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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 refinance 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

41 India-backed terrorists killed in Balochistan: ISPR

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

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 unshakable resolve against the terrorists backed by Fitnatul Hindustan and Fitna al Khawarij.

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Turkish Chief of General staff meets CDF

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

Continued on Page 06

RAWALPINDI: General Selcuk Bayraktar oglu, 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-

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Pak-China friendship strengthens with time, global changes

Muzammil Aslam said the development of Special Economic Zones is opening new avenues for investment, industrial growth, and employment, adding that China has always treated Pakistan as an equal partner, which is why China enjoys widespread respect and goodwill among the Pakistani people.

PESHAWAR: ADVISED to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Finance Muzammil Aslam, on Friday said that the friendship between Pakistan and China is one of the rare relationships in the world that has continued to grow stronger despite political circumstances, and global transformations. Addressing a ceremony organized by China Window to mark the 75th anniversary of Pakistan-China friendship and the Chinese Spring Festival, Muzammil Aslam said the bilateral relationship is not limited to diplomacy or economics but is a living bond rooted in trust, mutual respect, brotherhood, and cooperation. He said Pakistan's decision to recognize the People's Republic of China in 1951 has, 75 years later, proven to be a farsighted and principled move that has strengthened and sustainable partnership. He added that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the flagship project of Pak-China friendship, which has played a key role in transforming Pakistan's economy. Energy projects under CPEC

have helped ease the electricity crisis, road infrastructure has improved connectivity from north to south, and Gwadar Port has enhanced Pakistan's importance on the regional and global trade map. Muzammil Aslam said the development of Special Economic Zones is opening new avenues for investment, industrial growth, and employment, adding that China has always treated Pakistan as an equal partner, which is why China enjoys widespread respect and goodwill among the Pakistani people.

Commissioner Dera Ismail Khan of Khyber said the need to pass Pakistan-China friendship on to the younger generation through education, culture, and media, noting that institutions like China Window are playing an important role at the grassroots level.

The ceremony was attended by former governors, senior officials, academics, religious leaders, members of the business community, journalists, students, and citizens from various walks of life.

A cake was cut to mark the 75th anniversary of Pakistan-China friendship and shared among participants.

China Window Administrator Amjad Aziz Iqbal said earlier welcomed the guests and said the event aimed to convey a message of peace and goodwill from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to the people of China.



ISLAMABAD: Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad presenting souvenir to Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces General Selçuk Bayraktaroğlu.

Turkish Defense chief lauds Pak's role in promoting peace

ISLAMABAD: Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces General Selçuk Bayraktaroğlu called on Friday directed teams at the Union Council level to carry out a thorough inspection of manholes in their respective areas and submit detailed reports within 24 hours.

"Based on these reports,

tasking will be undertaken to ensure that no manhole remains uncovered," the commissioner said while presiding over a review meeting on Performance Monitoring Indicators at his office.

The meeting was attended by Additional Commissioner Xenia Hmayan, Director General of the Punjab Housing Author-

ity Ahmed Hassan Rehija, Managing Director WASA, Director Health, Chief Of Sector Metropolitan Corporation Rawalpindi, and other concerned officers, while Deputy Commissioners of Murree, Attock, Chakwal, and Jhelum joined via video link. Commissioner Khattak said manhole covers and cleanliness were key performance indicators under the Punjab Chief Minister's Performance Monitoring framework due to their direct impact on public safety.

The commissioner said the public to immediately report any open or damaged manholes to the relevant administrative office. He also instructed

that all complaints regarding manhole covers and cleanliness be addressed promptly.

The commissioner stressed that public safety must be prioritized at project sites. He directed that all manholes and ongoing work areas be fully covered and clearly marked with warning signsboards to protect passersby. The deputy commissioners were also instructed to ensure cleanliness and administrative measures in their districts and to issue comprehensive standard operating procedure (SOPs) clearly defining responsibilities to ensure accountability in cases of negligence. APP

Survey of all manholes in Rawalpindi Division ordered

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Efforts afoot to rehabilitate inactive govt schools: Bugti

QUETTA: Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti on Friday said the rapid progress being made is a clear proof of the success of the provincial government's education policies.

Mir Sarfraz Bugti said that the relevant authorities of the Balochistan Education Department have confirmed in writing that no government school is closed in Gwadar district, while a formal certificate of the functioning of all schools has also been issued.

He said that the provincial government is bringing about a historic change in the education sector through practical and concrete reforms.

In his special message on social networking site X, the Chief Minister said that Gwadar district has demonstrated its commitment to the public's confidence in the education system but also ensured merit and accountability.

The Chief Minister praised the performance of the administration and education officials of Gwadar

district and congratulated them and said that this historic achievement was possible due to hard work, honesty and teamwork.

He hoped that other districts would also complete the process of rehabilitating inactive schools with the same spirit and determination.

Mir Sarfraz Bugti, while reiterating the commitment made to the people of Balochistan, said that very soon no government school would remain closed in the entire province and no child will be deprived of education.

He clarified that education is the basis of Balochistan's bright future, social development and sustainable stability and the provincial government could not compromise on this sector. APP

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) and the Capital Development Authority (CDA) have agreed to collaborate on improving engineering standards in mega development projects, including Project Director (PD) Certification and the training of young engineers under the Graduate Engineers Trainee (GET) Placement Program.

The understanding was reached during a meeting between PEC Chairman Engineer Wasim Nazar and CDA Chairman Muhammad Ali Randhawa, focusing on joint measures to enhance transparency, quality, and

efficiency in large-scale infrastructure projects. Under the agreement, PEC and CDA will work together to strengthen engineering practices in ongoing and future mega projects.

The collaboration aims to ensure improved compliance with professional and technical standards, with emphasis on effective project management, accountability, and quality assurance throughout the project lifecycle.

As part of these initiatives, the Pakistan Engineering Council is set to form a Project Director (PD) Certification

Program. Engineers working on CDA's

mega projects will undergo PD certification, with the first batch scheduled to begin in March. The certification program is aimed at improving transparency, governance, and construction quality by aligning engineering projects with international standards.

The meeting also reviewed progress on employment and capacity-building opportunities for young engineers. Under the CDA Graduate Engineers Trainee (GET) Placement Program, 900 grade-III engineers will be provided training and practical exposure through participation in CDA's mega projects. APP

Series of cultural awareness events on Kashmir Solidarity Day

RAWALPINDI: The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) has arrested nine people, including three women, and recovered 17.39 kilograms of drugs worth more than Rs 2.2 million in eight operations conducted around educational institutions and across major cities, an ANF spokesperson said on Friday. In operations near campuses, ANF recovered 2.2 kg of hashish from a suspect near Jamnu Road in Sialkot and 400 grams of hashish from another accused near a university on Hattar Road in Haripur. The arrested accused confessed to supplying drugs to students, the spokesperson said.

Elsewhere, 1.08 kg of ice was seized from the bag of a passenger bound for Qatar at Allama Iqbal International Airport, Lahore, while 880 grams of ice was recovered from clothing concealed in a parcel destined for New Zealand at the Jinnah International Airport cargo shed. The ANF also recovered 30 grams of marijuana from a parcel arriving from the United States at a courier office in Chaklala Garrison, Rawalpindi, arresting the accused. In separate actions, 6 kg of hashish was seized from two women and a man near Fateh Chowk in Hyderabad; 3.6 kg of hashish from a suspect near a bus terminal in Rawalpindi; and 3.2 kg of ice from the bag of a female accused near the Islamabad Motorway Toll Plaza. The accused were registered under the Control of Narcotic Substances Act, 1997, and investigations are underway, the spokesperson said. APP

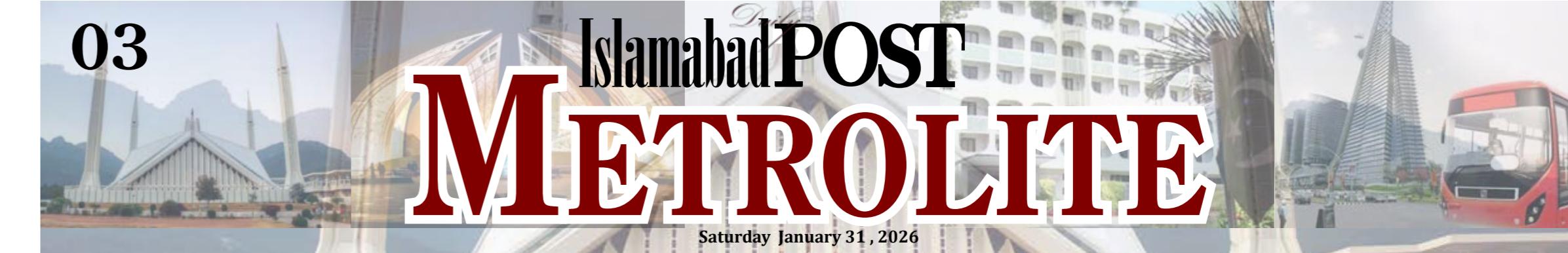
FTO upholds Customs action in EFS export case

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) on Friday upheld the legality of customs proceedings in a case involving exports under the Export Facilitation Scheme (EFS), ruling that no maladministration was committed by the customs authorities. A complaint relating to customs proceedings was examined under the FTO Ordinance, 2000, concerning a request for rectification of an alleged clerical error under section 155R of the Customs Act, 1969, said a news release. The matter pertained to exports made under the Export Facilitation Scheme (EFS), in which it was claimed that certain export Goods Declarations were inadvertently filed under the Commercial Exports category instead of the EFS tab. It was contended that this discrepancy occurred due to a clerical mistake and that a formal application for correction was submitted to the concerned customs authorities along with supporting documentary evidence. The record revealed that the case was duly referred to the Revenue Division for comments in accordance with the law. In response, the customs authorities maintained that all actions, including cancellation of EFS authorization, issuance of show cause notice, audit, and recovery procedures, were undertaken strictly in accordance with applicable legal provisions and prescribed procedures. It was further said that no case did not fall within the definition of maladministration under the Federal Tax Ombudsman Ordinance, 2000. Upon examination of the case record, and submissions made to the FTS, it was found that the concerned customs authorities had taken appropriate steps to rectify the EFS regime. The discrepancy was found to involve a large volume of export declarations, resulting in the wrongful availing of fiscal benefits. Based on the findings, it was concluded that no maladministration could be attributed to the customs authorities, who acted in accordance with the law. The complaint was found to lack merit, and a penalty was imposed under section 22(2) of the Federal Tax Ombudsman Ordinance, 2000, with directions for its deposit within the stipulated time, failing which recovery proceedings may be initiated under the Customs Act, 1969. The case was accordingly decided and consigned to record. APP

Unchecked population growth major eco, social challenge: Murad

KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has termed unchecked population growth one of Pakistan's most serious social and economic challenges, stressing the need for sustained, evidence-based family planning policies to secure the country's future. He was addressing a programme, "Waqa - Tawazun Ke Liye", organized by the Khalil-ur-Rahman Foundation (MKRF). Population Control Minister Murad Ali Shah explained that population growth patterns reveal stark contrasts. "India's population grew by 2.7 times, Bangladesh's by about two and a half times, while Pakistan's population grew by 4.2 times," he noted. The CM further said that while India and Bangladesh maintained a population growth rate close to 1.8 per cent, India still managed to keep its growth rate 1.7 per cent lower than Pakistan's, underscor-

ing the effectiveness of long-term population management policies. The chief minister observed that had Pakistan followed a population growth trajectory similar to Bangladesh since 1971, the country's population today would have been around 155 million - nearly 100 million less than its current size. "We must ask ourselves what went wrong and why we failed to acknowledge our mistakes in this," he remarked. The CM further said that while India and Bangladesh maintained a population growth rate close to 1.8 per cent, India still managed to keep its growth rate 1.7 per cent lower than Pakistan's, underscor-



Saturday January 31, 2026

Largest Tourism, Family Festival today in capital: Sardar Ilyas

The prime minister's coordinator said the festival would feature food, games, handicrafts and jewelry stalls, while cultures of all four provinces, Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir would be showcased

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A dedicated area has been designed for photography and spectators. He said over 300 vintage cars and classic motorcycles would be displayed, along with rallies, while rock climbing and zip-lining activities would be arranged for youth and children. The prime minister's coordinator said the festival would feature food, games, handicrafts and jewelry stalls, while cultures of all four provinces, Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir would be showcased. The prime minister's coordinator said the festival would be aligned with Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif's vision to develop tourism as a full-fledged industry, noting that Pakistan holds immense untapped tourism potential. Providing details of some events, he said that the festival will commence on Saturday at the Pakistan Sports Complex, Islamabad, marking a major step toward reviving and mainstreaming the country's tourism sector after years of neglect. 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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 related to dower and dower, Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Yahya Afzil 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 tolas of gold was too 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 supplier, the spokesman said, adding that the Rawalpindi Police, under the directions of the Police Officer (CPO) Syed Khalid Mahmood Hamidani, would 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 06 months

ISLAMABAD: The imports of agriculture machinery and implements into the country during the first half of current 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 imports of \$54,050 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 \$5,573 billion were imported as compared to the imports of \$4,928 billion of the same period of the last year. However, imports of fertilizer manufacturers 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 \$440,34 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, Kuri Wala, 40 Mor Jarawala, Chak No. 421 GB, Hursainabad Faisalabad District, and Bambu Bola 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 will further strengthen the longstanding friendship and cooperation between Japan and Pakistan.

BOI minister meets Silkway Impex, Chinese BRI delegation

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Board of Investment, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, held a meeting with a delegation of Silkway Impex Pvt. Ltd. and a high-level Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) delegation, led by Mr. Deng Yubin, Head of BRI for Yunnan Province, to discuss enhanced bilateral investment cooperation between Pakistan and China. Welcoming the delegation, the Federal Minister stated that Pakistan-China friendship has a long history and continues to grow stronger through close economic and strategic cooperation. He emphasized that both countries enjoy collaboration across various sectors, including infrastructure, energy, and manufacturing, and referred to minerals and mining, agriculture, digitalisation, technology, and manufacturing, and referred to minerals as a priority sector, recalling the recently held Pak-China Mineral Cooperation Forum, which provided a strong platform for strengthening bilateral collaboration in the mineral sector. He noted that Pakistan is rich in mineral resources and aims to develop integrated mineral value chains, including exploration, processing, beneficiation, and downstream industrial development. The Chinese delegation expressed keen interest in mineral development, particularly copper and other strategic minerals, and shared their interest to pursue long-term investment opportunities aligned with Pakistan's economic and industrial vision. Dr. Erfan Iqbal, Additional Secretary, Board of Investment, welcomed the delegation and described the Belt and Road Initiative as a game changer for the region. She briefed the delegation on Pakistan's priority investment sectors and the facilitative role of BOI, highlighting areas such as digitalisation, agriculture, minerals, and technology-driven industries. She informed the delegation about Pakistan's incentive framework, including Special Technology Zones (STZs) for technology and research-based industries and Special Economic Zones (SEZs) for manufacturing and industrial projects. She added that BOI stands ready to connect investors with relevant federal and provincial stakeholders to ensure effective facilitation. On agriculture, she noted that Pakistan encourages investments focused on yield enhancement, quality improvement, research, and the introduction of modern technology, and highlighted that several Chinese companies are already collaborating on projects for converting land into fertile agricultural areas, including regions such as the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Chinese delegation was represented by its Managing Directors Mr. Raja Tahir Rehman, Mr. Selman Pataudi, and Mr. Raja Hashim Rehman, who briefed the Minister on Silkway's role as a structured facilitation platform connecting international partners with Pakistan's public and private sector stakeholders in a compliant and institutionally aligned manner.

Govt pledges support for local advanced biologics production

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination, Syed Mustafa Kamal, has 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, Libevitung (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.

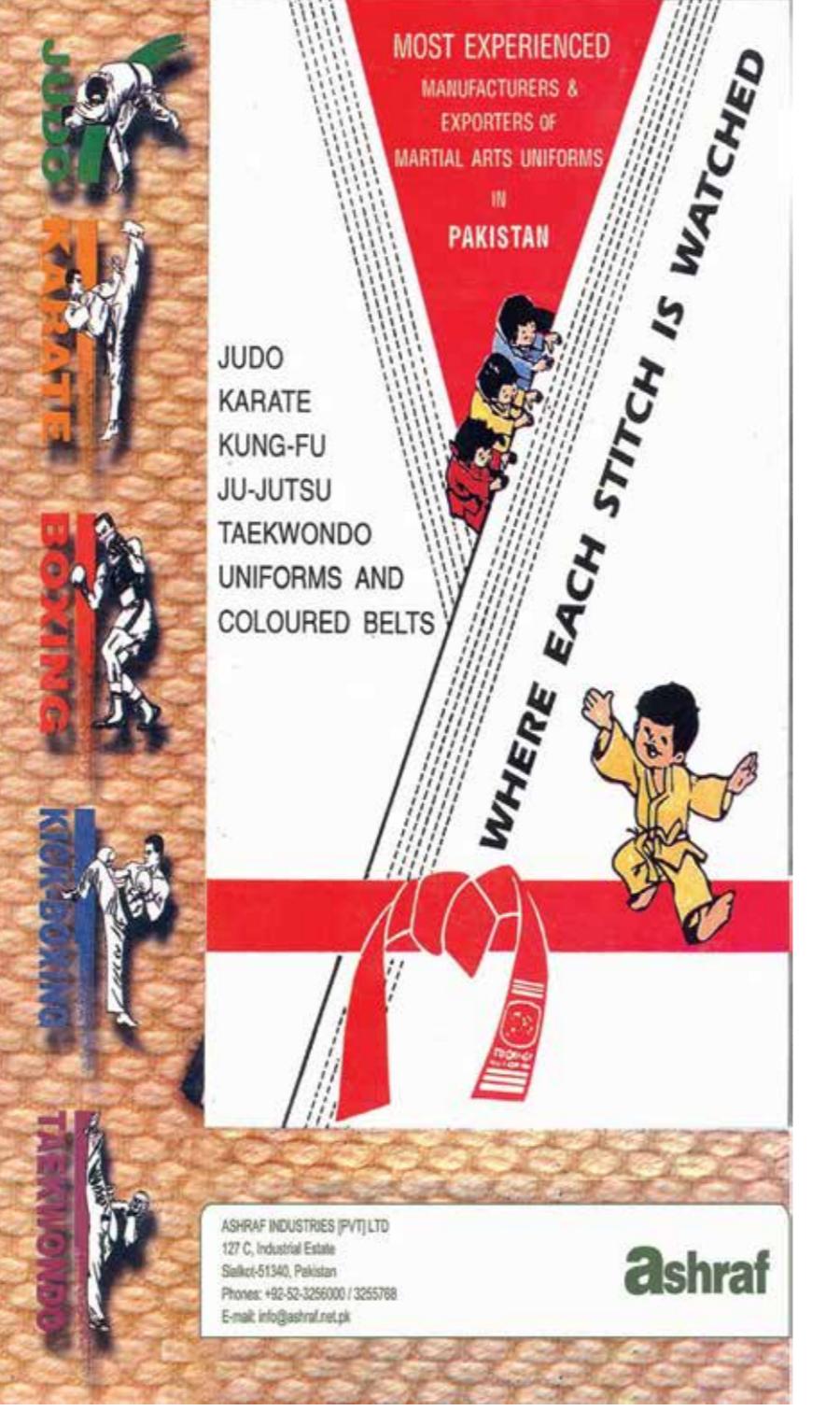
To ensure sustainable and affordable patient access, Minister Syed Mustafa Kamal assured that the Government of Pakistan will facilitate a partnership between Huahui Health and a premier local pharmaceutical manufacturer. This initiative is aimed at localizing the production of advanced biological products 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 therapy, Libevitung (HH-003), 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 Al Pervaiz Malik and Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Pakistan Nawaf bin Saeed Almalki on Friday discussed areas of mutual cooperation and further strengthen political 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 Almalki appreciated Pakistan's active participation in the Future Minerals Forum and noted that the platform offers significant opportunities for regional collaboration.—DNA

Govt to setup Business facilitation Centre in Gwadar

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 mobilized under the directives of Chief Minister Balochistan Sarfaraz 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 such as one-stop shop, including the issuance of non-projective 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.



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 Economic Cooperation Organization, Muhammad Zamir, emphasized the importance of sustainable development and said that adherence to international construction and operational standards 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. Muhammad Zamir Asadi stated that under the Saindak Project, more than 5,200 local workers have so far received training, which serves as practical evidence of China's strong commitment to local workforce inclusion and capacity enhancement.—APP

successful completion of the project and 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 will further strengthen the longstanding friendship and cooperation between Japan and Pakistan.

CTO expands driving test facilities

RAWALPINDI: Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) 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 tracks at the Traffic Headquarters had been increased from one to two in view of growing public demand. Additional vehicles had also been added to drive training provided for 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 licenses 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 that all licensing processes were being simplified to ensure merit and transparency, adding that an automated video system had been introduced to further strengthen transparency in the licensing system.—APP

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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 "hatred 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 GCC states will not



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 mullahs, 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 work 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 for war are many, ranging from collapse to a coup or the regime holding firm and emerging stronger. All Gulf governments have chosen not to become directly involved in the operation. This does not represent a disappointment for them or 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 Brooksian '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

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 cynical. He has been a master of the 'win-win' framework, 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. Chinese leaders have emphasized humility, mutual respect, and the search for common ground.

The rhetoric is carefully calibrated: it focuses on internal politics, or 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.

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the people at the top have already checked out, why should the middle class stay? Adopting a 'naked official' policy in a democratic or semi-democratic country like Pakistan, would be a messy affair. It runs headlong into constitutional protections of movement and equal rights. It would face ferocious pushback from the very elites who would be targeted. There is the very real danger that it would be used as a political club; a way for those in power to disqualify their rivals while shielding their friends. Yet, the core idea is, that certain high-stakes roles in finance, education, judiciary, defence, taxation etc. should be reserved for those, whose primary loyalty and family presence are domestic. It moves us from a culture of 'prove the crime' to a culture of 'demonstrate commitment.' A soft version of this policy wouldn't need to be a threat.

It could simply be a requirement for radical transparency and a restriction on sensitive portfolios. If you want to run the bureaucracy, politics, or defence, your family shouldn't be holding foreign citizenship. It's a way of saying that leadership isn't just a job; it's a pledge. We live in a globalized world where mobility is a mark of success. But for those who hold the levers of power, there must be a limit to that mobility. We need leaders who are not 'naked', but 'clothed' in the realities of the people they serve. Only when the elite share the consequences of their own failures, will we see the kind of urgent, structural reform that nations like Pakistan so desperately need. The question is not just whether an official is corrupt. The question is: when the ship starts to leak, is he the one reaching for a bucket, or the one already sitting in the lifeboat?

Beijing as Europe's New Geopolitical Mecca

Qamar Bashir



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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 fled 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 (PP273, 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-Sharar 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-Ikhbariya 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



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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 prudent 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.

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.

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, Jamaat-e-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 Naeemur 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".

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