar accused a female member of the committee of supporting a private company involved in the dispute.

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly Standing Committee on Inter-Provincial Coordination, chaired by MNA Sheikh Aftab Ahmed, convened a tense session today to address the long-standing issue of elections in the Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF). The meeting brought together key stakeholders, including Director General Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) Muhammad Yasir Pirzada, Secretary PHF, Olympians Shahbaz Senior, Samiullah, and Shahbaz Sheikh, amid sharp exchanges between committee members. DG PSB Yasir Pirzada informed the committee that the PHF has registered over 1,100 hockey clubs on its portal. However, he highlighted serious irregularities in the registration process. At

the start of scrutiny, 19 districts had only five hockey clubs each, raising questions about authenticity and coverage. He further revealed that not a single hockey club in Islamabad met all required criteria and standards, underscoring systemic issues in club verification nationwide. Pirzada added that the PSB is now formulating a proper procedure and methodology for scrutinizing hockey clubs to ensure transparency and fairness ahead of any elections. The session witnessed heated exchanges between MNAs Khawaja Iftikhar ul Hassan and Shehla Raza. Khawaja Iftikhar accused a female member of the committee of supporting a private company involved in the dispute. He claimed the ongoing conflict stems from tensions between an association and this private company, with one MNA allegedly representing the company's interests. "No

MNA has the right to represent a private company," he asserted, adding that individuals banned by the PHF are stakeholders in this company. Shehla Raza countered by alleging irregularities under Tariq Bugti's leadership. She claimed Bugti was previously authorized only to conduct PHF elections but instead appointed himself president. She further accused the federation of registering "favorite" hockey clubs selectively, bypassing proper rules. Chairman Sheikh Aftab intervened, reminding members of the committee's dignity and urging restraint, stating: "This is a committee – please show some consideration." The committee issued a clear mandate to the PHF and PSB to resolve the impasse. Discussions focused on expediting club scrutiny in collaboration with the PSB, forming an election

## CM Afridi calls for federal dialogue

FROM PAGE 01

government are reluctant to accept a boy from the tribal region as Chief Minister." He recalled that in the past two years, certain circles in the federal government have broken all previous records of political victimization. He stressed that it is time for the federal government to acknowledge its missteps and recognize the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government as the elected representative of over 40 million people. On the issue of the Tirra Valley, Afridi reiterated his position that military operations are no longer effective solutions to terrorism. "Over the last two decades, numerous military operations have proven meaningless," he said, urging the federal government to adopt a positive and civilized approach. He recommended inclusive policymaking, involving all stakeholders, noting that unrealistic federal policies have exacerbated terrorism, extremism, and other challenges, while complicating Pakistan's diplomatic relations with Afghanistan and other countries. Afridi also raised concerns over Pakistan's broader political and economic situation. He said the country faces severe security, administrative, and economic challenges, while political and parliamentary institutions are losing credibility. "Due to military involvement, almost all civil institutions are struggling with governance, affecting the country's global reputation," he added. With foreign reserves heavily reliant on grants and loans, Pakistan risks economic collapse. In conclusion, the Chief Minister called for patient, tolerant dialogue among federal and state institutions. He emphasized that without ending internal rifts and hostilities, it will be difficult for Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif or Chief of Defence Forces Gen. Asim Muneeb to address terrorism, extremism, economic disorder, and political turmoil. CM Afridi reiterated that Rawalpindi and Islamabad must respect the mandate of the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, adding that such steps would place the federal government in a stronger position to tackle both internal and external challenges.

## Pakistan, Myanmar vow to make ties stronger

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As the visit progresses, further details on agreements or joint initiatives are anticipated. This diplomatic exchange reflects Pakistan's active foreign policy in engaging with diverse partners across Asia.

## President approves seven bills passed by Parliament

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Protection) Bill, 2026; The Daanish Schools Authority Bill, 2026; The Income Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2026; and The National Commission for Human Rights (Amendment) Bill, 2026.

## SBP keeps interest rate unchanged..

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including large-scale manufacturing (LSM), economic activity continues to gain momentum faster than anticipated, mainly led by domestic-oriented sectors," it added. The MPC noted an increase in the trade deficit in the wake of a substantial rise in imports, particularly in import volumes, and a decline in exports. However, resilient workers' remittances and benign global commodity prices helped keep the current account deficit relatively contained. "In this backdrop, the MPC noted that the outlook for inflation and the current account are broadly unchanged from its previous assessment, while the outlook for economic growth has improved significantly," the SBP said.

## Briefs

## Rupee gains 01 paisa against US Dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Monday appreciated by 01 paisa against the US Dollar in interbank trading and closed at Rs 279.85 compared to the previous day's closing at Rs 279.86.

According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs 280.85 and Rs 282.55, respectively. The price of the Euro increased by Rs 3.71 to close at Rs 331.47 from the previous day's close of Rs 328.30, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese Yen went up by 05 paisa and closed at Rs 1.81, whereas the exchange rate of the British Pound witnessed an increase of Rs 4.6 and closed at Rs 382.08 compared to the previous day's Rs 377.48. The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham remained unchanged to close at Rs 76.19, while the Saudi Riyal declined by 01 paisa and closed Rs 74.62, respectively.—APP

Gold price surges to Rs 10,900 per tola

ISLAMABAD: Gold prices surged to an all-time high in the local market on Monday as the price of 24-karat gold per tola jumped by Rs10,900 to settle at Rs532,062. The price of 10 grams of 24-karat gold also jumped by Rs9,345 to Rs456,157, while, the price of 10 grams of 22-karat gold rose by Rs8,567 to Rs418,159, according to the All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association.

Silver prices also witnessed an upward trend, with the price of 24-karat silver per tola increasing by Rs627 to Rs11,428, whereas the price of 10 grams of silver went up by Rs537 to Rs9,797. In the international market, gold prices climbed by \$109 to reach \$5,097 per ounce, marking a fresh record, while silver prices rose by \$6.27 to \$109.53 per ounce, the association reported.—APP

World urged to prevent any steps undermining UNRWA's role

CAIRO: Egypt expressed its full support for the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and all humanitarian and relief organizations operating in the occupied Palestinian territories, calling on the international community to prevent any measures that would undermine UNRWA's role or infringe upon its mandate. In a statement issued today, the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasized the vital importance of the role played by these agencies in providing essential services to Palestinian refugees and the civilian population. The Ministry condemned the Israeli occupation forces' demolition of an UNRWA facility in occupied East Jerusalem, considering it a flagrant violation of international law and international resolutions, and an unacceptable infringement upon the immunity and property of United Nations institutions. The statement expressed Egypt's deep concern regarding the unprecedented restrictions and violations imposed on these institutions, which impede their ability to carry out their duties and negatively impact the delivery of humanitarian aid and services. This constitutes a clear violation of international humanitarian law and the rules protecting UN agencies and humanitarian personnel. The statement emphasized that UNRWA plays a pivotal and irreplaceable role as the UN agency mandated to provide educational, health, and relief services to millions of Palestinian refugees. It stressed that any attempts to undermine the agency's existence or diminish its role directly infringe upon the rights of refugees and attempt to evade the international community's responsibility towards them. The statement further affirmed that UNRWA's existence is inextricably linked to the Palestinian question itself and to the historical international commitment to the refugee issue until a just—APP



MULTAN: Senate Chairman Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani with philanthropists and civil society organisations at PPAF's Community Infrastructure and Economic Empowerment Initiatives in Punjab.

## Rubio warns Iraq on Iran ties as Al-Maliki sets return

Iraq's parliament meets Tuesday to elect a new president, who holds a largely ceremonial role but will appoint a prime minister

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Marco Rubio warned Iraq on Sunday against a pro-Iranian government as the expected return of Nouri Al-Maliki as prime minister stirs Washington's concern. Maliki, who left power in 2014 following heated pressure from the United States, has been chosen by Iraq's largest Shiite bloc, which would put him in line to be nominated prime minister. Rubio, in a telephone call with incumbent Prime Minister Mohammad Shia Al-Sudani, voiced hope the next government will work to make Iraq "a force for stability, prosperity and security in the Middle East." "The secretary emphasized that a government controlled by Iran can-

not successfully put Iraq's own interests first, keep Iraq out of regional conflicts or advance the mutually beneficial partnership between the United States and Iraq," Rubio said, according to State Department spokesman Tommy Piggott. A pro-Iranian government in Iraq would be a rare boon for Tehran's clerical state after it suffered major setbacks at home and in the region. The Islamic republic has killed thousands of Iranians since mass protests erupted in late December. Since the October 7, 2023 attacks, Israel has hit Iran both with strikes inside the country and heavy blows against Tehran's Lebanese ally Hezbollah, while Iran lost its main Arab ally with the fall of

Bashar Assad in Syria. An Iraqi political source told AFP that the United States had conveyed that it "holds a negative view of previous governments led by former prime minister Maliki." In a letter, US representatives said that while the selection of the prime minister is an Iraqi decision, "the United States will make its own sovereign decisions regarding the next government in line with American interests." The United States wields key leverage over Iraq as the country's oil export revenue is largely held at the Federal Reserve Bank in New York, in an arrangement reached after the 2003 US invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein. Chief among US demands is that Iraq pre-

vent a resurgence of Shiite armed groups backed by Iran. Sudani, who took office in 2022, has won US confidence through his delicate efforts to curb violence by the groups. Maliki initially took office in 2006 with support of the United States as he strongly backed US military efforts against Al-Qaeda in Iraq and other Sunni militants. But the United States eventually soured on Maliki, believing he pushed an excessively sectarian agenda that helped give rise to the Islamic State extremist movement. Iraq's parliament meets Tuesday to elect a new president, who holds a largely ceremonial role but will appoint a prime minister.—APP

## UN Palestinian refugee agency says demolished HQ set on fire

JERUSALEM: The United Nations' agency for Palestinian refugees said Sunday that its partially demolished headquarters in occupied East Jerusalem was set on fire.

The agency, UNRWA, did not offer details on the cause of the incident at their premises, which Israeli authorities seized and began dismantling last week after banning the organization from operating in the country in 2025. After having been stormed and demolished by the Israeli authorities, the UNRWA Headquarters in occupied East Jerusalem has now been set on fire," the agency said in a statement. It described the blaze as part of an "ongoing attempt to dismantle the status of Palestine Refugees." The fire and rescue service said early Sunday that it had responded to a call at the facility, where it was working to "extinguish the blaze and prevent it from spreading," also without offering a cause. The UN had slammed last week's seizure and demolitions, and UNRWA insisted that its property remained protected by the privileges and immunities of the UN, a view it repeated on Sunday. "Like any UN Member State anywhere in the world, without exception, Israel is legally obliged to protect and respect UN facilities," UNRWA spokesman Jonathan Fowler told AFP on Sunday. UNRWA was created specifically for the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians displaced during the creation of Israel in 1948, and provides refugee status registration and health and education services. Its compound in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem has been empty of staff since January 2025, when the law banning its operations took effect. Israel accuses UNRWA of providing cover for Hamas militants, and a series of investigations found "neutrality-related issues" at the agency but held that Israel had not provided conclusive evidence. UNRWA still operates in the occupied West Bank and Gaza.—APP

## Only 4% women on ballot in Bangladesh

DHAKA: As Bangladesh prepares for the first election since the ouster of its long-serving ex-prime minister Sheikh Hasina, only 4 percent of the registered candidates are women, as more than half of the political parties did not field female candidates. The vote on Feb. 12 will bring in new leadership after an 18-month rule of the caretaker administration that took control following the student-led uprising that ended 15 years in power of Hasina's Awami League party. Nearly 128 million Bangladeshis will head to the polls, but while more than 62 million of them are women, the percentage of female candidates in the race is incomparably lower, despite last year's consensus reached by political parties to have at least 5 percent women on their lists. According to the Election Commission, among 1,981 candidates only 81 are women, in a country that in its 54 years of independence had for 32 years been led by women prime ministers — Hasina and her late rival Khaleda Zia. According to Dr. Rasheda Rawnak Khan from the Department of Anthropology at Dhaka University, women's political participation was neither reflected by the rule of Hasina nor Zia. "Bangladesh has had women rulers, not women's rule," Khan told Arab News. "The structure of party politics in Bangladesh is deeply patriarchal." Only 20 out of 51 political parties nominated female candidates for the 2026 vote. Percentage-wise, the Bangladesh Socialist Party was leading with nine women, or 34 percent of its candidates. The election's main contender, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, whose former leader Zia in 1991 became the second woman prime minister of a predominantly Muslim nation — after Pakistan's Benazir Bhutto — was the party that last year put forward the 5 percent quota for women. For the upcoming vote, however, it ended up nominating only 10 women, or 3.5 percent of its 288 candidates. The second-largest party, Jamaat-e-Islami, has not nominated a single woman. The 4 percent participation is lower than in the previous election in 2024, when it was slightly above 5 percent, but there was no decreasing trend. In 2019, the rate was 5.9 percent, and 4 percent in 2014. "We have not seen any independent women's political movement or institutional activities earlier, from where women could now participate in the election independently," Khan said. "Real political participation is different and difficult as well in this patriarchal society, where we need to establish internal party democracy, protection from political violence, ensure direct election, and cultural shifts around female leadership." While the 2024 student-led uprising featured a prominent presence of women activists, Election Commission data shows that this has not translated into their political participation, with very few women contesting the upcoming polls. "In the student movement, women were recruited because they were useful, presentable for rallies and protests both on campus and in the field of political legitimacy. Women were kept at the forefront for exhibiting some sort of 'inclusive' images to the media and the people," Khan said. "To become a candidate in the general election, one needs to have a powerful mentor, money, muscle power, control over party people, activists, and locals. Within the male-dominated networks, it's very difficult for women to get all these things.—APP

## Rana opens mega leather show, underscores govt's trade focus

The Mega Leather Show stands as a pivotal platform for Pakistan's industrial economy. Recognized as a major conduit for business generation, innovation, and export promotion, the event this year has drawn significant participation, hosting over 200 exhibitors



German defense minister asks Trump to apologize for Afghanistan remarks

BERLIN: German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius has called on US President Donald Trump to apologize for remarks suggesting that America's NATO allies in Afghanistan avoided frontline service, joining a chorus of criticism from European politicians and army veterans. Trump caused deep offense among US allies when he told Fox Business Network last week that the US had "never needed" the transatlantic alliance and accused allies of staying "a little off the front lines" in Afghanistan. "It's just not right and it's disrespectful to talk about the dead of your allies in that way. They all stood there, at the side of the United States. To claim something else today is simply not true," he told a talk show on Germany's ARD public broadcaster late on Sunday. Thousands of German troops took part in NATO's Operation Enduring Freedom and Resolute Support missions in Afghanistan and 59 were killed. The operations were launched following the Al-Qaeda attacks on the United States. Pistorius said he would bring up the issue the next time he spoke with US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and he urged Trump to apologize.—APP

US defense official hails 'model ally' in South Korea talks 00:0000:30

SEoul: The Pentagon's number three official hailed South Korea as a "model ally" as he met with local counterparts in Seoul on Monday, days after Washington's new defense strategy called for reduced support for partners overseas. Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Elbridge Colby arrived in South Korea on Monday and is seen as a key proponent of President Donald Trump's "America First" foreign policy. That policy — detailed in Washington's 2026 National Defense Strategy (NDS) released last week — calls for the United States to prioritize deterring China and for long-standing US allies to take "primary responsibility" for their own defense. Arriving in Seoul on his first overseas trip as the Pentagon's number three official, Colby in a post on X called South Korea a "model ally." And he praised President Lee Jae Myung's pledge to spend 3.5 percent of the country's GDP on the military. That decision, he told a forum, "reflects a clear-eyed and sage understanding of how to address the security environment that we all face and how to put our storied and historic alliance on solid footing for the long haul," according to South Korea's Yonhap News Agencies.—APP

KEC earns Dual Recognition at GEA

MADINAH: The Knowledge Economic City (KEC) has won two awards at the Global Economics Awards 2025: "Most Innovative Iconic Project Design — Madinah Gate" and "Leading Developer of Integrated Urban Destinations." This recognition reflects KEC's ambition to cement Madinah's standing as a global model for integrated urban development. The KEC is developing destinations that place people at the heart of the experience, improve quality of life and generate sustainable economic value in line with the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030. The Madinah Gate project is one of the cornerstone projects within KEC's master plan. It is the first retail destination located directly at the Haramain High-Speed Railway station, and the Kingdom's first transit-oriented development of its kind, with investments of up to SAR620 million. Its first phase includes more than 23,000 square meters of leasable space, along with the DoubleTree by Hilton Madinah Gate, which features 325 hotel rooms.—APP

**Briefs**

**Ferry accident in Philippines leaves at least 18 dead**

DNA

MANILA: A ferry with more than 350 people onboard sank early Monday in choppy seas off the southern Philippines, killing at least 18 and leaving 24 still missing, the coast guard said. The MV Trisha Kerstin 3 issued a distress signal around 1:50am (1750 GMT Sunday), a bit over four hours after it departed the Port of Zamboanga City on the southwestern tip of Mindanao, the coast guard said in a statement. Video released by the governor of Basilan province showed barefoot survivors being wrapped in blankets and placed on gurneys, while victims of the sinking were carried past in body bags. The triple-decker vessel went down on nearly the same route where 31 people died in 2023 after a fire aboard the Lady Mary Joy 3 ferry. Both ships were owned by locally based Ale-son Shipping Lines.

At least 317 people have so far been rescued, according to the most recent tally by the Philippine Coast Guard, with 18 confirmed dead and 24 still unaccounted for amid an ongoing search-and-rescue operation. Sheryl Balondo, a rescuer in Isabela City, one of two municipalities where survivors were being taken, said their office had received more than 100 phone calls from concerned family members. "There's a tug in our hearts whenever we pick up a call. Their voices sounded worried," she said. "What we can only say is that, as of now, we don't have the final list (of names), because the search and retrieval operation is ongoing."

**Court sentences ex-police chief**

DHAKA: A Bangladesh court on Monday sentenced Dhaka's fugitive former police chief and two senior colleagues to be hanged for crimes against humanity committed during the rule of ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina. All three, including the capital's former police chief, Habibur Rahman, were tried in absentia, and their whereabouts are not known. The verdict comes ahead of elections on February 12, the first in the South Asian country of 170 million people since Hasina's overthrow in August 2024.

Five other ex-police officers were sentenced to varying terms. The case concerned the killing of six protesters in Dhaka on August 5, 2024, the day Hasina fled to India as protesters stormed her palace. Up to 1,400 people were killed between July and August 2024 when Hasina's government launched a brutal campaign to silence the protesters, according to UN. "The police forces... opened fire with lethal weapons... causing death to the aforesaid six persons," judge Golam Mortuza Mozumder read to the court in Dhaka. The court heard how Rahman sent messages to police units ordering the use of lethal force to crush the protests. - APP

**REPUBLIC DAY OF INDIA**



ISLAMABAD: Charge d'Affaires of India Geetika Srivastava, Ambassadors and High Commissioners of SAARC countries including Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Maldives cutting cake to celebrate the 77th Republic Day of India. A large number of people from various walks of life attended the reception. - DNA

Pakistani citizen returns home after 25 years in Indian jail

DNA

RAHIM YAR KHAN: A Pakistani national has returned home after being freed from Indian custody, where he spent 25 years in prison after inadvertently crossing the Pakistan-India border while hunting. His release was ordered by the Indian Supreme Court.

He was warmly welcomed by local residents upon his arrival. According to details, Asghar Ali, a resident of Chak 170-P near Sadiqabad, mistakenly crossed into Indian territory in 2000 while hunting. He was immediately taken into custody by Indian security forces and later charged with terrorism and espionage.

An Indian court sentenced him to imprisonment until 2010. Despite completing his sentence, Ali alleged that just before his release, new charges were fabricated against him, accusing him of orchestrating an attack while still in jail.

Based on these allegations, another court sentenced him again, extending his imprisonment. After years of legal struggle, Ali filed an appeal in the Indian Supreme Court, which accepted his plea and ordered his release. Following his freedom, he returned to his hometown of Chak 170-P in Sadiqabad after 25 years, where residents gave him a grand and emotional welcome.

# EU give final approval to Russian gas ban

European Union to halt Russian LNG by end-2026, pipeline gas by 2027

DNA

BRUSSELS: European Union countries on Monday gave their final approval to ban Russian gas imports by late 2027, making their vow to cut ties with their former top supplier legally binding, nearly four years after Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Ministers from EU countries approved the law at a meeting in Brussels on Monday, although Slovakia and Hungary voted against, and Bulgaria abstained. Hungary said it would challenge the law at the European Court of Justice. The ban was designed to be approved by a reinforced majority of countries, allowing it to overcome opposition from Hungary and Slovakia, who remain heavily reliant on Russian energy imports and want to maintain close ties with Moscow. Under the agreement, the EU will halt Russian liquefied natural gas imports by end-2026 and pipeline gas by September 30, 2027.

The law allows that deadline to shift to November 1, 2027, at the latest, if a country is struggling to fill its storage caverns with non-Russian gas ahead of winter. Russia supplied more than 40% of the EU's gas before 2022. That share dropped to around 13% in 2025, according to the latest available EU data. But some

EU countries continue to pay Moscow for oil, pipeline gas and liquefied natural gas, contradicting their efforts to support Ukraine and restrict funding to Russia's wartime economy. Last month, the five biggest EU importers spent \$1.66 billion on Russian energy, mostly on gas and LNG, data from the non-profit Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air showed. Hungary was the biggest buyer, before France and Belgium. The EU imposed sanctions on Russian seaborne oil in 2022, but never proposed sanctions on gas imports, which would require unanimous approval from all 27 EU countries. The EU law prohibits companies from signing new Russian gas deals and will require those with existing contracts to terminate them to comply with the ban.

For existing contracts, imports under short-term deals signed before June 17, 2025, will be banned on April 25, 2026, for LNG, and June 17 for pipeline gas. Long-term contracts must be phased out by the final deadlines. Companies could face financial penalties of up to 3.5% of total global annual turnover for failure to comply.

The European Commission plans to also propose legislation in the coming months to phase out Russian pipeline oil, and wean countries off Russian nuclear fuel.

## Bangladesh panel says Adani power deal overpriced

NEW DELHI: A panel of experts appointed by the Indian government has concluded that an Adani Power coal-fired plant in Bangladesh is overpriced. The panel, which included economists and energy experts, found that the plant's electricity generation costs are significantly higher than those of local private sector competitors. The report also found that the plant's construction and operational costs are higher than expected, leading to a higher overall cost of electricity generation. The report recommended that the government should negotiate a lower price for the electricity generated by the plant.

## Lawyers stage protest outside IHC

The case pertaining to controversial social media posts stems from a complaint filed on Aug 12, 2025, at the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) in Islamabad

**NEWS DESK**

ISLAMABAD: Lawyers staged a protest on Monday at the main gate of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) against the arrest and sentencing of lawyers Imaan Zainab Mazarri-Hazir and her husband, Hadi Ali Chattha, in the controversial social media posts case. The protest was led by IHC Bar President Syed Wajid Ali Gilani. Senior lawyer Babar Awan and a large number of advocates from the Islamabad Bar Council (IBC), High Court Bar and District Bar also participated in the protest. They carried banners reading "Justice for Lawyers" and raised slogans against the police. Addressing the gathering, Awan said that "state and police terrorism" was being carried out against lawyers, adding that such actions were harmful for society. Meanwhile, the Islamabad High Court Bar Association (IHCBA), IBC and Islamabad District Bar jointly announced a strike. However, lawyers appeared in the high court only in urgent matters. Due to the protest, strict security arrangements were made in and around the IHC, with a heavy police contingent deployed and armoured vehicles stationed outside the court premises. The issue of the strike also came up during the hearing of a civil case before Chief Justice Sarfaraz Dogar.

## Historic winter storm kills at least 10 across US

New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani says 5 found dead over weekend, authorities confirm 3 deaths in Texas

WASHINGTON: A monster storm barreling across swathes of the United States has killed at least 10 people and prompted warnings to stay off the roads, mass flight cancellations and power outages, as freezing conditions persisted into Monday. As the storm dumped snow, sleet and freezing rain across the wide expanse, officials cautioned that an Arctic air mass behind the system would see temperatures fall dangerously low for days, prolonging disruptions to daily life. The US National Weather Service (NWS) told Americans to expect more of the same weather conditions into Monday morning.

New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani said five people were found dead outside over the weekend in freezing temperatures. While he did not confirm the deaths were weather-related, he told reporters "there is no more powerful reminder of the danger of extreme cold."

In Texas, authorities confirmed three deaths, including a 16-year-old

girl killed in a sledding accident. Two people died in Louisiana from hypothermia, the southern state's health department said. The PowerOutage.com tracking site showed more than 840,000 customers without electricity as of Sunday night, mostly in the US South where the storm intensified Saturday. In Tennessee, where a band of ice has downed power lines, more than 300,000 residential and commercial customers were without electricity, while Louisiana, Mississippi and Georgia — where such storms are less common — each had over 100,000 outages. The outages are particularly dangerous as the South is being wallowed by treacherous cold that the NWS warns could set records. Authorities from Texas to North Carolina and New York urged residents to stay home due to the perilous conditions. "Stay off the roads unless absolutely necessary," Texas's Emergency Management Division posted on X. - DNA

