



# Islamabad POST

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**Aurangzeb meets new leadership of the SECP**

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**Ahsan calls for enhanced value added exports**

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**Alcaraz reaches final of the Australian open**

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## Relief in power tariff

# PM unfurls incentives for industry

Prime Minister Shehbaz emphasized that future FDI would be encouraged only in export-led projects, which would help generate foreign exchange and strengthen the country's reserves

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday announced major relief measures for industry, including a reduction in electricity tariff by Rs4.04 per unit and a Rs 9 cut in wheeling charges to enhance competitiveness. Further he also announced to reduce the refinancing scheme for the exporters from 7.55% to 4.5%.

Addressing the award ceremony of top exporters for the year 2024-25, the prime minister said that Pakistan's economic revival and long-term stability depend on export-led growth and foreign direct investment (FDI) in export-oriented projects, stressing that the business community must play a central role in driving sustainable development. He said stabilization alone was not enough and the country must now transition towards growth that is sustainable, competitive, and export-driven. "There is no other way forward. Export-led growth is the only solution for Pakistan's economic future," he said. Prime Minister Shehbaz emphasized that future FDI would be encouraged only in export-led projects, which would help generate foreign exchange and strengthen the country's reserves. "This is a win-win strategy. It boosts exports and attracts investment at the same time," he added.

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## PM resolves to further cement ties with Azerbaijan

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Representative of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Special Assignments, H.E. Mr. Khalaf Khalafov, called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif, at the Prime Minister House. Welcoming the Azerbaijani dignitary, the Prime Minister recalled the warm fraternal bonds between Pakistan and Azerbaijan and reaffirmed Pakistan's resolve to further strengthen bilateral relations with Azerbaijan, in all areas of mutual interest. He conveyed his warm greetings for H.E. President Ilham Aliyev, and praised him for his wise and sagacious leadership that had raised Azerbaijan's global profile. He fondly recalled his numerous important meetings with President Aliyev, including at the Victory Parade in Baku last November. While noting that both

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ISLAMABAD: Representative of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Special Assignments, H.E. Mr. Khalaf Khalafov, called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif, at the Prime Minister House. – DNA

## Iran prepared for fair talks: FM

DNA

TEHRAN: Iran is prepared for the resumption of talks with the United States, but they should be fair and not include Iran's defence capabilities, Iran's chief diplomat said on Friday, as regional powers work to prevent military conflict between the two foes. US President Donald Trump said on Thursday he planned to speak with Iran, even as the US sent another warship to the Middle East and the Pentagon chief said the military would be ready to carry out whatever the president decided. One of the main demands by the US to resume talks with Iran is curbing its missile programme, a senior Iranian official told Reuters last week. Iran rejects that demand.

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## Pak Notifies revised control lists

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has notified and updated the National Control List of items requiring an export license from the Strategic Export Control Division. This has been done under the Export Control on Goods, Technologies, Material and Equipment related to Nuclear and Biological Weapons and their Delivery Systems Act, 2004. The latest update ensures continuous harmonisation with the control lists maintained by the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the Missile Technology Control Regime, and the Australia Group. The revision is part of Strategic

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# 41 India-backed terrorists killed in Balochistan: ISPR

Security forces conduct two intel-based operations; recover large cache of ammunition and explosives

DNA

RAWALPINDI: As many as 41 Indian-backed militants were killed in two separate operations in Balochistan, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said on Friday, as the army vowed to crush the menace of terrorism. In a statement, the military's media wing said that the terrorists – belonging to Indian proxy, Fitna al-Khawarij and Fitna al-Hindustan – were killed on January 29 during intelligence-based operations (IBO). Providing details, the ISPR said that one IBO was conducted on the outskirts of Harnai District on the reported presence of Fitna al-Khawarij. During the conduct of the operation, the security forces effectively engaged the hideout, and after an intense fire exchange, 30 Indian sponsored Khawarij "were sent to hell". The military's media wing added that a large cache of ammunition and explosives was also recovered from the killed terrorists and destroyed on the spot.

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## President, PM laud security forces

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday paid tribute to the security forces for carrying out successful operations in Balochistan and Bannu city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa against foreign-sponsored terrorists. In their separately issued statements, the president and the prime minister said that the effective actions against the terrorists manifested the state's unshakeable resolve against the terrorists backed by Fitnatul Hindustan and Fitna al Khawarij.

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## Turkish Chief of General staff meets CDF

DNA

RAWALPINDI: General Selcuk Bayraktaroglu, Chief of the Turkish General Staff, called on Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), HJ, COAS & CDF, at General Headquarters (GHQ) today. Upon his arrival at the General Headquarters, he was presented with the guard of honour by a smartly turned contingent of the Pakistan Armed Forces. During the meet-

ing, besides dilating upon matters of mutual interest, prevailing regional and global security landscape, and prospects for strengthening bilateral defence and

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## Briefs

### China lifts curbs on six British MPs

DNA

LONDON: Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has said China has lifted "all restrictions" on six current members of the British Parliament, after talks with President Xi Jinping. Speaking to the BBC in Shanghai, Sir Keir said a travel ban and other sanctions "no longer apply" to those parliamentarians, which includes four Conservative MPs and two peers in the House of Lords. The PM said the outcome "vindicated" his approach, suggesting his visit to China had "provided the opportunity for a leader-to-leader discussion on sensitive issues". But in a statement, the MPs and peers targeted said they did not want to be "used as a bargaining chip" and would rather remain sanctioned. Sir Keir's three-day trip to China - the first by a British prime minister since 2018 - is an attempt to thaw relations with the country, which is the second-biggest economy in the world behind the US. The prime minister said the UK's relationship with China was in a "good, strong place" following his talks with Xi at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Thursday. But there is disquiet among critics of China who argue the country has a poor record on human rights and poses a threat to the UK's national security. The Conservatives have accused Sir Keir of "kowtowing" to China. Sir Keir said he knew the sanctions on MPs and peers were "a cause of concern, which is why I did raise it".

### Holiday Notice

The offices of daily Islamabad POST shall remain closed on Saturday on account of weekly off therefore there will be no newspaper on Sunday. – Editor

# Imran underwent eye surgery at PIMS, claims PTI leader

PTI announces plan to remain gathered outside SC; leaders seek meeting with chief justice

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Secretary General Salman Akram Raja claimed that the party's jailed founder, Imran Khan, underwent eye surgery at Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (Pims), accusing the government of concealing details of his medical condition for several days. Speaking to the media outside the Supreme Court, Raja said government circles continued to "mislead the public" about the PTI founder's health for five days, adding that he was not being provided basic human rights despite being in custody. His remarks came a day after Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaulah Tarar confirmed that the PTI founder was briefly taken to the Pims, where eye specialists had examined him. A large number of PTI leaders, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi, and party lawmakers gathered outside the Supreme Court after

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## KP CM Afridi camps outside Supreme Court

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi on Friday camped outside the Supreme Court in an effort to facilitate a meeting between incarcerated PTI founder Imran Khan and his personal physicians. "The whole nation is concerned about the health of the country's most popular leader, Imran Khan," said Afridi while speaking outside the apex court, adding that he would try to arrange a meeting between the PTI founder and his personal physicians with the help of the chief justice. The KP chief executive said the party would announce

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# Trump warns Britain on China ties as Starmer hails progress

CENTRELINE REPORT

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said it was dangerous for Britain to be getting into business with Beijing, as Prime Minister Keir Starmer lauded the economic benefits of resetting relations with China during a visit there on Friday. As Western leaders reel from Trump's unpredictability, Starmer is the latest to head to China. In three-hour talks with President Xi Jinping on Thursday, the British leader called for a "more sophisticated relationship" with improved market access, lower tariffs and investment deals while also discussing soccer and Shakespeare. In Washington, however, replying to questions about the closer ties, Trump said: "Well, it's very dangerous for them to do that." He was speaking to reporters ahead of the premiere of the film "Melania" at the Kennedy Centre. He did not elaborate. Trump, who plans to travel to China in April, threatened last week to impose tariffs on Canada after Prime Minister Mark Carney struck economic deals with Beijing on a recent visit. Britains Prime Minister Keir Starmer speaks during the UK-China Business Forum at the headquarters of the Bank of China (BOC) in Beijing, China, Janu-

## Trump says 'hopefully' no need for military action against Iran

"We have a group headed out to a place called Iran, and hopefully we won't have to use it," says US president

NEWS DESK

PARIS: US President Donald Trump said on Thursday he hoped to avoid military action against Iran, which has threatened to strike American bases and aircraft carriers in response to any attack. Trump said he is speaking with Iran and left open the possibility of avoiding a military operation after earlier warning that time was "running out" for Tehran as the United States sends a large naval fleet to the region. When asked if he would have talks with Iran, Trump told reporters: "I have had, and I am planning on it." "We have a group headed out to a place called Iran, and hopefully we won't have to use it," the US president added, while speaking to media at the premiere of a documentary about his wife, Melania. As Brussels and Washington dialled up their rhetoric and Iran issued stark threats this week, UN chief Antonio Guterres has called for nuclear negotiations to "avoid a

crisis that could have devastating consequences in the region". An Iranian military spokesman warned Tehran's response to any US action would not be limited – as it was in June last year when American planes and missiles briefly joined Israel's short air war against Iran – but would be a decisive response "delivered instantly". Brigadier General Mohammad Akraminia told state television that US aircraft carriers have "serious vulnerabilities" and that numerous American bases in the Gulf region are "within the range of our medium-range missiles". "If such a miscalculation is made by the Americans, it will certainly not unfold the way Trump imagines – carrying out a quick operation and then, two hours later, tweeting that the operation is over," he said. Iranian officials have blamed the recent protest wave on the two countries, claiming their agents spurred "riots" and a "terrorist operation" that hijacked peaceful rallies sparked over economic grievances. Iranian authorities acknowledge that thousands were killed during the protests, giving a toll of more than 3,000 deaths, but say the majority were members of the security forces or bystanders killed by "rioters". Billboards and banners have gone up in the capital, Tehran to bolster the authorities' messages. One massive poster appears to show an American aircraft carrier being destroyed.

ary 30, 2026. Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer speaks during the UK-China Business Forum at the headquarters of the Bank of China (BOC) in Beijing, China, January 30, 2026. While a Downing Street spokesperson and China's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to requests for comment, British trade department minister Chris Bryant said Trump was "wrong" to say what the UK was doing was dangerous. "Of course, we enter into our relationship with China with our eyes wide open," he told the BBC on Friday. Around the time of Trump's comments, Starmer told a meeting of the UK-China Business Forum in the Chinese capital that his "very warm" meetings with Xi had provided "real progress". Starmer hailed deals on visa-free travel and lower whisky tariffs as "really important access, symbolic of what we're doing with the relationship". "That is the way that we build the mutual trust and respect that is so important," Starmer said. Before heading for the financial hub of Shanghai, he met Chinese business leaders, such as Yin Tongyue, chief executive of carmaker Chery, which plans to open a research and development centre for its commercial vehicle arm in the English city of Liverpool, a city official said during Starmer's visit.







## Briefs

**SC terms payment of dower stated in Nikahnama, husband's legal obligation**

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan has ruled that the payment of dower (haq mehr) mentioned in a marriage contract (Nikahnama) is a legal obligation of the husband and cannot be avoided. During the hearing of multiple petitions relating to dower and dower, Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Yahya Afridi made significant remarks, stating that when a man marries a woman, he becomes legally bound to fulfill all conditions recorded in the Nikahnama, including the payment of haq mehr. The Chief Justice emphasized that whatever is written in the dower section of the marriage contract must be paid by the husband, as it is a binding legal and moral responsibility. During the proceedings, the petitioner's lawyer argued that the agreed dower of 40 tolas of gold was excessive and proposed that the husband was willing to pay 20 tolas instead. In response, the Chief Justice remarked that paying a little more could help satisfy the wife, adding that it is the husband's responsibility to keep his wife content. The Chief Justice further observed that courts cannot interfere in personal and family matters that are based on mutual consent.—APP

**Airport Police seize truckload of kites, arrest supplier**

RAWALPINDI: The Airport Police have seized a truck loaded with kite-flying material and arrested a supplier during a major operation, a Rawalpindi Police spokesman said on Friday. According to the spokesman, the police recovered 20,000 kites and 100 reels of string from the vehicle. The arrested supplier was allegedly planning to distribute the banned material in various parts of the city. He said the police received information about the transportation of a large quantity of kites and string, following which a raid was conducted and the truck was intercepted. A case was registered against the suspect, the spokesman said, adding that the Rawalpindi Police, on the directions of City Police Officer (CPO) Syed Khalid Mahmood Hamdani, will continue a crackdown against the "deadly sport". Superintendent of Police, Potohar, Sardar Babar Mumtaz Khan appreciated the Airport Police for seizing a large quantity of kites. Being a non-bailable offence, those involved in the "bloody sport" would not be allowed to evade the law, he added.

**Import of agri machinery grew by 21.64 % in Oct months**

ISLAMABAD: The imports of agriculture machinery and implements into the country during the first half of the financial year grew by 21.64 percent as compared to the imports of the corresponding period of the last year. Agriculture machinery valued at \$65.760 million were imported during the period from July-December 2026 as compared to the imports of \$54.059 million of the same period of the last year, according to the data of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. Meanwhile, the imports of agriculture and other chemicals group into the country during first half of the current financial year increased by 9.04 percent as compared to the imports of the corresponding period of the last year. During the period from July-December, 2026, agricultural chemicals worth of \$5.373 billion were imported as compared to the imports of \$4.928 billion of the same period of the last year. However, imports of fertilizer manufactured into the country reduced by 2.62 percent as \$61.707 metric tons of fertilizer valued at \$482.792 million was imported as compared to the imports of 719,583 metric tons worth of \$440.341 million of the same period of the last year.—APP

# Japan funds for installation of seven water filtration plants

Ambassador Akamatsu emphasized that the Government of Japan's commitment to continuing its support for the people of Pakistan and expressed his hope that this project would further strengthen the longstanding friendship and cooperation between Japan and Pakistan



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Akamatsu Shuichi, Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan, inaugurated a project for the installation of water filtration plants in seven communities of District Faisalabad, Punjab on Thursday. The project was implemented by Alkhidmat Foundation Pakistan, a non-governmental organization which has over three decades of experience in humanitarian and development work across Pakistan. The Government of Japan, through its Grant

Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGP) Program, provided financial assistance of 70,201 USD to this project, for the installation of seven water filtration plants in underserved communities such as Peoples Colony 2, Badar Colony, Kurt Wala, 40 Mor Jaranwala, Chak No. 421 GB, Husainabad in Faisalabad District, and Bamba Bala in Okara District. The inauguration ceremony was attended by officials from the Embassy of Japan, representatives of Alkhidmat Foundation Pakistan, and members of the beneficiary communities. Alkhidmat Foundation Pakistan has implemented

several successful projects in the past in collaboration with the Japanese Embassy to improve the living standard of people in Pakistan. This project, funded by the Government of Japan responds to the urgent need of safe drinking water for over 400 households (or 2,870 people) in Faisalabad where a large proportion of the population is exposed to waterborne diseases due to contaminated water sources. The availability of clean drinking water will contribute to improve people's health and livelihoods. While speaking at the ceremony, Ambassador Akamatsu congratulated NGO for the

successful completion of the project and appreciated its role in delivering essential services to underserved communities. Ambassador Akamatsu stressed that access to safe drinking water is a fundamental human right and a key priority of Japan's assistance policy toward Pakistan. Ambassador Akamatsu emphasized that the Government of Japan's commitment to continuing its support for the people of Pakistan and expressed his hope that this project would further strengthen the longstanding friendship and cooperation between Japan and Pakistan.

**China keen to advance mineral development in Pakistan: Zamir**

ISLAMABAD: China shows strong interest in investment, capacity building and the promotion of advanced technology in Pakistan's mineral sector, reflecting the long-standing partnership between the two countries. On Friday, Research Fellow at the China International Press Communication Center, Muhammad Zamir Assad, emphasized the importance of sustainable development and said that adherence to international construction and commitment to local ensures responsible mining, said a press release. He explained that responsible mining not only enables the efficient and transparent use of natural resources but also plays a key role in fostering harmonious and long-term relationships with local communities. He said that China is keen to advance mineral development in Pakistan under the principles of social and environmental responsibility. He said that China is keen to advance mineral development in Pakistan under the principles of social and environmental responsibility. He said that China is keen to advance mineral development in Pakistan under the principles of social and environmental responsibility.

**CTO expands driving test facilities**

RAWALPINDI: Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Rawalpindi Farhan Aslam has expanded driving test facilities at the Traffic Headquarters to facilitate citizens and reduce congestion, a traffic police spokesman said on Friday. He said the number of driving test centres at Traffic Headquarters had been increased from one to two in view of growing public demand. Additional vehicles had also been added to save time and provide greater convenience to applicants. The spokesman said citizens could now take driving tests in both automatic and manual vehicles. He urged citizens to avail themselves of the improved facilities and obtain their driving licences without delay. He said the facility of issuing learner and permanent driving licences to motorcyclists on the same day was also continuing. The spokesman said all licensing processes were being video recorded to ensure transparency and transparency, adding that an automated video system had been introduced to further strengthen transparency in the licensing system.—APP

## Govt to setup Business facilitation Centre in Gwadar

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Balochistan government will start establishing a Business Facilitation Centre (BFC) in Gwadar within the next 10 days, officials said. Preparatory work has already begun, with relevant government departments and officials mobilised under the directives of Chief Minister Balochistan Sarfraz Bugti. Gwadar Pro reported on Friday. The establishment of the BFC was discussed during a meeting between a delegation of the Quetta Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Balochistan Board of Investment and Trade, held during their visit to Gwadar Port on January 28. The Business Facilitation Centre is designed to support the business community as well as domestic and foreign investors by offering a range of services under one roof. These include the issuance of no-object certificates (NOCs), licenses, permits, and other approvals required to start and scale up businesses. The initiative seeks to reduce bureaucratic hurdles by linking multiple government agencies through a dedicated software platform, thereby creating a more enabling business environment and encouraging enterprise development. Dedicated staff, including Business Facilitation Officers (BFOs) and representatives from relevant government departments, will be deployed at the centre to process and coordinate applications for walk-in clients.

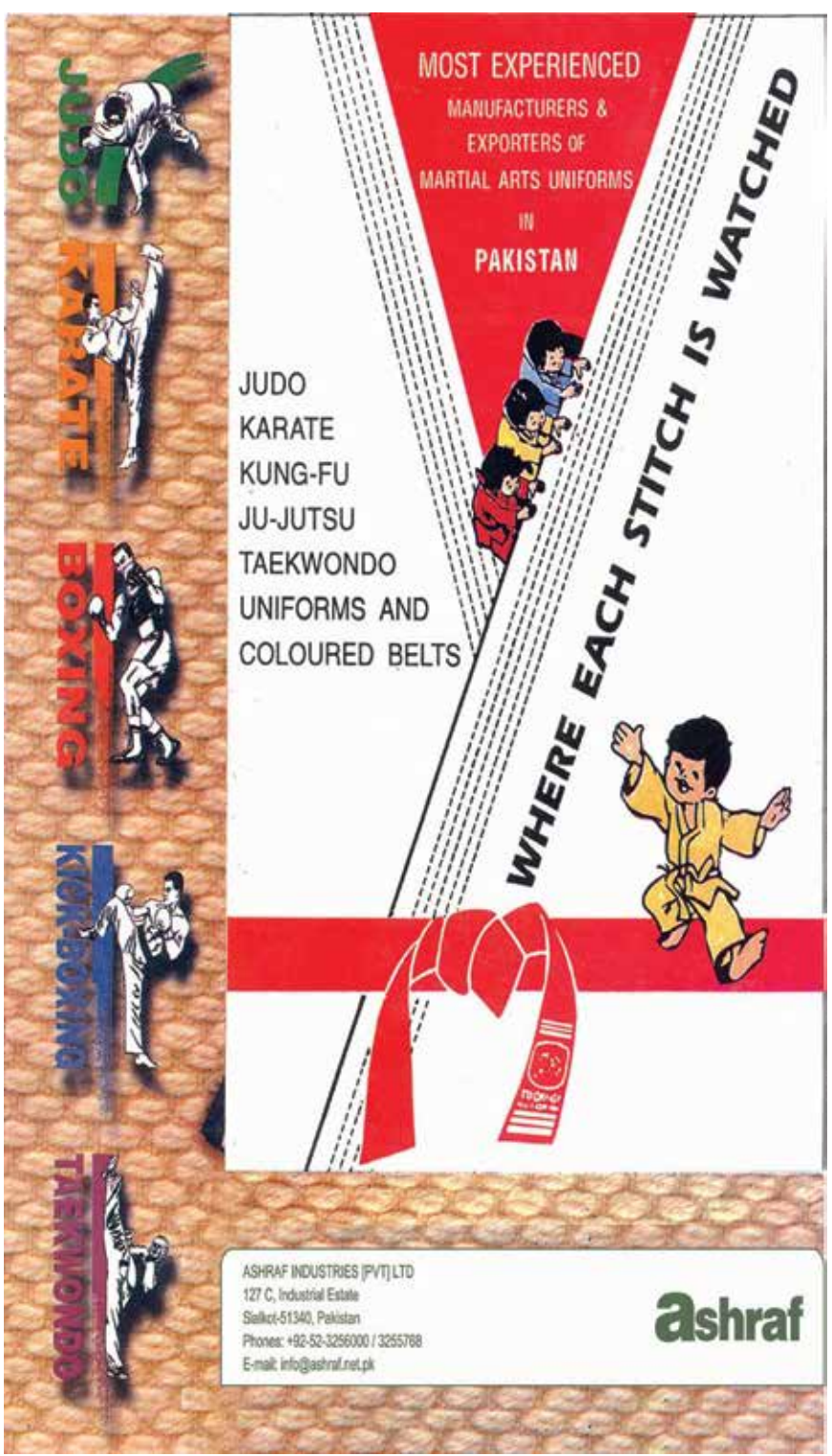
## Govt pledges support for local advanced biologics production

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination, Syed Mustafa Kamal, convened a high-level consultative meeting on Friday with the leadership of Huahui Health (China) and IQVIA Pakistan. The session focused on establishing a strategic framework to address the escalating prevalence of the Hepatitis Delta Virus (HDV) in Pakistan. During the session, the Federal Minister highlighted the significant clinical burden of HDV with estimates suggesting over one million affected individuals nationwide. The Ministry emphasized the high risk of rapid disease progression to liver cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma if left unmanaged. Data presented during the meeting indicated a critical diagnostic gap; approximately 20% of Hepatitis B patients in Pakistan may be co-infected with HDV, yet routine testing remains underutilized. Huahui Health shared key updates regarding its investigational HDV therapy, Libeving (HH-003), which recently concluded a successful Phase 2 multi-center, multi-country clinical study. The therapy has received regulatory approval in China based on favorable safety and effi-

cacy data. Notably, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has granted it Breakthrough Therapy Designation, underscoring its potential to provide substantial improvement over existing treatments. To ensure sustainable and affordable patient access, Minister Syed Mustafa Kamal assured that the Government of Pakistan will facilitate a partnership between Huahui Health and a premier local pharmaceutical manufacturer. This initiative is aimed at localizing the production of advanced biological products and enabling technology transfer. Dr. Obaidullah, CEO of Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP), remarked: "DRAP's regulatory mandate is to ensure that Pakistani patients have early access to life-saving innovations without compromising on safety or quality. By facilitating the Phase 3 trials of this breakthrough HDV therapy and enabling technology transfer for local manufacturing, DRAP is strengthening national health security. We are committed to a transparent, science-based approval process that aligns Pakistan with international best regulatory practices.—APP

## Pakistan, KSA agree to strengthen cooperation in energy sectors

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervais Malik and Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Pakistan Nawaf bin Sa'eed Ahmad Al-Malky on Friday discussed areas of mutual cooperation and further strengthened bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries. During the meeting, both sides reviewed ongoing collaboration and explored new avenues for cooperation, particularly in the energy and minerals sectors, said a news release. They reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing economic partnership and promoting mutually beneficial investment opportunities. Ambassador Al-Malky appreciated Pakistan's active participation in the Future Minerals Forum held recently in Riyadh and highlighted the importance of continued engagement between the two countries to advance cooperation in the minerals sector. Ali Pervais Malik congratulated the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the successful organization of the Future Minerals Forum and noted that the platform offered significant opportunities for regional collaboration.—DNA



## The dangers of Iran war for Gulf

ABDULRAHMAN AL-RASHED

OUR region is strewn with long-buried landmines, any one of which could spark unintended consequences. These landmines are not merely physical remnants of past conflicts but metaphorical dangers embedded in the political and security landscape of the Middle East. This is not meant to refer specifically to the Saudi-Emirati dispute in southern Yemen, despite it being one of today's heated issues that could still be resolved through direct talks. That dispute, while serious, remains a localized matter that can be addressed through dialogue and compromise. The more pressing concern lies elsewhere, in the looming shadow of a potential confrontation between the United States and Iran. Beyond these regional landmines, the far more dangerous issue is the rising likelihood of a US-Iran war and its repercussions on our surroundings. Foremost among those at risk are the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which sit in the front row of the theater of war. Any escalation between Washington and Tehran would not remain confined to the two adversaries; it would inevitably spill over into the Gulf, threatening the stability, economies, and security of the six GCC states. The Gulf, by virtue of geography and strategic importance, cannot escape the fallout of such a confrontation. It is worth recalling that the GCC was established more than four decades ago precisely to confront this type of danger. The organization was born in 1981, at a time when the region was reeling from the Iranian Revolution and the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War. Yet, over time, its member states chose to expand their objectives far beyond defense cooperation. The GCC became a framework for economic, social, and even cultural coordination, extending its reach to matters as minor as laundry labels and electrical sockets. Despite occasional political disagreements, it remains the only largely successful regional bloc in the Arab world. Its endurance is itself a testament to the shared interests of its members. One researcher once argued to me that the GCC was built on "hated of Iran's regime." That is, of course, inaccurate. While it is true that the GCC was founded against the backdrop of Ayatollah Khomeini's threats to Gulf states and the war between Iran and Iraq, its creation was not solely about Iran. The region overlooking the western Gulf needed a framework to organize relations among its six states even if no external threat had existed. Major undertakings often emerge from unintended circumstances, and the GCC was one such undertaking. It was both a response to immediate danger and a long-term investment in collective security. The Gulf states will not

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agree on everything, but their shared interest lies in preserving their collective security. The European Union offers a useful comparison. It was built on an agreement over coal and steel between Germany and France, two countries that had fought bitter wars for centuries. The European Coal and Steel Community became a gateway for developing relations in the years after the Second World War and later led to the establishment of the broader EU. Similarly, the Gulf states may disagree on political matters, but the Iranian threat has consistently played a role in strengthening inter-GCC relations and reminding them of the importance of unity. Not all of our history with Iran has been turbulent. This condition has been limited to the current regime. Under Iran's monarchy, Tehran maintained generally positive relations with its neighbors for centuries, marked by occasional disputes that were typical of relations between neighboring states. Matters deteriorated immediately after the rise of the clerical regime in 1979. From the very first week, Saudi Arabia expressed its desire for good relations, sending official and unofficial delegations to Khomeini and even dispatching a shipment of petroleum products to alleviate a severe shortage in Tehran at the time. This was a gesture of friendship toward the new regime. Yet Khomeini formally declared his intention to throw toward overthrowing neighboring systems, setting the stage for decades of hostility. It took more than 40 years for the republic to correct its course and seek reconciliation with Riyadh. Today, Tehran faces an existential threat that forces it to choose between abandoning the 1979 project it proclaimed — exporting revolutions and confronting the world — and risking a devastating confrontation. The six Gulf capitals recognize that they are not in a position to support or change the regime; the event is larger than them. Yet its repercussions are dangerous for them. The possibilities if war erupts are many, ranging from collapse to a coup or the regime holding firm and exacerbating the situation. All Gulf governments have chosen not to become directly involved in the operation. This does not represent a disappointment for their ally the United States, which maintains military assets and agreements with GCC states and likewise prefers not to expand the front. Washington understands that widening the battlefield would require greater defensive efforts and could destabilize its partners. Despite Iran's hints at striking facilities in Gulf states, such a scenario remains unlikely, though not impossible. The Gulf states, therefore, remain caught between caution and vulnerability, aware that their security is tied to events beyond their control. In conclusion, the Gulf region today stands at a crossroads. The metaphorical landmines scattered across its political landscape are dangerous enough, but the looming threat of a US-Iran war represents a far greater peril. The GCC, despite its imperfections, remains the best mechanism for collective security and coordination among its members. Its history demonstrates that unity in the face of external threats is both possible and necessary. Whether Iran collapses, changes course, or emerges stronger, the Gulf states must continue to prioritize their collective security. The stakes are too high, and the consequences of inaction too severe, for them to do otherwise.

## Bucket or Lifeboat

Dr M Ali Hamza



This is where the David Brooks-ian 'Moral Sense' comes into play. A society is not just a collection of individuals making rational choices; it is a moral community. Trust is built when the elite and people breathe the same air and face the same risks. When a leader asks the public to 'tighten their belts' while his own family is protected by a foreign economy, he isn't just being a hypocrite; he is hollowing out the state from within

## Beijing as Europe's New Geopolitical Mecca

Qamar Bashir



The shift did not begin in Beijing. It began in Washington. Trump's posture toward Europe and America's traditional allies has been unmistakably transactional and, at times, openly coercive. His handling of the Ukraine war, his pressure on European governments to accept a U.S.-designed "peace plan" that many in Europe saw as conceding too much to Russia, and his blunt warning that allies who did not fall in line would face punitive trade measures, all sent a shockwave through the Atlantic alliance

THERE was a time, not long ago, when the word "China" in European circles was spoken with a language of caution, if not suspicion. Parliaments passed laws to block Chinese acquisitions of strategic assets. Regulatory walls were erected against Chinese technology, telecommunications equipment, social media platforms, and even academic cooperation. Brussels and national governments debated how to "decouple" from Beijing, how to preserve Europe's cultural, economic, and technological sovereignty from what they framed as an expanding Chinese influence. China was cast as a systemic rival, an adversary whose footprint in Europe had to be contained at almost any cost. Yet within a single year of Donald Trump's return to the center of global politics, that posture has undergone a remarkable reversal. What once looked like a coordinated Western front to slow China's rise has given way to a steady procession of European and North American leaders boarding planes for Beijing. The shift did not begin in Beijing. It began in Washington. Trump's posture toward Europe and America's traditional allies has been unmistakably transactional and, at times, openly coercive. His handling of the Ukraine war, his pressure on European governments to accept a U.S.-designed "peace plan" that many in Europe saw as conceding too much to Russia, and his blunt warning that allies who did not fall in line would face punitive trade measures, all sent a shockwave through the Atlantic alliance. When European leaders drew a red line over Greenland—declaring it non-negotiable and off-limits to any form of geopolitical bargaining—Trump's response, threatening sweeping tariffs against those who opposed him, was read not as negotiation but as arm-twisting. For Europe, this was a wake-up call. The assumption that the United States, regardless of who occupied the White House, would remain a predictable anchor of stability and partnership began to look fragile. The message many leaders took from Washington was stark: partnership, shared history, and alliance commitments would not necessarily shield them from economic or political punishment if their national interests diverged from those of the United States. It is against this backdrop that the "pilgrimage" to China must be understood. The first high-profile visit, after years of diplomatic coolness, came from France's president. His trip to Beijing, the first in nearly a decade, signaled that Europe's second-largest economy was prepared to reopen channels not just for trade, but for strategic dialogue. Soon after, Canada's prime minister followed suit, making his own journey to China after years of strained relations. Now,

Germany's chancellor is preparing to land in Beijing, with a similarly heavy focus on industry, commerce, and technology leaders in tow. Behind them, other European heads of government are lining up, each seeking their own audience, their own agreements, their own place in what increasingly looks like a re-centered global economy. The substance of these visits goes beyond ceremonial handshakes. Agreements are being signed across a broad spectrum: renewable energy, solar and wind projects, electric vehicles, advanced manufacturing, artificial intelligence, infrastructure financing, and technology transfer. In some cases, even defense cooperation and strategic dialogue are quietly being placed on the agenda. The tone is pragmatic, even eager. Where once European leaders warned of dependence on China, they now speak of "win-win" frameworks, of diversification, of building parallel channels of growth and security that do not run exclusively through Washington. China, for its part, has played the role of the patient host. Chinese leaders have emphasized humility, mutual respect, and the search for common ground. The rhetoric is carefully calibrated: no lectures on internal politics, no overt demands for ideological alignment, but a steady emphasis on economic opportunity, infrastructure development, and long-term partnership. For European and Canadian leaders bruised by what they perceive as Washington's heavy-handedness, the contrast is striking. This realignment is not confined to Europe. Across the Caribbean and parts of the Western Hemisphere, governments are also reassessing their strategic options. Countries long accustomed to living in the shadow of U.S. power—economically, diplomatically, and sometimes militarily—are watching Europe's pivot with interest. The lesson many are drawing is that diversification is no longer a luxury; it is a necessity in a world where economic pressure and sanctions have become routine tools of statecraft. Nowhere are this broader shift more visible than in the Middle East, particularly in the evolving standoff between the United States, Israel, and Iran. European governments have shown a marked reluctance to back any new American or Israeli military adventure in the region. When U.S. naval forces moved closer to Iranian waters, signaling readiness for confrontation, European capitals responded not with public endorsements but with calls for restraint and diplomacy. At the same time, China and Russia have deepened their engagement with Tehran. During recent periods of heightened tension, both powers offered diplomatic cover and, according to many analysts, strategic support that helped Iran withstand external pressure. The result has been a recalibration of power. Iran now presents itself not as an isolated state under siege, but as a node in a broader Eurasian network, backed by two permanent members of the UN Security Council and enjoying at least tacit sympathy from much of the Global South.

For Europe, this matters. The continent's leaders are acutely aware that the new war in the Middle East would have direct consequences for energy prices, migration flows, and internal political stability. Aligning unquestioningly with Washington and Tel Aviv in such a scenario risks not only domestic backlash but also the loss of diplomatic leverage with Beijing, Moscow, and a large swath of the Muslim world. By contrast, maintaining open channels with China offers Europe a potential role as a mediator, or at least as an independent actor rather than a subordinate ally. Critics in Washington see Europe's turn toward Beijing as na ve, even dangerous. They warn of hidden dependencies, of technology transfer that could erode the Western security edifice, of economic ties that might one day be weaponized. European leaders counter that the greater danger lies in strategic monoculture—placing all economic, political, and security eggs in a single basket that may no longer be as reliable as it once was. The symbolism of these Beijing visits has been amplified by their timing. As European leaders walk the red carpets of the Great Hall of the People, Trump prepares to host—or confront—some of them in Washington. The contrast is deliberate. The message, implicit if not explicit, is that Europe will not be treated as a collection of smaller states to be disciplined through tariffs and threats. It is a blow of 45 million people, a major economic and technological power in its own right, and it intends to act like one. The broader narrative taking shape is almost poetic in its irony. The United States, long the architect and champion of a liberal international order built on open markets, alliances, and multilateral institutions, is now seen by many as retreating into a more unilateral, interest-driven posture. China, once portrayed as the outsider challenging that order, is positioning itself as a pillar of stability, investment, and predictable partnership. Whether this role reversal will endure is an open question. Europe's ties to the United States remain deep, woven through NATO, financial systems, and decades of political and cultural exchange. But something fundamental has shifted in the psychology of European leadership. The assumption of automatic alignment has given way to strategic hedging. In this unfolding story, the "geopolitical train" metaphor resonates. Many in Europe believe that the momentum of global growth, infrastructure development, and technological innovation is increasingly centered in Asia, with China as a primary engine. To miss that train, they fear, is to risk long-term economic stagnation and strategic irrelevance.

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



## ICCI President highlights Pak's vast trade, investment potential



## Briefs

Gold prices  
slump  
heavily

NEWS DESK

LONDON: Gold slid more than 4 per cent on Friday on rumours the Federal Reserve could get a more hawkish chair, but was still on track for its strongest monthly gain since 1980 as investors flocked to the safe haven amid lingering geopolitical and economic strains. Spot gold lost 3pc to \$5,232.57 per ounce, as of 05:20 GMT, after falling more than 5pc earlier. It scaled a record high of \$5,594.82 on Thursday. Prices have risen more than 20pc so far in January, heading for a sixth straight monthly gain and the largest monthly advance since 1980. US gold futures for February delivery fell 1.8pc to \$5,225.0 per ounce on Friday. "So, a potentially less dovish Fed Chairman pick, a rebound in the dollar, and gold giving way to overbought conditions have contributed to the decline in the price of the precious metal," KCM Chief Trade Analyst Tim Waterer said. US President Donald Trump said on Thursday he intends to announce his pick to replace Fed Chair Jerome Powell on Friday, with speculation intensifying that the nod will go to former Fed Governor Kevin Warsh. "Rumours that Kevin Warsh will replace Jerome Powell as Fed Chair have weighed on gold during Asian trade," said Matt Simpson, a senior analyst at StoneX. The dollar recovered from multi-year lows, supported in part by the Fed's decision on Wednesday to leave interest rates unchanged, but was poised for a second straight weekly decline. A stronger dollar makes greenback-priced gold more expensive for overseas buyers. Markets still expect two interest rate cuts in 2026. Gold exports from Switzerland to the UK, home to the world's largest over-the-counter gold trading hub, jumped to their highest since August 2019, customs data showed on Thursday. The Hang Seng Gold ETF surged more than 9pc on its trading debut in Hong Kong in the previous session.

ECP reinstates  
two Punjab  
legislators

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has restored the membership of two Punjab Assembly lawmakers after they submitted mandatory asset declarations for the financial year 2024-25. Malik Atbar Khan (PP-5, Attock) and Muhammad Dawood Khan (PP-273, Muzaffargarh) had been suspended on January 16, 2026, for failing to comply with Section 137(1) of the Elections Act, 2017, which requires legislators to file annual statements of assets and liabilities by December 31. Following the submission of their statements, the ECP withdrew the suspension orders, enabling both members to resume parliamentary duties. — APP

Syrian govt, Kurdish  
forces declare ceasefire

DNA

DAMASCUS: The Syrian government and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) group declared a ceasefire deal on Friday that foresees a phased integration of Kurdish forces with the state, staving off a potentially bloody battle for the northeast. The sides announced the agreement after government forces under President Ahmed al-Sharaa captured swathes of northern and eastern Syria from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) this month, forcing the Kurdish forces to retreat into a shrinking enclave. The fate of the SDF, which once held a quarter or more of Syria, has been one of the biggest issues looming over the country since fighters led by Sharaa toppled President Bashar al-Assad 14 months ago. US envoy Tom Barrack, who has been closely involved in mediation efforts, declared the agreement "a profound and historic milestone in Syria's journey towards national reconciliation, unity, and enduring stability". Deal aims to unify Syria: Under the agreement, forces that had amassed on front lines in the north would pull back and Interior Ministry security forces would deploy to the centre of the cities of Hasakah and Qamishli in the northeast, both held by the SDF. The agreement includes the formation of a military division that will include three SDF brigades, in addition to the formation of a brigade for forces in the SDF-held town of Kobani, also known as Ain al-Arab, which will be affiliated with the governorate of Aleppo.

Governing institutions established by the Kurdish-led groups in the northeast are to be merged with Syrian state institutions. Damascus and the SDF first struck an integration deal last March, but made scant progress towards implementation before a year-end deadline, paving the way for government forces to go on the march. Noah Bonsey, senior adviser with the International Crisis Group think-tank, said the deal was "a potentially historic turning point". "It looks like both sides have succeeded in defining a middle ground that works for both of them on some incredibly difficult questions," he said. "It spares northeast Syria what could have been a really ugly military showdown. Implementation will be tricky. There are a lot of challenges ahead," he said, adding that he was waiting to see all the terms. An SDF statement said the deal "aims to unify Syrian territory and achieve full integration in the region by strengthening cooperation between the concerned parties and unifying efforts to rebuild the country". Syrian state-run broadcaster Al-Khbariya published an almost identical statement, citing a government official. A senior Syrian government official told Reuters the deal was final and had been reached late on Thursday night, and that implementation was to begin immediately. The United States has been closely involved in efforts to mediate a deal between the sides for almost a year. The SDF was once Washington's main Syrian ally, helping the US military fight the Islamic State. But its position grew weaker as President Donald Trump built close ties with Sharaa.

Govt to coordinate with SECP  
on time-bound reform agenda

Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb held a meeting at the Finance Division with the new leadership of the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP), led by Chairman Kabir Ahmed Sidhu and Commissioner Ali Farid Khawaja



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb held a meeting at the Finance Division with the new leadership of the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP), led by Chairman Kabir Ahmed Sidhu and Commissioner Ali Farid Khawaja, who called on the Finance Minister. The Finance Minister's core team at the Finance Division, including senior officers overseeing debt management, capital mar-

ket development, and regulatory coordination, was also in attendance. Welcoming the new SECP leadership, the Finance Minister expressed confidence that their extensive domestic and international market experience would strengthen Pakistan's regulatory framework and accelerate the development of capital markets. The meeting focused on aligning priorities to deepen capital markets, diversify financing sources for the public and private sectors, and improve investor confidence through efficient regulation, modern infrastructure, and coordinated policy action.

The Finance Minister highlighted the Government's move toward a more integrated reform approach through the Capital Markets Development Council, with finalized terms of reference aimed at shifting from institution-specific silos to a horizontal, system-wide market development agenda. The objective, he noted, is to leverage progress already achieved across various market institutions while addressing gaps that require regulatory reform, legislative support, and inter-agency coordination. A major focus of the discussion was the development of Pakistan's debt capital mar-

kets. The Finance Minister emphasized the need to reduce reliance on banks as the primary source of financing and to broaden participation by insurance companies, asset managers, pension funds, and retail investors, in line with sound asset-liability management practices. Investor onboarding and market access were discussed as critical enablers of liquidity and participation. The meeting reviewed the need for faster, genuinely digital account opening processes, risk-based KYC, and consent-based portability of KYC across financial institutions. Improving ease of entry for retail investors was identified as a priority, particularly to channel participation from informal or unregulated investment avenues into the formal capital market. The SECP leadership shared initial observations on regulatory frameworks for NBFCs, SME-focused finance, and insurance, noting the need to revisit and strengthen these frameworks to support access to finance while maintaining prudential oversight. The discussion emphasized a regulatory approach that enables business activity, reduces unnecessary procedural delays, and promotes compliance through digital tools. On the equity market side, the meeting welcomed signs of improving IPO activity and discussed measures to broaden participation in equity capital market transactions. The Finance Minister underscored the importance of expanding the pool of institutions able to support capital raising activity, enhancing competition, and ensuring that market infrastructure has adequate capacity to process increased issuance without bottlenecks.

No confidence  
motion against  
Karachi  
mayor on cards

DNA

KARACHI: The opposition leader in Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) on Friday announced a no-confidence motion against Karachi Mayor Murtaza Wahab, accusing the local government of failing to protect citizens following repeated deadly incidents across the metropolis. Addressing a press conference in Karachi, Jamaate-Islami (JI) Karachi Naib Emir Saifuddin Advocate stated that the city has been mourning since the Gul Plaza tragedy, which left dozens dead and destroyed the livelihoods of hundreds. He added that successive incidents had left citizens feeling abandoned, with no one willing to take responsibility, noting that people were dying due to water tanker accidents, dog bites, and robberies. The KMC opposition leader alleged that criminal elements had overwhelmed the city, saying government officials believed that just holding meetings was governance. Saifuddin added that governance would be evident if institutions were performing their duties fully and on time. He also held Karachi's Commissioner Syed Hassan Naqvi responsible for negligence, stating that institutional failures and mismanagement had already been highlighted earlier by JI Chief Hafiz Naemur Rehman. "We had already said that all institutions in Karachi have collapsed, but the government refuses to accept it," he added. He alleged that the Sindh government wanted all institutions to operate under its direct control.

South Africa  
expels  
Israeli envoy

DNA

PRETORIA: The South African government has declared Israel's top diplomat in the country "persona non grata" and given him 72 hours to leave, said the foreign ministry. It follows "a series of unacceptable violations of diplomatic norms and practice which pose a direct challenge to South Africa's sovereignty," it said in a statement. The charge d'affaires, Ariel Seidman, is "declared persona non grata" and "required to depart from the republic within 72 hours".

WHO sees low risk of  
Nipah virus spread

DNA

NEW DELHI: There is a low risk of the deadly Nipah virus spreading from India, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said on Friday, adding that it did not recommend travel or trade curbs after two infections were reported by the South Asian nation. Pakistan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam are among the Asian locations that tightened airport screening checks this week to guard against such a spread after India confirmed infections. "The WHO considers the risk of further spread of infection from these two cases is low," the agency told Reuters in an email on Friday, adding that India had the capacity to contain such outbreaks. "There is no evidence yet of increased human-to-human transmission," it said, adding that it has coordinated with Indian

health authorities. But it did not rule out further exposure to the virus, which circulates in the bat population in parts of India and neighbouring Bangladesh. Carried by fruit bats and animals such as pigs, the virus can cause fever and brain inflammation. It has a fatality rate ranging from 40 per cent to 75pc, with no cure, though vaccines in development are still being tested. It spreads to humans from infected bats, or fruit they contaminate, but person-to-person transmission is not easy as it typically requires prolonged contact with those infected. Small outbreaks are not unusual and virologists say the risk to the general population remains low. The source of infection was not yet fully understood, said the WHO. It classifies Nipah as a priority pathogen because of a lack of licensed vaccines or treatments, a high fatality rate, and a fear it could mutate into a more transmissible variant.

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