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Erosion of rule of Law contributing to conflict: Asim

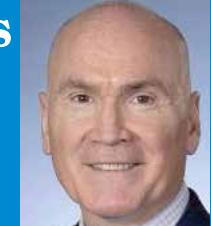
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**FM U Than meets PM Shehbaz**

Pakistan-Myanmar ties gain momentum

Welcoming the visiting dignitary warmly, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif reaffirmed Pakistan's longstanding commitment to deepening relations with Myanmar

ANSAR MAHMOOD BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: In a significant diplomatic engagement underscoring Pakistan's outreach to Southeast Asia, Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, H.E. U Than Swe, paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif this morning at the Prime Minister's Office.

The meeting, held on January 27, 2026, came amid the Myanmar Foreign Minister's ongoing official visit to Pakistan, which has already seen high-level bilateral talks and the signing of key institutional mechanisms. Welcoming the visiting dignitary warmly, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif reaffirmed Pakistan's longstanding commitment to deepening relations with Myanmar. He highlighted the potential for expanded cooperation across diverse sectors, including trade and economic engagement, education, culture, capacity-building, and enhanced people-to-people exchanges. The Prime Minister particularly appreciated Myanmar's constructive role in combating human trafficking and its consistent support for Pakistan's growing engagement with ASEAN, reflecting shared interests in regional stability and connectivity.

The Myanmar Foreign Minister conveyed heartfelt greetings and good wishes from Myanmar's leadership to the Prime Minister and the people of Pakistan.

Expressing gratitude for the gracious hospitality extended to him and his delegation, U Than Swe reiterated

Myanmar's keen desire to broaden bilateral ties in areas of mutual benefit. He specifically thanked Pakistan for its prompt and generous assistance following the devastating

March 28, 2025, earthquake in central Myanmar—a

7.7-magnitude tremor that struck near Mandalay, claiming

thousands of lives, destroying tens of thousands

of homes, and causing widespread devastation across

Sagaing, Mandalay, and other regions. Pakistan's timely

humanitarian aid, including relief supplies and support

through international channels, was warmly acknowledged as testament to enduring friendship. The meeting was attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, along with Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs Tariq Fatemi, underscoring the high priority accorded to this engagement. The courtesy call builds on productive discussions held a day earlier between Foreign Minister Dar and Union Minister U Than Swe at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Those talks covered the full spectrum of bilateral relations, with both sides pledging to bolster cooperation in economy, agriculture, livestock, manufacturing, trade, technology, healthcare, and culture. A key outcome was the signing of an Arrangement for the Establishment of Foreign Office Consultations, creating a structured mechanism for regular dialogue on bilateral, regional, and international issues. Pakistan also reaffirmed its support for a peaceful, stable, and prosperous Myanmar, expressing confidence in the country's potential role in fostering regional reconciliation and shared development. This visit—the first high-level Myanmar engagement in Islamabad in recent years—signals Islamabad's strategic push to strengthen links with ASEAN nations amid evolving regional dynamics. With Myanmar marking 77 years of diplomatic relations with Pakistan in 2026, both sides appear poised to translate goodwill into tangible outcomes, including increased trade volumes, investment flows, religious tourism, and closer coordination in multilateral forums such as the United Nations, ASEAN, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Observers note that the renewed momentum could open avenues for Pakistani businesses to explore opportunities in Myanmar's recovering economy, while Myanmar benefits from Pakistan's expertise in agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and textiles. As Prime Minister Sharif emphasized broader people-to-people and academic ties, the visit lays a foundation for sustained, multifaceted partnership that contributes to peace and prosperity in South and Southeast Asia.



ISLAMABAD: The Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, H.E. U Than Swe called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif in Islamabad on 27 January 2026. —DNA

MQM wants Mayor to step down

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Stressing the need for accountability, Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) on Tuesday urged Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari to sack Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, Karachi Mayor Murtaza Wahab and Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon over the Gul Plaza tragedy. Addressing a joint press conference, MQM-P leader Farooq Sattar reiterated the party's demand for a judicial commission to probe the deadly shopping mall blaze that claimed more than 73 lives. Sattar's remarks came after the security of MQM-P leaders was withdrawn, a claim the provincial government denied. The MQM-P leader termed the move an "attempt to divert attention" from the Gul Plaza tragedy, adding: "This time we will bring justice to the victims of the Gul Plaza."

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Inflation to remain between 5 to 6 %

FIAZ CHAUDHRY

ISLAMABAD: Inflation is expected to remain between 5% and 6% in January, the Finance Division reported on Tuesday, pointing to stability and positive trends in major macroeconomic indicators. In its Economic Update and Outlook report for the first month of 2026, the Finance Division said that the country's economy completed the first half of the fiscal year 2026 (FY2026) with continued macroeconomic stability, reflected in contained inflation. Large-Scale Manufacturing (LSM) growth, and strengthened foreign exchange reserves. The CPI inflation recorded

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FCC upholds super tax

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Accepting the authority of Parliament to legislate on imposing taxes, the Federal Constitution Court (FCC) on Tuesday—in a landmark ruling with far-reaching constitutional and fiscal implications—upheld the vires of the super tax. This means that means Section 4-B and the 4-C of the Income Tax Ordinance (ITO), 2001 will be applicable from the dates these were levied as per the prescribed rates. A three-member bench, headed by FCC Chief Justice Aminuddin Khan and also including Justice Syed Hasan Azhar Rizvi and Justice Syed Arshad Hussain Shah, announced the much-anticipated short order. The short order was announced in the afternoon after a brief hearing in the morning, when the FCC reserved its ruling with an observation that the verdict would be issued today. The detailed judgment will follow later.

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Briefs

Trump says Iran wants talks

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: A US naval strike force led by an aircraft carrier was in Middle Eastern waters on Tuesday as Iran vowed to hit back against any strike and President Donald Trump said he believed the Islamic republic still wanted talks. Washington has not ruled out new military intervention against Tehran over its crackdown on protests, which saw over 3,000 killed within days, according to Iranian media. A strike group led by the USS Abraham Lincoln has now arrived in Middle Eastern waters, US Central Command said, without revealing its precise location. Since Iran earlier this month launched the crackdown on protests accompanied by a blanket internet blackout, Trump has given mixed signals on intervention.

Gul plaza: Sindh cabinet approves compensation

BUREAU REPORT

KARACHI: The Sindh Cabinet on Tuesday approved the relief and rehabilitation package—announced last week—for the families of the victims of the Gul Plaza inferno in Karachi, which includes Rs10 million as financial compensation. Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah had earlier announced the compensation on January 19. The deadly inferno, which erupted on the night of January 17 at the mall and took nearly two days to be fully extinguished, has claimed at least 73 lives and left over 1,100 shops in ruins. After nine days of scouring through the rubble to locate remains of the dead and missing, the search operation concluded on Sunday.

Uzbekistan, Pakistan poised to deepen ties as President Mirziyoyev plans Feb visit

Strategic Connectivity, trans-Afghan railway in main focus, the transport infrastructure remains a centerpiece and the proposed Trans-Afghan Railway, linking Central and South Asia has emerged as a flagship project, with the potential to reshape regional trade routes



ISLAMABAD: President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's upcoming visit to Islamabad in February 2026 is set to mark a major step forward in Uzbek-Pakistani relations, with both sides preparing a slate of initiatives spanning trade, transport, energy, and digital technologies. Experts and business leaders expect the trip to inject fresh momentum into a partnership that has gained speed in recent years and now aspires to regional impact across Central and South Asia.

Uzbekistan and Pakistan say the visit will not only advance large-scale, strategic projects but also broaden cooperation at the regional and local levels, bringing small and medium-sized enterprises, academ-

ia, youth, and civil society more directly into the bilateral agenda. Nigora Sultanova, Chief Research Fellow at the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan said in a article. The aim, according to planners on both sides, is to convert long-standing goodwill and cultural affinity into practical, long-term mechanisms that drive investment, jobs, and innovation.

Strategic Connectivity, trans-Afghan railway in main focus, the transport infrastructure remains a centerpiece and the proposed Trans-Afghan Railway, linking Central and South Asia has emerged as a flagship project, with the potential to reshape regional trade routes.

Stakeholders say the corridor could cut delivery times to 3-5 days and reduce transport costs by 40% or more, dramatically improving competitiveness for exporters across the region. In 2025, key feasibility components were prepared and intergovernmental talks on routing and financing advanced, underscoring growing confidence in the project's practical implementation. For landlocked Central Asian economies, reliable access to ports and markets is viewed as indispensable to long-term growth and integration. In trade targets and tools the economic cooperation has become the most visible

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EU, India agree FTA – 'mother of all' trade deals

Deal will cut or eliminate tariffs on almost 97% of European exports, saving up to \$4.75bn annually in duties

CENTRELINE REPORT

NEW DELHI: India and the European Union announced Tuesday the "mother of all deals", a huge trade pact to create a market of two billion people, reached after two decades of negotiations. EU chiefs and Prime Minister Narendra Modi hope the pact will help shield against challenges from the world's two leading economies, the United States and China. The agreement will cut or eliminate tariffs on almost 97% of European exports, saving up to 4 billion (\$4.75 billion) annually in duties, the 27-nation bloc said. "A mother of all deals," Modi said Tuesday in the capital New Delhi, where he met with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Antonio Costa. "This deal will bring many opportunities for India's 1.4 billion and many millions of people of the EU," Modi said, adding the agreement "represents

about 25% of global GDP, and one-third of global trade". The EU has eyed India—the world's most populous nation—as an important market for the future. "Europe and India are making history today," von der Leyen said in a statement, a day after she and Costa were feted as guests of honour at India's Republic Day parade. "We have created a free trade zone of two billion people, with both sides set to benefit." EU officials said the deal was the most ambitious India had ever signed, and European companies would benefit from the so-called "first mover advantage". Europe's key agricultural, automotive and service sectors stand to gain. New Delhi sees the European bloc as an important source of much-needed technology and investment to rapidly upscale its infrastructure and create millions of new jobs. Bilateral trade in goods reached 120 billion (\$139 billion) in 2024, an increase of nearly 90% over the past decade, according to EU figures, with a further 60 billion (\$69 billion) in trade in services.

Under the agreement, India is expected to ease market access for key European products. Tariffs on cars will be gradually lowered from a top rate of 110% to as low as 10%, while duties on wines progressively go down from 150% to as low as 20%. Currently at 50%, tariffs on processed foods—including pasta and chocolate—will be eliminated, according to the EU. Von der Leyen said she expected exports to India to double, and that the EU would "gain the highest level of access ever granted to a trade partner in the traditionally protected Indian market". European firms will get privileged access to the Indian financial services and maritime transport market, the bloc said. For India, it would boost sectors including textiles, gems and jewellery, and leather goods, as well as the service sector, Modi said. Talks went down to the wire on Monday, focusing on a few sticking points, including the impact of the EU's carbon border tax on steel, according to

sources familiar with the discussions. The accord comes as both Brussels and New Delhi have sought to open up new markets in the face of US tariffs and Chinese export controls. India and the EU were also expected to conclude an accord to facilitate movement for seasonal workers, students, researchers and highly skilled professionals, and a security and defence pact. "India and Europe have made a clear choice. The choice of strategic partnership, dialogue and openness," von der Leyen wrote on social media. "We are showing a fractured world that another way is possible." India is on track to become the fourth-largest economy this year, according to International Monetary Fund projections. New Delhi, which has relied on Moscow for key military hardware for decades, has tried to cut its dependence on Russia in recent years by diversifying imports and pushing its own domestic manufacturing base. Europe is doing the same with regard to the US.

Human capital key to SME productivity growth: Alamgir

ISLAMABAD: National Productivity Organization (NPO) Chief Executive Officer Muhammad Alamgir Chaudhry on Tuesday highlighted the strategic importance of human capital as a core organizational asset, saying that sustainable productivity growth in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) hinges on people-centric policies and continuous capacity building.

He said this while addressing the inaugural ceremony of the APO Workshop on Human Capital Management in SMEs, jointly organized by the Asian Productivity Organization (APO) and NPO under the Ministry of Industries and Production.

The four-day workshop, from January 27 to 30, has brought together policymakers, experts, practitioners and SME representatives from across APO member countries to exchange experiences and best practices in human capital management.

Alamgir reaffirmed NPO Pakistan's commitment to promoting productivity through leadership development, skills enhancement and institutional capacity building, particularly for SMEs, which he described as the backbone of the national economy.—APP

Fresh spell of snowfall disrupts life in Mansehra areas

MANSEHRA: A fresh spell of rain in the plain areas and intermittent snowfall in the upper regions of Mansehra district has continued since late last night, severely affecting normal life across the mountainous areas. According to officials, the mountains of Kaghan Valley, Siran Valley and Konsh Valley have been covered with a thick white blanket of snow. Heavy snowfall is ongoing at major tourist destinations including Shogran, Kaghan and Naran, where accumulation has increased significantly during the current spell. In Shogran, more than one additional foot of snow has fallen during the latest snowfall, raising the total snow depth to over three feet. Kaghan Bazaar has also received nearly one and a half feet of snow, leading to disruption of routine activities and restricting the movement of residents, who have largely remained confined to their homes due to severe cold and slippery conditions. Snowfall has also caused the closure of several link roads in Siran Valley and Konsh Valley. Areas including Chatta Plain, Battal, Jabbori, Sachan and Nawazabad have been cut off after heavy snow blocked access routes, creating difficulties for commuters and local communities. In Kaghan Valley, machinery of the Kaghan Development Authority (KDA) has been deployed to clear snow from Shogran Road and other important link roads to restore connectivity. On the instructions of Director General KDA, Rehmat Ali, staff along with heavy machinery have been stationed at sensitive points along the Kaghan Highway to provide guidance and assistance to both local residents and tourists. Meanwhile, the district administration has issued an advisory urging tourists and local residents in Kaghan Valley to avoid unnecessary travel in view of the prevailing weather conditions and the risk of further snowfall. Authorities have assured that the situation is being closely monitored and snow clearance and relief operations will continue as weather permits.—APP

Pakistan, Australia discuss coop in mining, gemstones

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Australia on Tuesday discussed avenues for enhanced bilateral cooperation in the mining and gemstone sectors. During a meeting with Australian High Commissioner to Pakistan Timothy Kane, Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik welcomed the strong interest shown by Australian companies in Pakistan's mining sector and highlighted the country's vast untapped mineral potential, particularly in the Tethyan Belt. The minister proposed the possibility of an intergovernmental agreement between Pakistan and Australia to promote structured and long-term cooperation in the mining sector. The minister also underscored the government's efforts to develop and formalise the gemstones sector, stressing its potential for value addition, export growth and employment generation. The Australian high commissioner said Australian companies were already actively involved in the Reko



ISLAMABAD: Australian High Commissioner to Pakistan Timothy Kane called on Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik on Tuesday.

Diq project, while additional firms had shown keen interest in joining the venture. He added that Australian companies would

be encouraged to participate in the Pakistan Minerals Investment Forum, expressing hope for a strong Australian presence at the event. Highlighting the growing global importance of copper and gold for the energy transition, the high commissioner said that Pakistan's mining sector had attracted significant international attention. He expressed optimism about collaboration in the gemstones sector through knowledge-sharing, training and technical assistance. The federal minister appreciated Australia's willingness to support Pakistan in efforts to formalise the minerals sector, terming such cooperation timely and reassuring. He also recalled his recent visit to Australia for the International Mining and Resources Conference, where discussions were held with leading and junior Australian mining companies on investment and cooperation opportunities. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening Pakistan-Australia cooperation in the mining and gemstones sectors for mutual benefit.

HEC, British Council begin week-long deliberations on REF

ISLAMABAD: The Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan, in close partnership with the British Council Pakistan, has formally commenced five-day deliberations on the development of Research Excellence Framework (REF) under PakUK Education Gateway programme. Once finalised, the framework is expected to strengthen the research evaluation, benchmarking, and performance assessment ecosystem in Pakistan. During the course of the consultations, organised by Research & Innovation Division (R&ID) of HEC, a four-member expert delegation from the University of Sussex, UK – the lead consultant providing technical expertise for the initiative – will remain engaged in in-depth discussions with the HEC and British Council leadership, academic leaders and policymakers, and stakeholders to finalise the proposed policy framework. The flagship bilateral initiative – the proposed REF – is envisioned to serve as a formula to evaluate the quality, impact, and value of the proposed framework.

Govt committed to resolve industrialists' issues: Qaiser

FAISALABAD: Federal Minister for Board of Investment Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh has said the government under dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is working with full sincerity and commitment to address genuine issues being faced by the industrialist and business community. During his visit to the Faisalabad Industrial Estate Development & Management Company (FIEDMC) on Tuesday, he said the FIEDMC is a highly important and effective hub for Pakistan's industrial development. Hence, all existing bottlenecks at the industrial estate would be removed to make it more active, stable and investor-friendly, he added. He said that promotion of investment is one of the government's top priorities as sustainable industrial growth is backbone of a strong national economy. The minister said that he belongs to Chiniot district, which is globally renowned for its high-quality furniture. Therefore, he fully understands the importance of industry and practical challenges being faced by

the industrialists. He himself comes from an industrial family and as such, he views the problems of business community not merely as paperwork issues but as real and ground-level concerns, the minister added. He said that challenges exist on both sides but the country belongs to all of us and despite current difficulties, collective efforts are essential to move Pakistan forward. He said that government is fully determined to resolve issues of the industrialists and business community. Due to prudent policies of incumbent government, the economy has shown improvement, foreign exchange reserves have increased and the finance minister has been directed to remain in close liaison with stakeholders to address prompt redressal of industrialists' problems wherever they arise, he added. Earlier, Chairman FIEDMC Rana Azhar Waqar briefed the federal minister about the progress of industrial estate and informed that 90 factories had been established in FIEDMC by 2025 while 26

new factories have been set up during current year and development work on 31 more factories is underway. The briefing highlighted that a business-friendly environment exists at FIEDMC and local industrialists are showing keen interest in investing in the industrial zone. Additional Secretary Board of Investment Dr Erfat Iqbal, CEO FIEDMC Qurratul Ain and other officials were also present on the occasion. Later, the federal minister visited the factory of renowned industrialist Mian Mansha and held discussions with him. On this occasion, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh said that FIEDMC is the largest industrial zone in the country and purpose of his visit was to conduct a comprehensive review and translate improvement proposals into actionable measures. He discussed plans for direct transportation of containers from Karachi Port to FIEDMC to reduce costs, the use of rail-based transportation and linking Faisalabad, Chiniot and other areas through an improved railway network to facilitate smooth movement of goods.—APP

Efforts afoot to keep highways open amid winter weather

ISLAMABAD: The National Highway Authority (NHA) has intensified field operations across the country in line with the strict directives of the Federal Minister for Communications to ensure uninterrupted highway connectivity and the safety of commuters during the ongoing winter spell. The minister's mandate is clear: zero tolerance for road blockages and the absolute safety of commuters. Consequently, NHA field formations are working tirelessly in shifts to manage the challenges posed by the ongoing winter weather, said a press release issued on Tuesday. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a high alert has been issued for travelers on the N-45, N-145, N-95, and N-90. Due to heavy snowfall and the risk of landslides in Dir, Chitral, Swat, and Shangla, NHA teams and heavy machinery remain stationed at vulnerable points. These teams are conducting 24/7 monitoring to ensure that these essential links remain functional. Commuters are strongly advised to avoid unnecessary travel in these regions and are mandated to use "grip chains" to prevent accidents in snow-bound areas.—APP

Attock lawyers' meritorious sacrifices uphold justice

QAZI SHOAIB KHAN

ATTOCK: The prominent lawyer and newly elected Member Punjab Bar Council Sardar Tauseef Ahmed Khan Advocate along with Qazi Muhammad Shoaib Advocate here in his chamber on Tuesday. Speaking on the occasion, the Member Punjab Bar Council Sardar Tauseef Ahmed Khan said the Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali, Alama Mohammad Iqbal and First Prime Minister of Pakistan Rana Liaquat Ali Khan were also lawyers who led the nation

to forge unity, discipline and confidence among their ranks emerging the new country Pakistan on the map of the world a true dream. Responding various questions, Sardar Tauseef Ahmed Khan Advocate High Court said that he and his team are struggling to safe the rights of the lawyers at all forums as well as devising a number of viable proposals for the socio-economic development and welfare of the lawyers in line with the other parts of the Punjab. He further said that his doors are always open for the support of his fellows as and when they desire, he added.

CM Bugti lauds CTD timely action against militants

QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti on Tuesday appreciated the timely and effective action of the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) in Pishin district against militants. He said that the law enforcement agencies are performing their duties with full professionalism and determination to establish law and order in Balochistan. In a statement, the Chief Minister paid tribute to the courage, bravery and sense of duty of the CTD personnel who were injured in the exchange of fire during the operation and expressed his best wishes for their speedy recovery. Mir Sarfraz Bugti said that CTD Balochistan and police personnel are standing on the front line in the war against terrorism and are taking all possible steps to protect the lives and property of the people. He said that the recovery of rocket launchers, SMGs and explosives from the terrorists during the operation is clear evidence that these elements were busy trying to sabotage the peace of the province and had links with banned organizations. The CM mentioned that the government has always given top priority to peace and law enforcement, and the agencies have been given clear instructions to continue their operations without discrimination under the zero-tolerance policy against terrorism.—APP

Muzaffarabad Chamber, LCCI discuss economy, business coop

LAHORE: A delegation from the Muzaffarabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry led by its President Khawaja Ishtisham Woogra met with Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) office-bearers here at LCCI on Tuesday. Matters of mutual interest, the current economic situation and business cooperation were discussed in detail during the meeting that was attended by LCCI President Faheem ur Rehman Saigol, Senior Vice President Tanveer Ahmad Sheikh and Vice President Khurram Lodhi, former LCCI president Tahir Javed Malik, former SVP Zafar Mahmood Chaudhry and former Executive Committee members. Muzaffarabad Chamber's delegation comprised its Executive Committee members Raja Abid Khan, Malik Ejaz Gilani, Shadab Mateen, Muhammad Irfan Kayani, Hasan Taj and Raja Abdul Rasheed. During the meeting, LCCI President Faheem ur Rehman Saigol said that Lahore Chamber is a major and active chamber, and given Pakistan's current economic situation, it is necessary for the country's business community to be united. He emphasized that government should receive a single joint budget proposal to enable effective measures for economic stability. He added that Lahore Chamber has decided to work collaboratively through the Federation platform to provide concrete proposals for economic stability. Faheem ur Rehman Saigol demanded the abolition of CESS, and a reduction in power tariff and interest rates, adding that Lahore Chamber will submit joint budget proposals to government by February end and will actively work for their implementation. "LCCI remains active at all the time to address the business community's concerns," he mentioned. Muzaffarabad Chamber President Khawaja Ishtisham Woogra said that communication between Lahore and Muzaffarabad Chambers should continue. He highlighted the vast business potential in Azad Kashmir, especially in handicrafts, tourism and the mineral sector. He said Muzaffarabad Chamber is an active chamber and will provide full support for investment in the region. He further stated that the Muzaffarabad Chamber is ready to support the mineral sector and other businesses. The culture of Azad Kashmir is gradually disappearing, and sectors like furniture, dry fruits, and medicinal herbs have export potential. In addition, there is also significant hydropower potential in the region.—DNA

Every district to have stroke treatment facilities: Punjab CM

The meeting was informed that one in four people above the age of 25 is at risk of stroke. Neurologist Dr Qasim Bashir from PIMS Islamabad gave a detailed briefing on the proposed stroke management programme and its implementation framework

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has approved the establishment of stroke management centres in every district of the province to ensure timely and specialized treatment for stroke patients close to their homes. The decision was taken during a meeting of the Health Department chaired by the chief minister, here on Tuesday. The meeting also approved, in principle, the posting of neurologists and paediatric neurologists at all District Headquarters (DHQ) hospitals across Punjab. Under the approved plan, one doctor and one nurse from each dis-

trict will undergo a three-month specialized training programme in stroke management. The chief minister further directed the immediate launch of a telemedicine project for stroke patients, enabling district hospitals to consult senior specialists and neurologists through direct telephone and telemedicine links to ensure prompt and effective treatment. CM Maryam Nawaz instructed the Health Department to initiate a dedicated training programme for nurses at stroke management centres and to take necessary steps for providing stroke management training to rescue ser-

vice personnel. She also directed the launch of a comprehensive public awareness campaign focusing on stroke prevention, early diagnosis, and timely treatment. During the briefing, health experts highlighted the importance of an integrated approach encompassing pre-hospital, hospital, and post-hospital care for stroke patients. The meeting was informed that the golden hours immediately after a stroke are critical for successful treatment and recovery. "The importance of golden hours in stroke treatment is universally recognised. I will personally lead the public

awareness campaign," the chief minister said, adding that the government aims to ensure that no patient is forced to travel to major cities for stroke treatment. She further announced that stroke management centres would also be established at children's hospitals across Punjab to address paediatric neurological emergencies. The meeting was informed that one in four people above the age of 25 is at risk of stroke. Neurologist Dr Qasim Bashir from PIMS Islamabad gave a detailed briefing on the proposed stroke management programme and its implementation framework.—APP

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

JANUARY

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

Turkish Airlines.....8494949



Emergency

Rescue (Police).....15
Bomb Disposal.....15
Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad.....1122 & 16
Emergency Ambulance.....1122 & Rescue Services.....4451122
Motorway Police.....9266044
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PIA Cargo.....9280979
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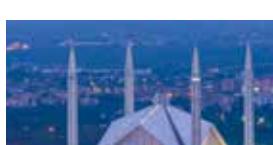
Hospitals

CMH.....5611111
MH.....561116
Cantt Hospital.....9270907-11
DHQ.....5556311-4
RGH.....9290301-7
Holy Family.....9290322-7
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CDA.....9208301-04
Met Office.....9250360-6
RDA.....5555864
TMA.....5770886
Cantonment Board 9270151-3



Islamabad Metropolitan

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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Essay competition Pakistan-Turkiye relations: a timeless bond concludes

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Embassy of the Republic of Turkiye, in collaboration with the National Book Foundation (NBF) of Pakistan and the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center, successfully organized the Prize Distribution Ceremony of the National Essay Writing Competition 2025, aimed at university students across Pakistan. The ceremony was attended by Wajihah Qamar, Minister of State for Federal Education and Professional Training, Dr. Irfan Neziroglu, Ambassador of the Republic of Turkiye to Pakistan, Dr. Kamran Jahangir, Managing Director of the National Book Foundation, senior officials, representatives of academic and cultural institutions, teachers, parents, and students. Speaking on the occasion, Ambassador Dr. Irfan Neziroglu highlighted that the essay competition was initiated for two key reasons: to celebrate and honor the centuries-old fraternal bond between Turkiye and Pakistan, and to commemorate the sacrifice of two Turkish engineers, Cenek Yakın and Ufuk Arslan, who were martyred during a relief mission in Balakot following the devastating 2005 earthquake. The Ambassador recalled that during the historic visit of H.E. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Islamabad last year, both countries agreed to establish a "Shura of Fraternity" to strengthen cooperation in social, cultural, and academic fields. He stated that this competition stands as a practical example of that vision in action. Ambassador Neziroglu paid tribute to the shared heroes and historical figures of both nations, including Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Allama Muhammad Iqbal, the Ali Brothers of the Khilafat Movement, and Abdurrahman Peshawar, emphasizing the importance of transferring this shared legacy to future generations through education and awareness. He



congratulated all participating students and prize winners for their dedication, creativity, and commitment. He also expressed appreciation for Anatolia Travel Services for facilitating visa-related services and acknowledged the contributions of Mr. Halil Toker, Country Director of the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center, for his role in strengthening bilateral cultural relations. Addressing the ceremony, Minister of State Wajihah Qamar warmly welcomed the distinguished guests and congratulated the organizers for arranging a meaningful initiative under the auspices of the Embassy of Turkiye. She emphasized that Pakistan-Turkiye relations are rooted in shared history, faith, values, and mutual

respect, and represent a unique example of people-to-people brotherhood. Minister highlighted the role of youth and writing in shaping narratives and strengthening international relationships. She encouraged students to view themselves as future diplomats, scholars, and leaders who will further deepen Pakistan-Turkiye ties. She also expressed admiration for Turkiye's scholarship opportunities and academic exposure for Pakistani students, noting that such exchanges broaden horizons and foster lifelong bonds. Reaffirming the Government of Pakistan's commitment to international academic collaboration, the Minister stressed that education remains the strongest bridge between societies.

She encouraged students to continue reading, writing, learning foreign languages—particularly Turkish—and exploring global cultures with confidence. At the conclusion of the ceremony, prizes were awarded to the winning students: First Prize: Maryam Batool, Alkuwat College for Women, Chakwal. Second Prize: Izza Naeem, University of Management & Technology, Lahore. Third Prize: Muhammad Aariz Zafar, Pakistan Institute of Management Sciences, Peshawar. The ceremony concluded with a renewed commitment to strengthening Pakistan-Turkiye friendship through education, culture, and youth engagement, reaffirming that the relationship between the two nations remains a timeless bond.

Salik vows to strengthen global coop on skills pathways

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Overseas Pakistani and Human Resource Development, Chaudhry Salik Hussain, has underscored Pakistan's strong commitment to modernizing its labor policies, enhancing skills development and aligning with international best practices. He made the remarks while representing Pakistan at the 3rd Edition of the Global Labour Market Conference (GLMC) held in Riyadh. During the high-level Ministerial Roundtable, the Federal Minister presented Pakistan's stance on labour market transformation, emphasizing a shift toward dynamic, demand-driven skills alignment, digitization of the Bureau of Emigration, and the integration of training curriculum with real-time global labour demand. He highlighted Pakistan's focus on high-growth sectors such as construction, healthcare, ICT, logistics, and emerging green jobs, as well as the importance of ethical recruitment, worker-centred mobility, and whole-of-government coordination on migration and skills policy. The Federal Minister reaffirmed Pakistan's readiness to deepen cooperation with international partners to co-design skills pathways, digital mobility platforms, and ethical recruitment models that translate policy ambition into employment outcomes. He reiterated that Pakistan stands prepared to play a constructive role in shaping a fair, transparent, and resilient global labour market. The Global Labour Market Conference brought together ministers, policymakers, international organizations, private-sector leaders, and academic experts to deliberate on key themes such as skills mismatches, AI and the future of work, targeted immigration, productivity, youth employment, green jobs, and ethical cross-border talent mobility. On the sidelines of the Conference, the Minister held

bilateral meetings with global leaders, ministers, and envoys from a range of countries, including Oman, the Philippines, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. These engagements focused on expanding government-to-government labour agreements, skills partnerships, and cooperation frameworks to facilitate transparent, mutually beneficial labour mobility. The Federal Minister also participated in the 10th Anniversary Celebration of Musanad, recognizing its role in strengthening regulated and ethical recruitment systems in the region. He visited exhibition stalls of leading global companies to explore emerging trends in workforce development, technology-enabled recruitment, and private-sector collaboration. In addition, he attended the graduation ceremony of the Global Labour Market Academy, commending the initiative for building future-ready talent pipelines and promoting lifelong learning.—APP

NAB, TI discuss transparency, future collaboration

ISLAMABAD: A four-member Transparency International (TI) delegation led by Chair François Valérian met National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Chairman Lt Gen (R) Nazir Ahmed at NAB Headquarters to discuss transparency accountability and prospects for enhanced cooperation between TI and NAB. The TI delegation included Justice (R) Zia Pervez, Advocate Daniyal Muzaffar and Kashif Ali. Deputy Chairman NAB Sohail Nasir and senior NAB officers were also present. During the meeting, both sides exchanged views on key anti-corruption initiatives, institutional reforms, and the importance of collaboration between national anti-graft institutions and international civil society organizations to promote accountability and good governance. Chairman NAB emphasized the need for coordinated national and international efforts to counter corruption, noting that the challenge transcends borders and undermines the rule of law and public trust. The Chairman briefed the delegation on comprehensive structural reforms undertaken by NAB, particularly in the areas of digital transformation, AI-assisted investigations, blockchain analysis, and digital forensics.—APP

ICCI decries SBP decision for unchanged interest rate

Single-digit interest rate imperative for economic revival, says Sardar Tahir

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) Sardar Tahir Mehmood has strongly criticized the State Bank of Pakistan's decision to keep the policy interest rate steady at 10.50%. He warned that this approach risks undermining the country's urgent need for industrial revival and export expansion. In a statement issued here on Tuesday, Sardar Tahir Mehmood highlighted that maintaining high-interest rates continues to choke the flow of affordable finance to the industrial sector, particularly impacting Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and exporters. "Economic sustainability cannot be achieved without robust industrialization and that our industries are battling a daunting challenge as imports soar and exports decline, threatening their very survival," he said. He cautioned that if the upcoming monetary policy review does not reduce the interest rate to single digits, the government's ambitious targets for boosting exports and industrial output in the current fiscal year will remain unattainable. "Persistently high borrowing costs are a heavy burden on the private sector, curtailing investment and eroding Pakistan's export competitiveness," he added. Sardar Tahir Mehmood called on the State Bank to urgently realign its policy with the ground realities. "A timely and decisive reduction in the policy rate is essential to unlock credit for businesses, lower production costs, and restore the global competitiveness of Pakistani products," he urged. He concluded by emphasizing that an enabling monetary policy is critical for reviving industrial activity, generating employment, and driving sustainable economic growth. "We appeal to policymakers to act decisively to create a conducive environment for industry and exports, which are the pillars of Pakistan's economic future."

IRSA releases 34,400 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Tuesday released 34,400 cusecs of water from various rim stations with inflow of 42,700 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in the River Indus at Tarbela Dam stood at 1492.00 feet which was 90.00 feet higher than the dead level of 1402.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam were recorded as 17,000 cusecs each. The water level in the Jhelum River at Mangla Dam was 1202.50 feet, which was 152.50 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded as 8,100 cusecs and 100 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 23,400, 20,700, 21,600, and 18,400 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 10,500 cusecs of water was released at Nowshera, and 6,800 cusecs were released from River Chenab at Marala.—APP

Minister
directs PR to
boost revenue,
improve
services

LAHORE, Jan 27 (APP): Railways Minister Mohammad Hanif Abbasi on Tuesday directed Pakistan Railways (PR) administration to enhance revenue by extending greater facilities to the business community, saying that the growing confidence of traders in the railways must be matched with punctual and efficient services. Chairing a meeting at the PR Headquarters, the minister was given a detailed briefing on the performance of the Railway Traffic and Commercial Department. He noted that while progress had been made, there was still significant room for improvement in both freight and passenger sectors. He instructed the Chief Executive Officer to personally monitor railway revenue to ensure better financial discipline and results.—APP

AIOU free edu
for prisoners,
transgender
community

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is steadfastly pursuing its national mission of promoting literacy and making education accessible to every individual in the country. In line with this vision, the university is providing completely free education from matriculation to PhD level to the transgender community across Pakistan as well as to prisoners incarcerated in jails nationwide. Admissions for these programs are currently open. Vice Chancellor of the university, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood stated that education is a fundamental right of every citizen and that for the formation of a civilized and developed society, it is essential to bring marginalized and deprived segments of society into the educational mainstream.—APP

Seminar on Kashmir: Wait and See held at launch of Cedric Gerbehaye's Photo Book

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A seminar titled "Kashmir: Wait, See and Act" was held at the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) on Tuesday on the occasion of the launch of the pictorial book "Kashmir: Wait and See" by renowned European photojournalist Cedric Gerbehaye, highlighting the humanitarian crisis in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK). Addressing the seminar, former Prime Minister Raja Pervaiz Ashraf said the photo book presents an authentic portrayal of the realities in Indian-occupied Kashmir. He stated that Pakistan has consistently raised the Kashmir issue at international forums, including the United Nations, which has itself endorsed the right to plebiscite. He regretted that India continues to avoid resolving the dispute despite acknowledging it at the United Nations Security Council. Raja Pervaiz Ashraf said Pakistan and India have fought multiple wars over Kashmir, emphasizing that Pakistan has never been the aggressor. Referring to the recent May escalation, he said Pakistan defended itself effectively. He pointed out that nearly 800,000 Indian troops are deployed in Kashmir despite India's claims of peace, adding that the visiting European delegation would also visit Azad Jammu and Kashmir to witness a comparatively better quality of life. Federal Minister for Board of Investment Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, while welcoming parliamentarians, senators, Kashmiri representatives, and distinguished international guests, said the Kashmir dispute has remained unresolved for decades and continues to cause immense humanitarian suffering, posing a serious threat to peace

and stability in South Asia. He noted that the situation in IOJK has deteriorated further since 2019 due to intensified restrictions and grave human rights violations. Commending Cedric Gerbehaye, the Federal Minister praised his courage and professionalism in documenting Kashmir despite severe access limitations. He said the photo book powerfully captures both the natural beauty of the region and the harsh realities faced by its people. Highlighting the influence of visual media, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh remarked that impactful imagery has the ability to awaken global conscience and mobilize international action. Senior politician Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed said the strength of Gerbehaye's work lies in its first-hand human portrayal of Kashmiri suffering. "He listened, he observed, and then he made a difference," he said, describing the book as a vital historical record that gives voice to the voiceless. He urged that Kashmir be placed prominently on the global peace agenda, calling Kashmir and Palestine twin humanitarian issues. Senator Sitara Ayaz, while speaking at the seminar, said the prolonged silence of the international community has only deepened the suffering of the Kashmiri people. She stressed that women and children in Indian-occupied Kashmir remain the most affected by ongoing human rights violations and emphasized the need for sustained international advocacy and parliamentary diplomacy. Barrister Dr. Muhammad Ali Saif said Kashmir has waited far too long for its right to self-determination, adding that such documentation serves as a powerful medium of dialogue to convey the region's suffering. He said indifference to Kashmiri pain would amount to losing humanity itself. Chairman Kashmir Council Europe Ali Raza Syed, while addressing the gathering, thanked the partic-

ipation of all speakers, parliamentarians, and international guests. He said the photo book "Kashmir: Wait and See" is the result of an eight-year-long journey, during which Cedric Gerbehaye worked under extremely challenging conditions to document the human reality of Kashmir. He said the project reflects persistence, credibility, and a commitment to truth, and aims to keep the Kashmir issue alive within European political and human rights discourse. The seminar was attended by an eight-member European delegation comprising Members of the European Parliament, intellectuals, journalists, and human rights activists from different European countries, including Ali Raza Syed (Belgium), Cedric Albert R. Gerbehaye (Belgium), Maria Johanna Josefa Lucas (Netherlands), Ryszard Henryk Czarnecki (Poland), Carl Anders Sven Hultin (Sweden), Björn Anders Hultin (Sweden), and Endre Sandor Barcs. European human rights activist Maria Locus, while addressing the seminar, expressed hope that the Kashmir dispute would be resolved peacefully. Referring to international peace initiatives, she said she hoped global leadership, including former U.S. President Donald Trump's peace council, would recognize the Kashmir issue and play a role in ending ongoing atrocities in the region. Members of the European delegation stressed that the Kashmir issue requires conflict transformation rather than narrow bilateral approaches. European journalist Endre Sandor Barcs criticized the European Union for engaging economically with India while overlooking human rights violations in Kashmir, calling it a clear example of double standards. The seminar concluded with calls for sustained international engagement to address the Kashmir dispute as a critical global human rights and peace issue.

Briefs

PM assures all possible steps to enhance youth's skills, capabilities

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday assured that the federal government would utilize all possible resources to further increase the skills and capabilities of the country's youth. The prime minister, in a meeting with Chairman of Prime Minister Youth Program Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan, said that the government was prioritising the enhancement of youth's educational capabilities. Rana Mashhood briefed the prime minister on matters related to the Youth Program, particularly the laptop scheme. Prime Minister Shehbaz expressed satisfaction with the ongoing initiatives under the Youth Program aimed at promoting the welfare of the youth.—APP

Pakistan, Ghana agree to strengthen multi-sectoral coop

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Ghana have agreed to enhance cooperation across a broad range of areas, including political, economic, defence, tourism, cultural, health, education, information technology, and other mutually beneficial sectors. The bilateral ties were discussed during the first Bilateral Political Consultations (BPC) between the two countries held on Monday in Ghana, marking an important milestone in the development of bilateral relations. The Pakistani delegation was led by Ambassador Hamid Asghar Khan, Additional Foreign Secretary, while the Ghanaian side was headed by Ambassador Khadija Idrisi, Chief Director, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During the consultations, two Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) were signed, including one on Bilateral Political Consultations and the other between the Foreign Service Academy, Islamabad, and the Ghana Foreign Service Institute. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthening bilateral relations and agreed to hold the next round of the Bilateral Political Consultations in Islamabad next year. Pakistan and Ghana have friendly, cooperative ties, spanning many decades. The institutional dialogue process will further strengthen their bilateral relations through more meaningful and project-specific cooperation.—APP

GWM launches Tank 500 at Haval flagship dealership in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Great Wall Motor (GWM) has officially launched its premium offroad SUV, the Tank 500, at the Haval flagship dealership in Pakistan, marking a significant milestone in the company's expansion within the local automotive market. Introduced in Hybrid Electric Vehicle (HEV) and Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle (PHEV) variants, the Tank 500 is positioned as a luxury fullsize, seven-seater SUV that blends rugged offroad capability with refined design and advanced technology. The model features a powerful hybrid powertrain, an advanced four-wheel-drive system, and a premium interior, targeting customers seeking high performance, comfort, and efficiency.

GWM stated that the Tank 500 will be offered at a highly competitive and strategic price point, aimed at disrupting the premium seven-seater SUV segment in Pakistan. With this positioning, the vehicle is being introduced as a direct and more affordable competitor to established luxury SUVs, offering comparable features and capabilities at a lower cost. Bookings for the Tank 500 are expected to commence later this month, while deliveries are planned within the next few months. According to the company, the launch reflects growing consumer demand in Pakistan for technologically advanced, fuel-efficient, and premium SUVs. Speaking at the launch ceremony, General Manager Rehan Zafar said that the introduction of the Tank 500 at the Haval flagship dealership represents an important milestone for GWM in Pakistan.—APP

ZTBL distributes tractors worth billions without GPS

Records show that under a 2021 agreement, all tractors released on lease were required to be equipped with GPS trackers to allow ZTBL to monitor usage and recover vehicles in case of payment defaults. However, it was found that out of 6,272 tractors leased, 5,239 are operating without trackers. This security lapse effectively leaves the bank unable to locate or repossess assets if farmers default or if the tractors are stolen

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A major scandal has emerged implicating Zarai Taraqiati Bank Limited (ZTBL) and East West Insurance Company, raising serious concerns over the management of billions of rupees in government-subsidized tractor leases. An investigation has found that thousands of tractors were distributed to farmers without mandatory GPS tracking devices, leaving public funds vulnerable to misuse and theft. Records show that under a 2021 agreement, all tractors released on lease were required to be equipped with GPS trackers to allow ZTBL to monitor

usage and recover vehicles in case of payment defaults. However, it was found that out of 6,272 tractors leased, 5,239 are operating without trackers. This security lapse effectively leaves the bank unable to locate or repossess assets if farmers default or if the tractors are stolen. The probe also highlights concerning monetary practices. A joint account maintained by ZTBL and East West Insurance reportedly holds approximately 42.57 million PKR. Under the joint account number 21271040400528, held at a Lahore branch, the insurance company has specific "unrestricted" withdrawal rights to 19.83 million PKR. The account's structure allows the insurance company unrestricted access to withdraw

funds, generating questions about monitoring and accountability. Experts have described this arrangement as a potential loophole benefiting a small network of insiders at the expense of the national exchequer.

ZTBL officials reportedly continued releasing tractors and approving lease documentation despite being aware of the missing security devices. Specialists point out that bypassing standard procedures undermines institutional safeguards and creates opportunities for systemic fraud. The decision to award the contract to a mid-tier insurance company rather than established industry players has also drawn scrutiny. Observers suggest that the move may have been motivated by

vested interests rather than efficiency or farmer protection. Public impacts are direct and major. Farmers risk legal and financial problems if stolen or missing tractors cannot be traced, while taxpayers face potential losses running into billions of rupees. Researchers warn that the scandal could damage public confidence in government-led agricultural support programs and cast doubt on the effectiveness of future subsidy schemes. Authorities have been urged to conduct a thorough audit, recover untracked tractors, and review the contractual arrangements with insurance providers. ZTBL says it has stated that it is investigating the allegations, while East West Insurance has been approached for comment.



ISLAMABAD: Former health minister Dr Nadeem calls on Ambassador of Saudi Arabia Nawaf Saeed Al Maliky. DNA

Counterterrorism policy dialogue calls for coordinated approach

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: A Counterterrorism Policy Dialogue aimed at fostering informed debate and generating practical policy recommendations for the Government of Pakistan was held at Islamabad. The dialogue was jointly organized by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS), Islamabad, in collaboration with the BNU Centre for Policy Studies. The event brought together security experts, academics, and journalists, to assess Pakistan's counterterrorism landscape and identify actionable pathways forward. In his opening remarks, Ambassador Jauhar Saleem, President of IRS, emphasized the importance of engaging Afghanistan through peaceful means to address shared security challenges. He underscored that the purpose of the dialogue was to move beyond rhetoric and develop practical, implementable policy recommendations. Ambassador Saleem highlighted the need for Pakistan to invest in long-term societal resilience by prioritizing literacy, promoting tourism, fostering tolerance, and strengthening cultural values as essential components of countering extremism. Ambassador Mansoor Khan (Pakistan's former ambassador to Afghanistan) provided a historical overview of terrorism in Pakistan, identifying three major waves since 2001, 2006, and 2021. He pointed out critical gaps in Pakistan's counterterrorism policy, stressing that an effective strategy must combine ki-

netic operations, sustained dialogue, and social and economic integration. Maintaining balance among these three pillars, he noted, remains a key challenge. Ambassador Khan linked regional connectivity projects such as CASA-1000 and TAPI with security, arguing that cross-border challenges must be addressed for such initiatives to succeed. He also highlighted the lack of coordination among institutions and called for trilateral cooperation between Pakistan, Afghanistan, and China, especially in light of terrorist attacks targeting Chinese interests in the region. He stressed that NACTA must play a central coordinating role in the fight against terrorism. Dr. Rizwan Naseer, (Director of the Centre for Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism Studies-IRS) emphasized the growing threat of violent extremism and the need for evidence-based and community-focused responses. Mr. Intiaz Gul (Executive Director CRSS) highlighted the economic cost of insecurity, noting that farmers in both Pakistan and Afghanistan have collectively suffered losses of nearly USD 800 million. He criticized the absence of civilian ownership of counterterrorism policy, observing that no single entity has effectively occupied this critical space. Professor Samina Yasmeen (Professor Emerita and Director, Centre for Muslim States and Societies, University of Western Australia) challenged traditional narratives about Balochistan, stating that the province is no longer entirely dominated by sardars. She emphasized the

crucial role of women in addressing social divisions and countering extremism.

Mr. Amir Rana (Director PIPS) traced the evolution of NACTA since 2009, noting its ambitious beginnings under its founder, Tariq Pervez. He criticized the stagnation of policy development, pointing out that Pakistan's counterterrorism policy has largely remained unchanged since 2014 and has failed to evolve meaningfully.

Dr. Rakesh Parkash (Director at NACTA) highlighted NACTA's engagement with 49 stakeholder agencies and drew attention to emerging challenges, including the proliferation of leftover NATO weaponry and the growing use of cryptocurrencies in terror financing. While acknowledging NACTA's reliance on kinetic approaches, he stressed that non-kinetic strategies are equally vital. Mr. Iftikhar Firdous (Founder & Executive Editor, The Khorasan Diary) called for indigenous mechanisms to counter extremism and referenced regional examples, including China's handling of tribal dynamics, while questioning how NACTA is addressing the evolving threat of IS-K.

Mr. Aarish Ullah Khan (Editor Publications & Head of Afghanistan Program at IRS) outlined NACTA's strengths, such as its efficient control rooms, but emphasized the urgent need for a more effective diplomatic approach toward Afghanistan.

The dialogue concluded with a consensus on the need for an inclusive, indigenous, and coordinated counterterrorism framework that balances security operations with socio-economic and diplomatic initiatives.

DG Excise reviews special number plates, token tax data, crackdown steps

Officials emphasized that the use of unauthorized lights creates issues for traffic management and public safety, and that continued enforcement is required

ISLAMABAD: The Excise and Taxation Department held an important meeting under the chairmanship of the Director General of Excise to review ongoing work and future steps. Several senior officers, including the Director Excise and other officials, attended the meeting. During the meeting, officials reviewed the process for issuing special number plates. The discussion focused on how applications are being handled and how the system can be managed in a clear and orderly way. Officers shared updates on current procedures and highlighted the need to ensure that applicants receive timely responses. Token tax collection figures were also discussed in detail. The meeting reviewed available data to assess current performance and identify gaps. Officials examined collection trends and considered steps to improve compliance. The focus remained on ensuring that due taxes are collected through proper channels and recorded accurately.

The meeting also received a briefing on enforcement actions against vehicles using non-standard number plates. Officers shared information on ongoing checks and operations aimed at identifying such vehicles. The review stressed the need for consistent action to ensure that all vehicles on the road follow approved registration standards. Action against vehicles using illegal lights was another key point on the agenda. The department reviewed measures taken so far and discussed ways to strengthen monitoring. Officials emphasized that the use of unauthorized lights creates issues for traffic management and public safety, and that continued enforcement is required. Vehicles with black-tinted windows were also discussed. Officers briefed the meeting on actions taken against such violations. The review focused on maintaining regular checks and ensuring that field staff apply the rules uniformly. The Director General of Excise directed officers to further improve service delivery for citizens. He

A weak regulator will undermine Discos privatisation

ISLAMABAD: Business leader and former president of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce, Shahid Rasheed Butt, has said that attempts by the Power Division to control Nepra pose a threat to the protection of public rights and to the privatisation of the power sector. He said that ending the regulator's autonomy would sabotage the proposed privatisation of electricity distribution companies, discourage investors, and cause serious harm to consumer interests while further strengthening the interests of Independent Power Producers that have inflicted losses of trillions of rupees on the economy. In a statement issued here, Shahid Rasheed Butt said that proposed amendments to the Nepra Act 1997 and the Electricity Act 1910 would place Nepra directly under the control of the Power Division. He added that international financial institutions and the private sector have also expressed concerns over these amendments. He said that during fiscal year 2024 to 2025, poor performance by distribution companies led to an increase of about Rs. 397 billion in circular debt. Average transmission and distribution losses stood at 17.55 percent, far above the allowed limit of 11.43 percent. Shahid Rasheed Butt said that Nepra is already weak and unable to stand up to government arbitrariness, and is now being further weakened and rendered dysfunctional.

A compromised regulator will delay tariff notifications, stall the development of a competitive electricity market, and undermine key reforms. A weak regulator, he said, will be unable to ensure consumer protection or stability in the power sector. He urged parliament to review the proposed legal changes transparently and consult all stakeholders, including consumers and potential investors. Any move that compromises regulatory independence, he warned, would deepen inefficiencies, raise electricity costs for households and businesses, and further erode confidence in the power sector reform agenda.—DNA

Rain slows traffic flow, ITP urges caution

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) on Tuesday said that traffic flow on various roads of the federal capital has slowed down due to rainfall, causing pressure on major arteries of the city. An ITP official told APP that traffic police officers are present on roads to ensure smooth traffic flow and facilitate commuters despite the wet conditions. He urged citizens to strictly avoid lane violations while driving, saying that discipline on roads is essential to prevent congestion and accidents during rain. The official specifically advised motorcyclists to remain in the left lane and maintain a slow speed to ensure their own safety as well as that of other road users. He added that commuters can contact the traffic helpline 1915 or emergency helpline Pucar-15 for updates and assistance.

Chinese tech delegation meets IT minister to explore investment opportunities

ISLAMABAD: A Chinese technology delegation has expressed interest in exploring long-term partnerships and investment opportunities in Pakistan's information technology sector, citing the country's expanding digital ecosystem and availability of skilled human resources. The two-member delegation from the Leviathan Group – which specializes in big data centres, advanced digital solutions and smart technologies – conveyed its interest during a meeting with Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja, according to a news release. The delegation comprised Mingqian Sun, chief executive officer of Leviathan Technologies, and Dinglin Mei, senior representative of the group. The meeting was also attended by Zeehang Qureshi, chief operating officer of Capital Smart Innovations, and Khalid Taimur Akram, adviser to the chairman of HRL Group. During the meeting, Mingqian Sun briefed the minister on Leviathan Technologies' areas of expertise and discussed prospects for joint collaboration, technology transfer and potential investment in Pakistan's IT sector. Shaza Fatima Khawaja welcomed the delegation and highlighted the government's commitment to promoting foreign investment, strengthening digital infrastructure and fostering a business-friendly environment for international technology companies. She referred to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's Digital Nation Pakistan vision, aimed at positioning the country as a regional hub for IT services, innovation and digital transformation. The Chinese delegation appreciated the government's policy outlook and reaffirmed its interest in continued engagement with Pakistani stakeholders to explore collaborative projects. The meeting ended with a commitment from both sides to maintain close coordination and identify concrete avenues for cooperation in the near future, with a view to strengthening Pakistan-China technological and economic ties.—DNA

IESCO drives digital shift, urges use of 118

In response to a query about load-shedding during the summer, he stated that over the past three months, the team has been fully engaged in maintenance work

ISLAMABAD: IESCO Chief Executive Engineer Chaudhry Khalid Mahmood Tuesday advised consumers to use helpline 118 and download the smart app, noting that under the Prime Minister's vision, a countrywide digitalized system is being introduced in all offices, offering comprehensive under-one-roof services that meet international standards. While speaking in an exclusive interview on a PTV program, IESCO CEO stated that under the Prime Minister's vision for reforms and digitalization, all nationwide offices have been transformed with a modern digitalized system. The initiative includes e-files, online billing features, the Mobile Power App and helpline 118, allowing consumers to lodge complaints and access services online without the hassle of visiting offices in person, he added. He further highlighted that 13 additional facilitation centers have been integrated, linking all offices with nationwide digital centers to provide seamless, efficient services. The CEO emphasized that these measures mark a major step toward a fully digital, transparent, and consumer-friendly electricity service across the country. He also stated that IESCO serves as the foundation for a transparent, reliable, and sustainable power delivery system, with advanced billing and monitoring systems in place, ensuring transparency and prompt responses to consumer complaints. Responding to a query about the safety of line staff, he explained that new equipment meeting international standards has been provided, including safety belts, anti-static clothing and proper tools. He added that staff receive timely allowances, promotions and participate in awareness and safety training programs to ensure their protection while on duty. In response to another question, he said that the consumer helpline 118 is available in all major languages, encouraging customers to call the helpline for any complaints or assistance. In response to a query about load-shedding during the summer, he stated that over the past three months, the team has been fully engaged in maintenance work. He assured that, with these measures in place, consumers should not face load-shedding this summer and can expect a reliable power supply.—DNA

US-Europe rift

OSWI MEKELBERG

ARIFT between the US and Europe is quickly brewing. However, neither side can afford it or will benefit from it. Worse, this long-standing alliance now faces its severest test yet, which is bound to remain for the next three years. It is already leaving deep scars. The security and prosperity of what is known as the West depend on close transatlantic relationships. When this alliance weakens, it only serves those the US and Europe perceive as their main rivals: China and Russia. One would not be surprised if the leaderships in Beijing and Moscow were rubbing their hands with glee at every spat between the Trump administration and America's NATO allies. The American administration's insistence on acquiring Greenland has proven to be, for the EU, the UK and Canada, the final straw. For them, this was a red line they could not afford to let Washington cross without mounting a challenge, as they did. The strategic importance of Greenland – the world's largest island – is indisputable and it will only increase because of the unfortunate impact of climate change. Its strategic position between the US and Russia makes it a front-line area of growing importance as the ice sheets melt. Global warming is causing Greenland's ice sheet and the rest of the Arctic's sea ice to melt, opening new sea routes that will serve as an alternative to traditional, costly navigation through the Suez and Panama canals. Add to this Greenland's rich mineral and hydrocarbon deposits and the attraction of this massive island, despite its harsh weather, lack of infrastructure and remoteness, is turning it into the US' latest frontier. The administration's insistence on acquiring Greenland has proven to be, for the EU, the UK and Canada, the final straw. Alas, the way President Donald Trump is going about it alienates his country's closest allies and does so needlessly. The idea of the American frontier underpins the country's historical westward expansion, with European settlers moving from the original settlements along the Atlantic Coast toward the Pacific Coast. This was a combination of ideology and utilitarianism, eventually resulting, for instance, in the purchase of Alaska in 1867 for the modest sum of \$7.2 million (about \$150 million today). Acquiring territories reflected the "manifest destiny" notion, coined by John L. O'Sullivan in 1845, that America had a special destiny to stretch across the continent. However, it was another US president, Woodrow Wilson, with his notable 14 points during the First World War, who made his country the champion of the right to self-determination – a position that now seems reversed by the current US administration. Greenland, in Trump's thinking, epitomizes this. And it is no longer a fight between the so-called new world and the old world of colonial Europe, but a confrontation that undermines the closest of allies, which share similar security concerns and, at least until recently, similar values and respect for the norms of a rules-based world order. Before Trump's arrival at the World Economic Forum in Davos, the fear was that the issue of Greenland was going to cause irreparable damage to the US' relationship with most of the

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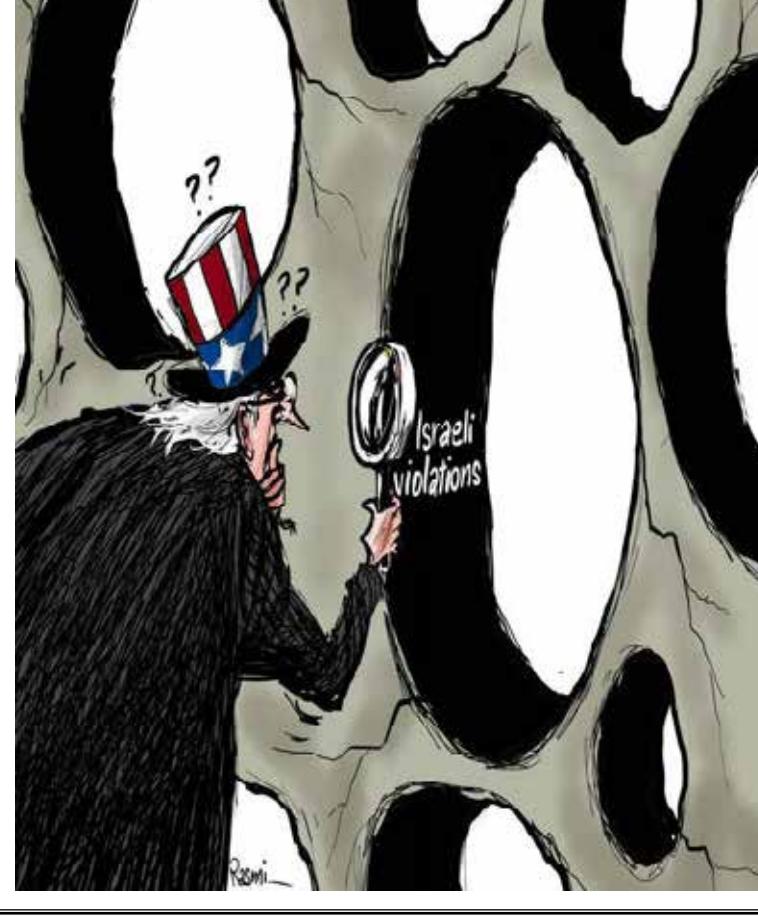
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Wednesday, January 28, 2026

other members of NATO, which believed that Trump would not climb down from his demand for American sovereignty over the island. The day before Trump addressed the forum, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney urged his fellow "middle powers" to form new alliances, accusing the great powers of abandoning the post-Second World War system of free trade and international norms, which required an adequate response. "We understand that this rupture calls for more than adaptation," he said, as "the old order is not coming back. We should not mourn it. Nostalgia is not a strategy. But from the fracture, we can build something better, stronger and more just." The response from Europe was very similar, rejecting any attempts to intimidate Denmark, the sovereign power in Greenland, or the 57,000 Greenlanders to hand the island to the US.

Trump might not have given up on his aspirations to own Greenland, but he took notice of his allies' firm position, making a very public commitment that he would not order a military operation to achieve this objective. Later, he announced that he and NATO had agreed a compromise with which both sides were happy, though they are yet to share it with the rest of us. To ease tensions with European allies, he also withdrew the threat of additional tariffs on them for their resistance to the US annexing Greenland.

To be sure, it is almost impossible to know whether Trump just enjoys pushing the envelope, and with it testing both the zones of possible agreement and the patience of his interlocutors, or if there is a serious and definite plan. In the case of Greenland, while there is curiosity about the agreement reached, a deal could have been achieved without straining America's relations with its close allies. Trump might not have given up on his aspirations to own Greenland, but he took notice of his allies' firm position Greenland, by virtue of being part of the Kingdom of Denmark, is protected by NATO, under Article 5 of its charter, from any hostile foreign forces. And if the US or any other member believes there is an imminent threat, they could work together to fortify the defenses of the island, on and offshore, to avert such a hostile development.

Moreover, the US already has more than 100 military personnel permanently stationed at its Pituffik base at the northwestern tip of the territory, operating under a 1951 agreement with Denmark. This agreement does not limit the number of troops the US is allowed to station there. This could serve as a basis for negotiations on an increased American presence without claiming sovereignty over land that is, anyway, public. This base, in coordination with Denmark and other NATO allies, or even additional bases, could be accorded long leases that guarantee an almost permanent American presence without violating the sovereignty of another country or deciding the future of the Greenlanders, which must be done by them alone. One complication with Trump's announcement is that neither the US nor NATO has legal standing in Danish territory and their leaders have not been mandated to negotiate on Denmark's behalf. Yet, reaching an amicable agreement with Denmark on the future security of Greenland, in the spirit of the NATO family, could create goodwill for the territory's commercial development, particularly regarding its natural resources. Significantly, Europe has drawn a line in the sand, which seems to have been understood in Washington: deliberations, negotiations and compromises are possible, but attempts to force an entire continent that yields its own levers of power to cede territory are mutually harmful and will be strongly rejected.

Rubio's Gaza Signal and Pakistan's Strategic Crossroads

Qamar Bashir



The backlash would not be confined to religious parties. Large segments of the public, already alienated by domestic political engineering and military dominance, would frame ISF participation as another example of Pakistan's security establishment acting without popular consent. The absence of parliamentary debate or a national consensus would magnify this perception. In a country where legitimacy increasingly comes from the street rather than the chamber, this is a perilous omission. There is also a quieter but no less serious concern: morale within...

WHEN US Secretary of State Marco Rubio publicly acknowledged Pakistan's willingness to "consider being part" of the proposed International Stabilisation Force (ISF) for Gaza, he did more than offer diplomatic gratitude. He placed Pakistan–quietly but unmistakably–at the center of the most sensitive post-war experiment in the Middle East. Rubio's words, carefully hedged yet pointed, signaled that Washington sees Pakistan not as a peripheral participant, but as a key pillar of a force designed to oversee Gaza's transition from devastation to an uncertain peace. For Islamabad, this moment marks a profound strategic crossroads. Participation in the ISF may promise international relevance, economic relief, and renewed favor in Washington. Yet it also carries the risk of deep domestic backlash, ideological rupture, and entanglement in a conflict where the lines between peacekeeping and coercion are dangerously blurred. At the heart of the issue lies the mandate itself. President Donald Trump's 20-point Gaza peace plan–endorsed by the UN Security Council–envisioned an international force, composed largely of troops from Muslim-majority countries, stepping in after Israel's withdrawal to oversee stabilisation, reconstruction, and security. Officially, the ISF is framed as a neutral mechanism to prevent chaos and facilitate recovery. In practice, however, its most controversial task is implicit: the disarmament of Hamas and other Palestinian resistance groups. This is where Pakistan's dilemma begins. Unlike Israel, which under the plan is required to vacate Gaza, or Western powers reluctant to deploy ground troops, Pakistan would enter Gaza with boots on the ground and credibility among Muslim populations. That very credibility is what makes Islamabad attractive to Washington—and simultaneously vulnerable at home. A Pakistani soldier confronting a Palestinian fighter will not be seen as a neutral peacekeeper by Pakistani public opinion; he will be seen, fairly or not, as enforcing a US-backed order against fellow Muslims. Field Marshal Asim Munir, now the most powerful military figure Pakistan has seen in decades, stands at the center of this storm. Recently elevated to oversee all three armed services, granted an extension until 2030, and shielded by constitutional immunity, Munir possesses unparalleled authority to take strategic risks. His close personal rapport with President Trump–symbolized by an unprecedented White House lunch without civilian officials–has restored trust between Washington and Rawalpindi after years of strain. But power does not eliminate consequences. It merely concentrates responsibility. Supporters of partici-

pation argue that Pakistan's military is uniquely qualified for the mission. It is battle-hardened, experienced in counterinsurgency, and among the world's largest contributors to UN peacekeeping operations. Financially, such missions bring dollar-denominated compensation, easing pressure on a struggling economy and reinforcing an institutional model the Pakistani military knows well. Diplomatically, participation could elevate Pakistan as a responsible global actor and secure US investment and security cooperation at a critical time. Yet these gains are contingent—and fragile. The most glaring weakness in the ISF proposal is mandate ambiguity. Peacekeeping traditionally rests on consent, neutrality, and limited use of force. Disarmament does not. If Hamas and other resistance factions refuse to surrender weapons voluntarily—as they have already signaled–then enforcement becomes unavoidable. In such a scenario, Pakistani troops would not merely stand between factions; they would become a party to coercion.

Compounding this is the absence of reciprocal enforcement mechanisms. The peace plan offers no clarity on what happens if Israel fails to fully withdraw from designated areas or violates post-withdrawal commitments. There is no indication that the ISF would be empowered to confront Israeli forces. The result is a one-sided enforcement architecture: Palestinian groups disarmed under international supervision, while Israel operates beyond the ISF's reach. For Pakistan, this asymmetry is politically toxic.

At home, the risks multiply. Pakistan's Islamist parties—particularly groups with strong street power such as JUI factions and Jamaat-e-Islami—are deeply opposed to US and Israeli policies in Palestine. Even with bans, arrests, and crackdowns, their ideological reach remains intact. Any perception that Pakistani soldiers are killing or detaining Palestinians—even in Gaza, even under UN authorization—could ignite nationwide protests, destabilizing cities and overwhelming civil order.

The backlash would not be confined to religious parties. Large segments of the public, already alienated by domestic political engineering and military dominance, would frame ISF participation as another example of Pakistan's security establishment acting without popular consent. The absence of parliamentary debate or a national consensus would magnify this perception. In a country where legitimacy increasingly comes from the street rather than the chamber, this is a perilous omission.

There is also a quieter but no less serious concern: morale within the ranks. Pakistani soldiers are drawn from a society that overwhelmingly sympathizes with

the Palestinian cause. Asking them to enforce disarmament against Palestinian fighters—while Israeli forces face no comparable restraint—could strain discipline and cohesion. Militaries can obey orders, but they are not immune to moral dissonance. Internationally, Pakistan faces the risk of strategic isolation if the mission falters. Gaza remains volatile, traumatized, and heavily armed. If the ISF encounters resistance, sustains casualties, or becomes mired in urban conflict, global enthusiasm may fade. Major powers can distance themselves; troops on the ground cannot. Pakistan could find itself trapped in an open-ended deployment with no clear exit strategy, absorbing blame while others retreat to diplomatic safety. Yet opportunities do exist—if handled with exceptional care. Pakistan could leverage its importance to insist on strict limitations: a mandate centered on civilian protection, humanitarian access, and policing ceasefire lines, explicitly excluding forced disarmament. It could demand written guarantees on rules of engagement, funding, timelines, and collective Muslim participation to avoid unilateral exposure. Properly negotiated, participation could position Pakistan as a mediator rather than an enforcer.

But such outcomes require transparency, parliamentary involvement, and a willingness to say no if red lines are crossed. The fundamental question is not whether Pakistan can participate in the Gaza stabilisation force. It is whether it can afford to do so on the terms currently envisioned.

Without clarity, consensus, and balance, ISF participation risks becoming a strategic trap: modest diplomatic gains purchased at the cost of domestic instability, moral authority, and long-term security. Field Marshal Munir's unprecedented power may allow him to make the decision—but it will not shield Pakistan from its consequences.

History offers a cautionary lesson. Nations that enter foreign conflicts under vague mandates often discover too late that stabilisation is easier to promise than to deliver. For Pakistan, Gaza is not merely a distant theater. It is a mirror reflecting the tension between power and legitimacy, ambition and restraint. How Islamabad responds will shape not only its role in the Middle East, but the fragile equilibrium at home.

In this moment, strategic prudence—not proximity to power—may prove the ultimate test of leadership.

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

Days that have passed

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



Tragedy followed when chemical string replaced Door (traditional cotton-coated string). The sky that once symbolized joy became a site of mourning, as lives were lost and families shattered. Gradually, the festival faded into silence. Today, the Punjab government has once again sought to revive Basant under official supervision...

ALTHOUGH mid-January arrives with icy winds at their fiercest and the mercury seems to sink perilously close to freezing, it is also the season when memory awakens with unusual intensity. The chill in the air carries with it the warmth of remembrance, drawing the mind irresistibly toward the narrow, winding streets of Lahore. What the younger generation now terms the "Walled City," what others know as Androon-e-Shehr, and what Lahore simply call Shehr, was then a living organism, breathing history, culture, and intimacy. Winter nights echoed with the rhythmic calls of "Garam Aandy," while peanuts and pine nuts were sold by lantern light. Afternoons were softened by sunshine and sweetened by oranges and kinnows, and mornings began with the unmistakable aromas of Siri Paye, Bong, Nihari, and Chanay, served generously with hot Kulchas or Puri Halwa, meals that nourished both body and soul. As January waned, conversation everywhere turned toward the first Sunday of February, for Basant had already been officially announced. The mere mention of the word was enough to ignite anticipation. Those living abroad would send messages weeks in advance, declaring their return especially for Basant and urging families to fix weddings of their relatives and close friends during those auspicious days, so that marriage and Basant can be celebrated at the same time. Relatives and friends working in the Middle East were entrusted with a specific task; bringing back Nar'a (Thread), regarded as superior and reliable. In Lahore, Kasur, and nearby towns, string-coating Addas bustled with activity. Orders were placed well ahead of time, colors carefully chosen, and once the string was ready, eager customers lined up at kite shops. It was customary to take along seasoned Ustaad (expert) who could judge the balance of a kite or the

smoothness of a spool at a glance. The kites and Gudis purchased earlier were handled with reverence, adjusted, tested, and carefully set aside.

In the days leading up to Basant, Lahore itself seemed to change its rhythm. Rooftops were cleaned, parapets repaired, and ladders readied. Nights were spent tightening and stretching kites and spools under dim bulbs, hands numbed by cold yet driven by excitement. Sleep was a rare luxury on the eve of Basant. At dawn, the first triumphant cries of "Bo-kata!" pierced the air, soon multiplying across neighborhoods. As the sun climbed, the sky blossomed into a riot of color, countless kites dancing like living beings, responding to every gust of wind. Women dressed in yellow, bangles clinked, and turmeric-hued dupattas fluttered from rooftops, while traditional songs and playful taunts drifted from house to house.

By noon, special dishes marked the festivity; Qeemay Walay Naan in many homes, Gajraila simmering slowly in others, along with an array of sweets and savories shared generously with neighbors and guests. Friendly rivals sometimes flared into minor scuffles, but elders intervened swiftly, restoring harmony with a few firm words and gentle counsel. Basant was, after all, a festival of togetherness.

As evening approached, the celebration intensified rather than faded. At the end of the day, the era of giant kites would begin in the name of Sham Kalyan, which was a great treat for the eyes. With the onset of night, rooftops and grounds were illuminated by floodlights, transforming the dark sky into a glowing stage. Night Basant had its own magic. Giant kites were launched under brilliant lights, their shadows gliding majestically across illuminated clouds, while specially prepared spools were tested in dramatic contests that drew cheers from all around. The glow of floodlights, the hum of generators, and

the echo of laughter gave Lahore a festive brilliance unmatched by daylight.

In those days, Basant largely belonged to the lower-middle and middle classes, who celebrated it with sincerity rather than spectacle. Many children from elite families viewed kite flying as undignified or feared injury, and thus remained distant observers. The festival's transformation began later, when it received formal government patronage. In Lahore, much of the credit for promoting Basant at an official and international level goes to Kamran Lashari, then Commissioner Lahore.

With private-sector collaboration, the festival was reshaped, marketed, and projected globally. While this recognition elevated Basant's profile, it also altered its character, pushing it beyond the modest means of those who had once been its custodians.

Tragedy followed when chemical string replaced Door (traditional cotton-coated string). The sky that once symbolized joy became a site of mourning, as lives were lost and families shattered. Gradually, the festival faded into silence. Today, the Punjab government has once again sought to revive Basant under official supervision, banning chemical string and hazardous practices. Whether these measures will be enforced effectively remains uncertain. God forbid, if blood again stains this celebration, only will cherished lives be lost, but the very survival of Basant may be threatened.

Kamran Lashari remains among those still engaged with this festival, and it is hoped that lessons of the past will guide present efforts. Even now, I profoundly miss those days. Perhaps these recollections will awaken dormant memories in others as well, and in doing so, bring to mind those dear souls who once stood beside us on rooftops, eyes lifted to the same sky, hearts united by the simple, radiant joy of Basant.

Briefs

Uzbekistan, Pakistan poised to deepen...

FROM PAGE 01 indicator of progress and in 2025, bilateral trade exceeded \$440 million is a 12 times higher than in 2016 with Uzbek exports topping \$320 million. The both sides leadership have outlined steps to lift trade to \$2 billion "in the near future," supported by the Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) that grants customs benefits for 17 categories of goods from each side. Business links are expanding rapidly, as of October 1, 2025, around 180 companies with Pakistani capital were operating in Uzbekistan, spanning textiles, food processing, construction materials, electrical equipment, and logistics. At both sides trade facilitation is also accelerating and Uzbekistan opened trade houses in Lahore and Karachi in 2025, while Pakistan plans to set up trade missions in Tashkent and Samarkand practical platforms intended to ease market entry and build business trust. On the investment side, upswing and industrial Partnerships, flows are strengthening in 2024, Pakistani investments of \$33 million were utilized in joint projects; from January to July 2025, that figure nearly doubled to around \$70 million. Joint ventures and feasibility studies are underway across textiles, pharmaceuticals, perfumery, and agriculture, with Uzbek companies also exploring production of household appliances, tractors, smart meters, and gas blocks in Pakistan, opening channels for technology transfer and advanced manufacturing. High-level engagement is reinforcing these trends, following Prime Minister, Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif's official visit to Uzbekistan in February 2025, both sides established a High-Level Strategic Partnership Council to institutionalize cooperation. Praising Uzbekistan's reform momentum, Sharif said, "miracles are possible only through a clear vision, high dynamism, hard work, and a resolute pursuit of a common goal."

Inflation to remain between 5 to 6 %

FROM PAGE 01 at 5.6% on a year-on-year basis in December 2025 as compared to 6.1% in the previous month and 4.1% in December 2024. On average, inflation during July-December FY2026 stood at 5.2% as against 7.2% during the same period last year. Remittances remained robust, supporting the external account, while the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) ranked among the world's top-performing markets. The report noted that the agriculture sector posted a growth of 2.9% in the first quarter FY2026, showing a significant improvement from 1% during the same period last year. Major crops (excluding wheat being rabi crop) recorded a contraction of 0.7% as compared to a contraction of 13.1% during the first quarter of last year, mainly due to reduced cotton production. LSM registered a growth of 6% with the QIM index reaching its highest during July-November FY2026 since FY2016, while during the period, 16 sectors recorded positive growth. In November 2025, LSM grew by 10.4% year-on-year and by 0.2% on a month-on-month basis. The government has achieved a fiscal surplus during July-November FY2026, with gross federal revenue receipts recording a growth of 7.8% during the period. The increase can be attributed to growth in the Federal Board of Revenue's (FBR) collection and non-tax revenue by 10.2% and 4.8%, respectively. Total expenditure declined by 6.2% due to 6.4% reduction in current expenditure as mark-up payments declined by 21.3%. Development expenditure, on the other hand, posted an increase of 1.5%.

Diplomatic Ryder Cup Islamabad 2026 at EIGHTEEN

The tournament witnessed enthusiastic participation from several distinguished Heads of Mission, including Ms. Natalie Baker, Chargé d'Affaires of the United States; H.E.

Mr. Maciej Pisarski, Ambassador of Poland; and H.E. Mr. Idesbald van der Gracht, Ambassador of Belgium, along with diplomats and members of the international community



DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Club at Eighteen, in collaboration with Mövenpick Hotel Centaurus Islamabad, successfully hosted the Diplomatic Ryder Cup Islamabad 2026 at the prestigious Eighteen Golf Course. The much-anticipated event brought together diplomatic missions from the United States

and Europe for a spirited 18-hole golf competition, celebrating sportsmanship, friendship, and international engagement.

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of the international community. Competition remained intense throughout the day, with both teams demonstrating exceptional skill and determination. In a closely contested finish, Team Europe emerged victorious, clinching the coveted Diplomatic Ryder Cup with a narrow three-point lead.

Adding to the day's excitement were on-course challenges with Brendan Kalland claimed the longest drive (Men) title,

Michaela Chrtova won longest drive (Women) and Gilles Hachez secured the closest to the Pin (Men) award. The event concluded with brunch providing an opportunity for diplomats, golfers, and guests to connect. Participants highly appreciated the world-class golf facilities and the exemplary event management by The Club at Eighteen, making the Diplomatic Ryder Cup Islamabad 2026 a memorable success.

Pakistan to Host South Asian Games in March 2027

AFZAL JAVED

ISLAMABAD: In a major boost for regional sports and Pakistan's international sporting profile, the South Asian Olympic Council (SAOC) has again unanimously confirmed Pakistan as the host of the 14th South Asian Games, scheduled to be held from 23 to 31 March 2027. The landmark decision was taken during a high-level meeting of South Asian Olympic countries on the sidelines of the 46th General Assembly of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) in Tashkent. The meeting was chaired by HRH Prince Jigvel Uugan Wangchuck, OCA Vice President for South Asia, and attended by Presidents and Secretaries General of the National Olympic Committees of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. President of the Pakistan Olympic Association (POA) and SAOC, Arif Saeed, represented Pakistan at the meeting, alongside Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani, Federal Secretary, Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination (IPC), who officially conveyed the Government of Pakistan's firm commitment to successfully host the Games.

Following detailed deliberations, the South Asian Olympic family authorized the Pakistan Olympic Association / NOC Pakistan to finalize operational arrangements, including the flexibility to adjust the event schedule within a one-week window, if required for logistical or technical reasons. It was further unanimously agreed that the sports disciplines and events will remain unchanged, as finalized during the SAOC Executive Committee Meeting held in Lahore on 25 February 2025. During the session, Federal Secretary Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani assured full government support, stating that all participating athletes and officials will be provided maximum facilities, security, and logistical assistance.

Rampant Sabalenka sweeps past Jovic into Australian Open semifinals

DNA

MELBOURNE: Relentless top seed Aryna Sabalenka muscled past American teenager Iva Jovic and into the Australian Open semifinals Tuesday to accelerate her bid for a third Melbourne title. The Belarusian powered home 6-3, 6-0 in blazing heat to set up a clash with either third seed Coco Gauff or 12th seed Elina Svitolina. It booked the 27-year-old a 14th career Grand Slam semifinal and fourth in a row at the season-opening major. Sabalenka has won twice in Melbourne, in 2023 and 2024, and seemed destined for another crown last year but was upset in the final by Madison Keys. Keys' title defense is over, beaten in the fourth round by Jessica Pegula.

FIA President Highlights Safety Boost with Hankook Partnership

DUBAI: FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem has welcomed Hankook, one of the world's leading tire makers, as the FIA's newest Global Partner in the organization's drive to boost safety in motorsport and mobility. Hankook has officially joined the FIA's Global Partner Programme after more than three years as an associate of the global governing body for motorsport and the federation for mobility organizations worldwide. Hankook will be an Official Partner of the annual FIA Awards as well as Official Partner of the FIA Sustainable Innovation Series, a global event platform, run in close cooperation with FIA World Championships. These include the ABB FIA Formula E World Championship, FIA Formula One World Championship, FIA World Endurance Championship and FIA World Rally Championship from 2026 through 2028. Ben Sulayem said: "Sustainability and technological innovation are at the heart of our missions at the FIA, so I am delighted to welcome Hankook as a new partner. This new partnership with Hankook reflects the global growth of our FIA Global Partner Programme, and through collaboration it will strengthen our work to make motor sport and mobility safer." The FIA Sustainable Innovation Series con-

venes industry leaders to focus on "track to road" opportunities, translating innovation developed in motorsport into wider automotive and mobility applications. As the exclusive technical partner and tire supplier of the ABB FIA Formula E World Championship and the FIA World Rally Championships, Hankook supports the FIA's ambition to use motorsport as a platform for progress and responsible innovation. These championships provide a live testing environment for new materials, performance standards and safety solutions, with learnings that can be transferred from competition to everyday mobility. Jongho Park, president and COO, Hankook Tire Europe, said: "The FIA and Hankook share the belief that technological innovation can only be effective on a sustained basis if it combines safety, fairness and responsibility. As Global Partner of the FIA, we want to use our expertise in technology and sustainable tire development to drive the mobility of the future, in motorsport and beyond." Craig Edmondson, chief commercial officer of the FIA, said: "Through our expanding Global Partner Programme, the FIA is working alongside leading international organizations that share our commitment to driving innovation, sustainability, and safety across both motorsport and mobility. - APP

Al-Nassr and Al-Ittihad claim difficult victories to close SPL Matchday 18

Al Nassr Edge Al-Taawoun Through Own Goal as Ronaldo, Mané Star; Al-Ittihad Win, Al-Hazem Rally, and Saudi Pro League Title Race Intensifies Ahead of Matchday Nineteen This Midweek Round Fixtures



aimed towards Ronaldo misdirected into Al-Taawoun's net by Mohammed Al-Dossary. The second half saw Al-Nassr push further in search of a second goal. A series of chances from João Félix, Ronaldo and

Mané were stopped by the Al-Taawoun defence, with Mané also striking the post in the 58th minute. Ronaldo thought that he had won a penalty after being brought down by Waleed Al-Ahmed in the 62nd

No military operation underway in Tirah Valley...

FROM PAGE 01 seasonal movement," he added. Asif said the provincial government had allocated funds to support displaced families. "[The] Khyber Pakhtunkhwa govt has set aside Rs4 billion for those who are migrating," he said. He went on to say that a notification regarding the relocation was issued after consultations between the provincial government and a local jirga. "The notification was issued after consultation between the provincial government and the jirga," Asif said, adding that it was agreed to establish schools and police stations in the area. The defence czar said that members of the jirga had met representatives of the outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). "Jirga members went to meet the proscribed TTP members on December 11, after that, they met the chief minister of KP," he said. "Around 400 to 500 TTP members, along with their families, are present in Tirah. However, intelligence-based operations against terrorism continue," he said. He stressed that the area was not being evacuated for any operation. "The armed forces deployed in that area have nothing to do with it," he added. The defence czar also claimed that illegal activities were a major source of tension in the region. "Cannabis is cultivated on around 12,000 acres in the Tirah Valley. The income is about Rs3.5 million per acre, and this is the real dispute," he said. Asif said the government was willing to take journalists to the Tirah Valley to show the situation on the ground. "We [govt] can take journalists to Tirah to show them the real situation," he added.

PTI voices concern over reports of Imran...

FROM PAGE 01 reportedly checked him in jail, this is an extremely sensitive and serious medical condition which, if not treated promptly and properly, carries a high risk of permanent damage to his eyesight," read a post on the party's official X account. The former ruling party claimed Adiala jail administration was insisting that the treatment for the infection be carried out inside the jail, despite an attending specialist doctor saying that such treatment was "not possible in jail and that it requires an operation theatre and specialised medical facilities". The PTI stated that the attitude put Khan's "eye vision and his overall health in grave danger". The party stated that the former prime minister was last granted access to his personal physician in October 2024, terming the move "a blatant violation of court orders and a gross breach of fundamental human rights".

MQM wants Mayor to step down

FROM PAGE 01 He maintained that they would not backtrack from their demand for the judicial commission, whether their security is withdrawn or false cases are registered against them. The deadly inferno erupted at the shopping mall on January 17 and took nearly two days to be extinguished. At least 73 people lost their lives, while around 1,200 shops were affected in the blaze. Slapping the Sindh government over the tragedy, the MQM-P leader said that Karachi should be handed over to the Centre if the provincial government is unable to fulfil its responsibilities. Referring to the withdrawal of security, the MQM-P leader asked whether the provincial government could not guarantee their security and if they should instead seek protection from the federal government. "By doing this, you [Sindh government] are sending a message that you can't take our [MQM-P] responsibility," he added. The MQM-P leader urged the provincial government to handover Karachi to the Centre if they cannot fulfil their responsibilities.

Briefs

KPRA team conducts visits to strengthen tax compliance

PESHAWAR : The Additional Collector Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA), Mardan & Malakand Region, Miss Wazir, along with her team, conducted field visits to various private hospitals, restaurants, hotels and wedding halls in Mardan as part of ongoing efforts to strengthen compliance and improve collection of Sales Tax on Services. The purpose of the visits was to examine the reasons for low tax payments, ensure proper compliance with the law. During the visits, the KPRA team also handed over on-the-spot payment challans to the respective entities to improve tax tax compliance. Speaking on the occasion the Additional Collector Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority - KPRA Mardan & Malakand Region said that tax evasion will not be tolerated at any cost and strict action will be taken against tax evaders as per KP Sales Tax on Services Act 2022.—APP

PSX stays bearish, loses 385 points

ISLAMABAD: The benchmark KSE-100 Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) on Tuesday continued with a bearish trend, losing 384.80 points, a decline of 0.20 percent, to close at 188,202.86 points compared to 188,587.66 points on the previous trading day, according to PSX data. During the session, the ready market recorded a trading volume of 749.247 million shares with a traded value of Rs 53,061 billion, against 870,446 million shares valuing Rs 57,197 billion in the previous session. Market capitalization declined to Rs 21,147 trillion from Rs 21,162 trillion a day earlier. Out of 486 active companies in the ready market, 160 advanced, 278 declined, while 48 remained unchanged. K-Electric Limited topped the volume chart with 90,164 million shares, followed by Hascol Petroleum with 47,948 million shares and Bank of Punjab with 35,973 million shares.

The top gainers included Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited, which rose by Rs 75.77 to close at Rs 27,676.00, and Khyber Textile Mills Limited, which increased by Rs 56.35 to settle at Rs 1,694.97. On the losing side, PIA Holding Company Limited (B) declined by Rs 234.33 to close at Rs 20,769.00, while Nestle Pakistan Limited fell by Rs 69.81 to close at Rs 7,900.83.

In the futures market, turnover stood at 446,671 million shares with a traded value of Rs 31,687 billion, compared to 374,873 million shares worth Rs 28,569 billion in the previous session. Out of 314 futures-market companies, 101 recorded gains, while 210 declined and three remained unchanged.—APP

Rupee gains 03 paisa against US Dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Tuesday appreciated by 03 paisa against the US Dollar in interbank trading and closed at Rs 279.82 compared to the previous day's closing at Rs 279.85. According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs 280.70 and Rs 282.4, respectively. The price of the Euro increased by Rs 0.45 to close at Rs 331.92 from the previous day's close of Rs 331.47, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese Yen came down by 01 paisa and closed at Rs 1.80, whereas the exchange rate of the British Pound witnessed an increase of Rs 0.48 and closed at Rs 382.56 compared to the previous day's Rs 382.08. The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham declined by 01 paisa and closed at Rs 76.18, while the Saudi Riyal remained unchanged to close at Rs 74.62.—APP

Ali Farid appointed as SECP commissioner

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Government of Pakistan has appointed Mr. Muhammad Ali Farid Khwaja as Commissioner of the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) for a three-year term, effective immediately. The announcement comes via a notice from the Finance Division's Investment Wing. His remuneration and allowances will be governed by the relevant provisions of the SECP Act. This appointment brings a seasoned private-sector leader to one of Pakistan's key financial regulatory bodies. Mr. Khwaja, a prominent Pakistani-British financier, investor, and entrepreneur, specializes in fintech, capital markets, and investment strategy. He is best known as the Co-founder and Chairman of KTrade Securities (formerly associated with KASB Securities), widely regarded as Pakistan's largest retail investment and trading platform. Under his leadership, KTrade has driven innovation in accessible stock trading, digital onboarding, and partnerships that have expanded financial inclusion, including collaborations with fintech players like JazzCash. With over 15 years of experience in equity research and investments, Mr. Khwaja previously served as a



partner at Autonomous Research in London (now part of Allianz Bernstein), focusing on European fintech equities. He also held roles as CFO and Board Director at Safe Charge Group (a London-listed payments firm) and was a top-ranked technology analyst at firms like Berenberg and UBS. An alumnus of the University of Oxford (as a Rhodes Scholar) and Georgetown Leadership Seminar, he has been recognized for his contributions to Pakistan's financial sector, including receiving the Pride of Pakistan award. The move is seen as timely amid efforts to modernize Pakistan's capital markets. Recent SECP developments include the appointment of Dr. Kabir Ahmed Sidhu as Chairman earlier in January 2026, signaling a push toward stronger governance, market supervision, and reforms in areas like digitalization and investor protection. Industry observers, including former regulators and market participants, have welcomed Mr. Khwaja's entry, noting his "real market experience" and "fresh ideas" could accelerate overdue changes in the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) ecosystem, boost investor confidence, and align regulation with global fintech trends. This appointment underscores the government's intent to infuse regulatory leadership with private-sector expertise, potentially fostering a more dynamic and transparent securities environment in Pakistan.

North Korea fires ballistic missiles toward Sea of Japan

SEOUL: North Korea fired what appeared to be two ballistic missiles toward the Sea of Japan on Tuesday, Tokyo said. South Korea's Joint Chief of Staff also said it had detected a "projectile" being fired toward what Seoul calls the East Sea. Japan's coast guard, citing the defense ministry, said it had detected two ballistic missiles and that both were estimated to have already splashed down. Japanese news agency Jiji Press reported the two missiles had landed outside of the country's Exclusive Economic Zone, citing defense ministry sources. The test is Pyongyang's second of the month, following a salvo of missiles fired hours before South Korea's leader headed to China for a summit. It comes a day after a high-level visit to Seoul by the Pentagon's number three official Elbridge Colby, who hailed South Korea as a "model ally." North Korea has stepped up missile testing significantly in recent years.—APP

Gold price falls by Rs1,500 per tola

ISLAMABAD: Gold prices registered a decline in the local market on Tuesday as the price of 24-karat gold per tola decreased by Rs1,500 to settle at Rs30,562. The price of 10 grams of 24-karat gold fell by Rs1,286 to Rs454,871, while the price of 10 grams of 22-karat gold went down by Rs1,179 to Rs416,980, according to the All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association. However, silver prices witnessed an upward trend, with the price of 24-karat silver per tola increasing by Rs212 to Rs11,640, whereas the price of 10 grams of silver went up by Rs182 to Rs9,979. In the international market, gold prices slipped by \$15 to \$5,082 per ounce, while silver prices increased by \$2.12 to \$11.65 per ounce, the association reported.—APP

Kazakhstan's tourism sector attracts over 1.2t in investments

ASTANA : Minister of Tourism and Sport Yerbol Myrzabossynov addressed tourism development issues at the Government's Jan 27 session, Qazinews News Agency reports. He noted stable growth of the sector's key indicators in 2025. In particular, the number of tourists in accommodation facilities increased by 12%, exceeding 10 million. In the World Economic Forum's 2024 Travel and Tourism (T&T) development index, Kazakhstan climbed from 62nd to 52nd spot, setting a goal to enter the world's TOP-50 countries. According to official statistics of 2025, the volume of investment in tourism sector rose by 32% compared to the same period in 2024, reaching 1 trillion 254 billion tenge. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Tourism and Sport is developing and implementing 328 investment projects, including Oi-Qaragai mountain resort, Hilton and Mandarin Oriental hotel complexes, Keruen Inn road service facilities, and Jibek Joly entertainment complex. "The implementation of these projects will enable to create some 10,000 jobs in the tourism sector.—APP

55,000 local observers to watch elections in Bangladesh

DHAKA : The Election Commission (EC) has allowed 55,454 local observers to monitor the 13th National Parliamentary Election and the Referendum scheduled for February 12. Of them, 7,997 observers from 81 observation organizations centrally registered with the EC, and constituency-based 47,457 observers have been given permission to observe the elections. A letter, signed by EC Secretariat Director (Public Relations) and Information Officer Md Ruhul Amin Mallick, revealed the information on Monday. According to the letter, only voters of the respective polling centres and those carrying EC-approved identity cards will be allowed to enter the polling centers. Observers must follow the 'Election Observation Guidelines 2025' while observing the election. The EC launched a web portal (<https://pr.ecs.gov.bd/>) to issue identity cards and car stickers for the local observers. To apply for identity cards and car stickers, the approved observers have to log into the portal separately and apply online by February 3. After verifying and approving the applications, the observers will have to download and print the cards and stickers online. Centrally-registered observers can collect their identity cards and car stickers from the EC Public Relations Branch. Returning officers or authorized officials will approve the online applications for constituency-based observers across the country. User IDs and passwords have already been provided to returning officers for this purpose. Observers must follow these instructions: Central and local observers should display their identification cards at all times during observation, ensuring they are clearly visible. Observers must respect voters' rights and avoid obstructing the work of EC officials. They cannot interfere with the election process in any way. Observers may stay briefly in any area inside polling centres, provided their presence does not disrupt the election process. Under no circumstances can an observer enter the secret voting room. The Constitution, election-related laws, and rules must be followed to assist in the conduct of elections in a democratic manner. Observers must not interfere with the work of election officials, and no election materials may be touched or removed. Observers must maintain complete impartiality and neutrality. They must refrain from wearing, carrying, or displaying any identification or symbol supporting or opposing any candidate or political party. Observers must not accept, attempt to buy, or encourage any gift or favour from any political party, candidate, agent, organization, or person involved in the election. During the polls, observers must refrain from making comments to the media that could disrupt or influence the election process.—APP

S. Korea's official gold reserves remain unchanged for 13 yrs

SEOUL: The Bank of Korea (BOK) ranked 39th worldwide in terms of gold reserves, as the central bank has refrained from additional gold purchases since 2013 despite active buying by its global peers, data showed Tuesday. According to a report by the World Gold Council, the BOK held 104.4 metric tons of gold at the end of 2025, ranking 39th among central banks worldwide, down one notch from a year earlier. When holdings by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Central Bank (ECB) are included, South Korea's position effectively falls to 41st. The United States held the world's largest gold reserves at 8,133.5 tons, followed by Germany with 3,350.3 tons, Italy 2,451.9 tons, France 2,437 tons, Russia 2,326.5 tons and China 2,305.4 tons. South Korea's total foreign exchange reserves stood at US\$430.7 billion as of end-November, ranking ninth in the world. —Agencies

Iraq's parliament delays presidential vote

BAGHDAD: Iraq's parliament postponed the election of the country's president on Tuesday to allow Kurdish rivals time to agree on a candidate. The parliament delayed the session, the official INA press agency reported, without saying whether a new date had been agreed. The agency reported earlier that speaker Haibat Al-Halbussi received requests from Iraq's two main Kurdish parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), to postpone the vote to "allow both parties more time" to reach a deal. By convention, a Shiite Muslim holds the powerful post of prime minister, the parliament speaker is a Sunni and the largely ceremonial presidency goes to a Kurd. Under a tacit agreement between the two main Kurdish parties, a PUK member holds the Iraqi presidency, while the president and regional premier of the semi-autonomous Kurdish region is selected from the KDP. But this time the KDP named its own candidate for Iraq's presidency: Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein. Once elected, the president will then have 15 days to appoint a prime minister, expected to be former premier Nouri Al-Maliki. On Saturday, the Coordination Framework, an alliance of Shiite parties with varying ties to Iran that holds a parliamentary majority, endorsed Maliki. But his nomination appeared to stoke concern in Washington. The 75-year-old shrewd politician is Iraq's only two-term premier (2006-2014) since the 2003 US invasion. Seen as close to Iran, Al-Maliki left power in 2014 following heated pressure from Washington. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio warned on Sunday against a pro-Iranian government in Iraq. An Iraqi source close to the Coordination Framework told AFP that Washington had conveyed that it "holds a negative view of previous governments led by former prime minister Maliki.—APP

Japan's last 2 pandas to leave for China

TOKYO: Japan's remaining twin giant pandas will depart for China on Tuesday, marking the first time in about half a century the country will be without any pandas, which have long been cherished as a symbol of bilateral friendship. Xiao Xiao and his sister, Lei Lei, left Tokyo's Ueno Zoological Gardens in the early afternoon for Narita airport to be flown to China later at night. They are scheduled to arrive Wednesday at a facility in China's Sichuan Province housing their mother Shin Shin and elder sister Xiang Xiang. The twin pandas were born at the Ueno zoo in 2021 to Shin Shin and her mate, Ri Ri, both of whom were on loan to Japan for breeding research. China retained ownership of them and the deadline for the twins' return approached under a bilateral lease agreement. Prospects for a new panda loan by China remain uncertain amid strained ties with Beijing following remarks last year by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi that suggested Japan could act in the event of an attack on Taiwan. At a press conference on Tuesday, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Kei Sato expressed hopes that exchanges through pandas will continue as they have contributed to improving public sentiment in both Japan and China. Noting that the twin pandas have won the hearts of many in Japan, Sato said, "I hope they will stay healthy and thrive in China as well." Since the first pair of giant pandas arrived in Japan from China in 1972 to commemorate the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries, the animals have drawn huge crowds and generated economic benefits through tourism and related merchandise, such as toys and goods. The Ueno zoo pair became the last two pandas in Japan last June after four other animals at the Adventure World amusement park in Shirahama, Wakayama Prefecture, left for China.—Agencies



HONG KONG: Ambassador of Pakistan to China Khalil Hashmi inaugurated a Pictorial Exhibition of History, Heritage and Diversity of Pakistan to start commemorative activities of #PakChinaAt75. Young children and students from different universities of Hong Kong evinced great interest in the exhibits.

The telecom sustainability challenge: Can Pakistan green its growing networks?

Relying on fossil fuels releases toxic air pollutants as well as greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Over 60% of Pakistan's electricity generation is sourced from fossil fuels, meaning even grid-connected infrastructure has a huge carbon footprint

MARYAM RASHEED

THE telecom sector of Pakistan is at the center of economic growth, governance and everyday life due to rapid digital transformation. The telecom networks act as the digital backbone of the country, with more than 200.3 million Telecom subscribers and more than 150 million broadband subscribers. Despite the expansion of connectivity throughout Pakistan, an important question is coming up; is it environmentally sustainable? The environmental cost of phone calls and internet is quite high and very often ignored. There are more than 58,423 total cell sites in Pakistan that consume 3 to 6 kilowatt-hours of electricity every hour. One tower may consume over 50,000 units of electricity in a year while functioning day and night. When it is multiplied through 1,000 sites, the energy footprint is large. In several rural and semi-urban areas, telecom operators depend on diesel generators due to erratic supply of grid electricity. Relying on fossil fuels releases toxic air pollutants as well as greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Over 60% of Pakistan's electricity generation is sourced

from fossil fuels, meaning even grid-connected infrastructure has a huge carbon footprint. As the country is facing record-breaking heat waves and recurring energy shortages, and with climate change leading to more and more floods, the environmental cost of connectivity is becoming increasingly difficult to overlook. Energy consumption is not the only problem. Pakistan is also facing a mounting issue of electronic waste connected to its telecom and digital industries. The country's e-waste burden is increasing due to obsolete network devices, wasted mobile phones, batteries, and routers. Pakistan produces more than 400,000 metric tons of e-waste every year, according to the Global E-Waste Monitor. However, no national policy for collection, recycling or safe disposal exists. Most e-waste ends up in the hands of the informal sector which engages in the process of dismantling and recycling without safety measures in place. This exposes workers to toxic substances and dirties the soil and air while polluting water, posing long-term public health and environmental hazards. Some telecom operators have initiated action to alleviate these issues. As the leading mobile broker in Pakistan, Jazz has launched a Climate Action Charter, tested solar-powered towers, and adopted lithium-ion bat-

teries. Telenor Pakistan has installed over 1,700 solar energy solutions, has developed smart energy management solutions, and operates its 'Take Back' program to encourage the return of old devices. Zong 4G is testing solar-battery-diesel hybrid energy systems while the PTCL Group is switching to energy-efficient cooling systems in exchanges and data centres. In spite of these initiatives indicating progress, yet reporting on sustainability remains voluntary and the publicly available data regarding real energy savings or emissions reduction in the life cycle of products is limited. While several companies are stepping up their sustainability game, it is hard to understand the real impact of their efforts. Green progress in the telecom sector continues to be affected by structural challenges. Diesel generators are largely used by operators in Pakistan due to power shortages in the country. Regulatory framework for telecom sector does not exist for monitoring carbon emission or for carrying out energy audits or meeting e-waste compliance and others. It is highly cost-sensitive and exhibits one of the lowest average revenues per user in the region, making the financial investment in green infrastructure at scale challenging

without external funding. Another ineffective link is public awareness as the demand for green telecom services is limited. The sector's headway towards sustainability requires a roadmap, according to policy experts. Green telecom guidelines should be introduced by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, financial incentives/tax rebates or green financing should be offered to support the adoption of renewable energy while e-waste management should be formalized with certified recycling facilities throughout the country. Efforts are also required to achieve public-private partnerships, particularly for solar-powered towers in rural areas, along with a nationwide public campaign on e-waste and energy conservation. There is an urgent need to curtail the environmental impact of the telecom industry. Innovation in telecom infrastructure will help facilitate the future of the country or the world. With appropriate policies and a collective disposition, Pakistan can position itself at the forefront of green digital infrastructure in the global South.

The writer is Manager (Regulatory Affairs & Coordination) at HG Telecommunication (pvt) Ltd.

Briefs

Govt approves rebasing National Accounts to 2025-26

ISLAMABAD: After a 10-year gap, the government has approved shifting the National Accounts base year from 2015-16 to 2025-26 to better capture new and closed businesses used in calculating Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, The News reported. The project cost has been revised to Rs 903.4 million from Rs 608 million after 12 additional surveys were added, including to cover small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in GDP estimates.

Pakistan previously rebased its national accounts from 2005-06 to 2015-16, and has now cleared a further rebasing to 2025-26. According to the set objectives, the project will aim to change the base of the National Accounts from 2015-16 to 2025-26 and to improve the estimates of GDP, Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) and expenditure on GDP, amongst others, by enlarging its coverage and filling the data gaps. The contribution of all economic sectors and sub-sectors towards the national economy in terms of the size and volume of GDP and GFCF will be estimated. The ratios and constant growth rates being used in the estimation of GDP will be updated or revaluated, and the implementation of the System of National Accounts 2008 will be enhanced. – Agencies

US carrier strike group arrives in Middle East amid Iran tensions

WASHINGTON: A US aircraft carrier and supporting warships have arrived in the Middle East, two US officials told Reuters on Monday, expanding President Donald Trump's capabilities to defend US forces, or potentially take military action against Iran. The aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln and several guided-missile destroyers have crossed into the Middle East region, which comes under the US military's Central Command, the officials told Reuters. Trump said on Thursday that the United States had an "armada" heading toward Iran, but hoped he would not have to use it. The warships began deploying from the Asia-Pacific region earlier this month, as tensions between Iran and the United States escalated following a crackdown on protests across Iran. Trump had repeatedly threatened to intervene if Iran continued to kill protesters, but the countrywide demonstrations have since abated. The president said he had been told that killings were subsiding and that he believes there is currently no plan for the executions of prisoners. – Agencies

FBR abolishes role of local agents

ISLAMABAD: The FBR has issued Customs General Order (CGO) abolishing the role of authorised local agents in the assessment of duties/taxes on the import of vehicles, including old, used cars. This condition applies to vehicles imported from Europe, especially those from German-based manufacturers. This condition does not apply in the case of importing cars from Japan. From now onwards, only prices certified by manufacturers will be taken for the purpose of assessment of duties and taxes on the import of old and used vehicles in case of luxurious brands coming from Europe, especially from Germany. This step will help to overcome under-invoicing. According to the CGO issued by the FBR on Monday stating that the Federal Board of Revenue is pleased to direct that the following further amendments shall be made in Customs General Order No 14 of 2005 dated June 6, 2005 – APP

Pak, Ghana hold first formal bilateral talks

The Pakistani delegation was led by Ambassador Hamid Asghar Khan, additional foreign secretary, while the Ghanaian side was headed by Ambassador Khadija Iddrisu, chief director (of the) ministry of foreign affairs,”

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani and Ghana held their first formal bilateral talks and signed two Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), the Foreign Office (FO) said on Tuesday. A press release by the FO, initially released said that the two countries convened their first Bilateral Political Consultations (BPC) on Monday, “marking an important milestone in the development of bilateral relations between the two countries.” The Pakistani delegation was led by Ambassador Hamid Asghar Khan, additional foreign secretary, while the Ghanaian side was headed by Ambassador Khadija Iddrisu, chief director (of the) ministry of foreign affairs,” it said. During the talks, it added, two Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) were signed: an MoU on BPCs and an MoU between Islamabad’s Foreign Service Academy and the Ghana Foreign Service Institute. “Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthening bilateral relations



and agreed to enhance cooperation across a broad range of areas, including political, economic, defence, tourism, cultural, health, education, information technology, and other mutually beneficial sectors,” the statement said. According to the FO, the two sides also agreed to hold the next round of the BPC in Islamabad next year. “Pakistan and Ghana have friendly cooperative ties, spanning many decades. The institutional dialogue process will further strengthen their bilateral relations through more meaningful and project-specific cooperation,” it said. While relations between the two countries are still budding, Pakistan has been endeavouring to establish closer diplomatic ties with African nations. On Saturday, Pakistan and Somalia signed an agreement abolishing visa requirements for diplomatic passport holders of both countries. Last year, the Senate unanimously adopted a resolution declaring May 25 as Pakistan-Africa Friendship Day, a motion moved by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar.

Govt's quick fix for overseas Pakistanis occupied property

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The government on Tuesday assured a quick fix for overseas Pakistanis’ illegally occupied properties in the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), declaring that their assets were fully protected. “For overseas Pakistanis: If you report any qabza/illegal occupation, the DC Islamabad is bound to decide within seven days. Your property rights will be protected; no one will be allowed to take what is lawfully yours,” Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi posted on X. “Your investments in ICT are welcome and valued. We will provide a secure, investor-friendly environment and ensure swift, transparent action to safeguard your assets 100 per cent”, he said. The minister’s post evoked an overwhelming response. Many welcomed the assurance, noting that land grabbers’ mafia had scared off many overseas investors. However, others raised questions about whether it would be implemented in letter and spirit. “That’s the type of tone, action and attitude we need against (the) Qabza mafia,” a comment posted in response said. “This should be implemented nationwide across Pa-

kistan as citizen portals and courts often take years to resolve even straightforward matters,” another response to the post said. Meanwhile, some sought to know the fate of expatriates’ investments in housing societies that were still not approved by the Capital Development Authority (CDA). An individual whose father passed away back in 2002 chose to use the platform for an appeal seeking the intervention of the authorities to ensure that he gets his lawful share of inherited property. A software developer by profession, the man wrote: “My paternal grandfather and uncles have denied me my legitimate rights. My mother has grown old and weak, and I am left without support. I cannot fight influential individuals alone.” While commenting on a post, an overseas Pakistani wondered how the deputy commissioner would react if the illegal occupant were an influential individual. Many linked the issue with politics, and criticised the role played by deputy commissioners and assistant commissioners as electoral staff in the 2024 general polls. Earlier in September 2025, the Prime Minister’s Office constituted a joint inquiry committee to thoroughly probe the alleged land grabbing by the ‘land mafia’ in the federal capital and to fix responsibility on those involved in the illegal practice.

Erosion of rule of law contributing to conflict, humanitarian crises: Pakistan tells UNSC

UNITED NATIONS: Pakistan has called for stronger respect for international law, warning that selective application of legal principles is deepening global instability. Speaking at a high-level debate of the UN Security Council on January 26, Pakistan’s Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, said the erosion of the rule of law was contributing to conflict, humanitarian crises and weakening trust between countries. He said international law was meant to make relations between states predictable and stable. But when countries ignore agreed rules, he warned, “law risks losing its meaning”. The Pakistani envoy said the core principles of the UN Charter – including sovereignty, territorial integrity and the prohibition on the use of force – were being challenged more frequently. He cautioned against attempts to normalise unilateral actions outside the UN framework. “Selective application of legal norms, erosion of treaty obligations, and unilateral actions have weakened trust among states and strained the multilateral system anchored in the UN Charter,” he stressed.

“When law yields to power or expediency, instability deepens, disputes entrench further, and peaceful coexistence jeopardised.” Referring to tensions with India, Ambassador Ahmad said Pakistan had experienced violations of international law first-hand, pointing out that India carried out military aggression last year, that led to Pakistan responding in self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter. He added that lasting peace in South Asia required resolving the Kashmir dispute in line with UN resolutions and ensuring respect for treaty obligations, including water-sharing agreements. Turning to the wider global picture, he said many developing countries had long faced the effects of “double standards” in the international system. Despite this, he said, nations in the Global South continued to place their trust in the UN and in a fair, rules-based international order. The UN envoy also pointed to what he described as positive developments, including progress in international maritime law and recent advisory opinions by the International Court of Justice on Palestine and climate change. He said such legal rulings must be respected universally, not selectively. – APP

Karzai seen as key figure for political reconciliation in Afghanistan

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan continue to deepen, with analysts warning that prolonged hostility between Pakistan’s powerful military establishment and Afghanistan’s ruling Taliban could prove damaging for both sides. Observers note that while future strategies on either side remain unclear, escalating friction has already halted political dialogue, bilateral trade and cross-border movement, further destabilising the fragile economies of both neighbouring countries. Afghanistan’s infrastructure, weakened by decades of conflict, remains in ruins, while Pakistan faces increasing security and economic pressures. Analysts argue that the Taliban leadership lacks experience in political dialogue, reconciliation and diplomacy. The group returned to power following the 2020 Doha Agreement, brokered by the United States, despite having failed to capture a single district militarily during years of insurgency against elected Afghan governments between 2002 and August 2021. Critics maintain that international backing, coupled with regional support, enabled the Taliban’s return to power. Since assuming control, the Taliban’s relationship with Pakistan has deteriorated sharply. Once considered an ally, Pakistan is now viewed by Kabul as hostile, with both sides showing reluctance to engage in talks. Afghan experts dismiss expectations of leadership change within the Taliban, saying internal revolt against supreme leader Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada is unlikely due to his uncontested authority within the movement. According to Afghan analysts, even senior Taliban

leaders based in Kabul and Kandahar remain largely silent before the supreme leader. Former deputy foreign minister Abbas Stanikzai was among the few who openly criticised leadership decisions in the past, but dissent has since faded. Experts warn that any internal rebellion would risk plunging Afghanistan and the wider region into renewed conflict. In this context, political observers suggest that dialogue, rather than confrontation, remains the only viable option. Among Afghanistan’s political figures, former president Hamid Karzai is widely regarded as a consensus candidate capable of engaging diverse ethnic, political and ideological groups. Despite criticism from some quarters, analysts credit Karzai with restoring central authority after years of war and integrating fragmented Afghan leadership during his tenure. Karzai is also believed to maintain working relations with several Taliban leaders, positioning him as a potential bridge for reconciliation efforts. Analysts argue that the international community bears responsibility for helping Afghanistan regain regional trust, particularly with neighbouring countries. Concerns persist over Afghanistan becoming a sanctuary for militant groups, including foreign extremists. Critics also point to changes in the education system, restrictions on women’s rights and reports of forced marriages, warning that these policies risk fostering extremism with regional and global consequences. Regional experts stress that countries with stakes in Afghanistan should move away from past approaches and collectively pursue political solutions. They argue that sustained regional dialogue is essential to prevent Afghanistan from sliding further into isolation and instability, which could threaten peace beyond its borders.

JI chief calls for a strong city govt

DNA

KARACHI: Jamaat-i-Islami chief Hafiz Naeemur Rehman on Tuesday stressed the formation of a “city government” as the only solution to Karachi’s administrative and governance issues. The remarks come against the backdrop of the Gul Plaza inferno, which has resulted in lawmakers stressing the need to empower local governments (LGs) and the Muttahida Qaum Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) even demanding that Karachi be made a “federal territory”. “The solution to Karachi’s issues is not provincial or federal control. According to the Constitution, the solution is Karachi city government,” the JI chief said while addressing a press conference in the metropolis. Rehman made the case for better local governance by citing Istanbul as an example: “Istanbul’s local governance has its master plan, fire brigade, construction, transportation, water, sewage, education and employment under its jurisdiction.” “This is real governance, not KDA (Karachi Development Authority) or SBCA (Sindh Building Control Authority),” he said, adding that “development cannot result from this”.

Two killed in accident on Motorway

DNA

PESHAWAR: A multi-vehicle collision on the Islamabad-Peshawar Motorway (M-1) on Tuesday killed two people and injured 10 others, including three women, according to Swabi Rescue 1122 officials. Swabi Rescue 1122 spokesperson Luqman, while speaking to Dawn, said that a trailer initially met with an accident on the motorway and blocked the road. As a result, multiple vehicles collided with each other. One vehicle occupant was killed on the spot, while the other was pronounced dead by medical staff at a hospital. The vehicles involved in the pile-up were travelling to Peshawar from Islamabad. Traffic on the M-1 was disrupted following the incident. Motorway police said its teams were at the incident site soon after the mishap and started initial rescue operations. Rescue personnel shifted the injured to Bacha Khan Teaching Hospital and an emergency was declared at the medical facility.

Gul Plaza search operation ends, authorities seal scorched building

SBCA says experts from Lahore Forensic Laboratory and PEC will inspect structure

KARACHI: The search operation of the deadly Gul Plaza shopping centre fire has culminated after 10 days of arduous rescue and relief efforts, and the scorched shopping centre has been sealed, the district administration said on Tuesday. The Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) has said that experts from Lahore Forensic Laboratory and Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) will inspect the building, and that it may take more than a week to complete the structure’s inspection. Noting that the Gul Plaza building has already been declared dilapidated and unsafe, the district administration noted that the forensic team will work with experts on the causes of the fire in Gul Plaza. The port city’s largest fire in more than a decade broke out on January 17 and quickly spread through the sprawling shopping complex, famous for its 1,200 family-owned stores selling wedding clothes, toys, crockery and other goods. Officials have so far reported at least 73 deaths from the fire, whereas 23 of the deceased have been identified via DNA sampling so far. A first information report (FIR) was later registered at the Nabi Bux Police Station with provisions relating to negligence and carelessness. Sindh Home Minister Ziaul Hassan Lanjra said that there were concerns of sabotage or terrorism, but the matter was not clear, and anti-terror provisions would be added in the FIR if there was sufficient evidence. Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah announced plans to rebuild shops on the site within two years, saying the remaining part of Gul Plaza would be demolished. Speaking on the Sindh Assembly floor, the chief minister assured that owners would be provided with the same number of shops after reconstruction. – APP

