



Islamabad POST

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Pakistan wants peaceful resolution of Ukraine issue

Detailed News On Page-08

Pakistan extends grant for child healthcare

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Trees cut as part of Capital master plan

Detailed News On Page-04



5 G Spectrum

Swedish company shows interest in Pak telecom sector

The Prime Minister welcomed the delegation and appreciated Ericsson's longstanding investment in Pakistan and its contribution to the development of the country's telecommunications sector

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif received a delegation from Ericsson at the Prime Minister's House. The delegation was led by Mr. Patrick Johansson, President and Head of Market Area Europe, Middle East and Africa at Ericsson. The Prime Minister welcomed the delegation and appreciated Ericsson's longstanding investment in Pakistan and its contribution to the development of the country's telecommunications sector. He acknowledged Ericsson's presence in Pakistan that spans more than six decades. The meeting focused on the importance of next-generation digital connectivity for economic growth, productivity and public service delivery. The Prime Minister highlighted Pakistan's interest in learning from Ericsson's global experience in advanced networks, including 5G, while ensuring secure and resilient infrastructure aligned with national needs. Discussions also covered cooperation on digital skills development, financial inclusion and the expansion of cashless payment systems, as well as the use of technology to strengthen disaster preparedness and institutional resilience. The Prime Minister reaffirmed the Government's commitment to supporting foreign investors and strategic technology partners. The Ericsson delegation praised the Government of Pakistan's efforts to develop and upgrade the country's IT infrastructure including the 5G spectrum auction. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Minister for IT Ms. Shaza Fatma Khawaja, SAPM Syed Tariq Fatemi and senior officials also attended the meeting.

X down for thousands of users

NEWS DESK

NEW YORK: Social media platform X was down for thousands of users globally on Tuesday, according to Downdetector. There were more than 22,900 reports of issues with the platform in the US as of 9:19am ET, according to Downdetector, which tracks outages by collating status reports from a number of sources. X was also down for more than 7,000 users in the UK as of 9:20am ET, and for more than 2,700 users in Canada. It also showed that 80 users in Pakistan had reported that X was down at 7:30pm. X did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment. The actual number of affected users may differ from what is shown on Downdetector because these reports are user-submitted.

PTI formally nominates Achakzai as Opp leader

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The PTI formally requested the appointment of Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP) chief Mehmood Khan Achakzai as the National Assembly (NA) opposition leader on Tuesday, with party Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan confirming the submission of his nomination papers. This is the second time that the party has formally proposed Achakzai's name for the opposition leader's post in the lower house of Parliament. The development comes a day after NA Speaker Ayaz Sadiq began afresh the process for the appointment of the opposition leader — a slot that has been lying vacant for almost five months since the disqualification of PTI's Omar Ayub in August 2025. Addressing the NA speaker, the written proposal for Achakzai's nomination — seen by Dawn and dated January 12 — stated: "We, the undersigned members of the National Assembly belonging to the opposition benches, have the honour to nominate Mehmood Khan Achakzai MNA (NA-266) for appointment as the leader of the opposition in the National Assembly of Pakistan."

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Shaksgam valley

China rejects India claim

DNA

BEIJING: Beijing has rejected New Delhi's claim over the Shaksgam valley in Kashmir and said that the territory "belongs to China". At a press conference when asked by the Press Trust of India (PTI) for comment on the Indian criticism of China's infrastructure development projects in the Shaksgam valley, China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning said that it was "fully justified" for China to conduct infrastructure construction "on its own territory". "The territory you mentioned belongs to China," she said. India's foreign ministry spokesperson had on Friday said that it reserved the right to take necessary measures to safeguard its interests as the Shaksgam valley was "an Indian territory". "We have never recognised the so-called China-Pakistan boundary agreement that happened in 1963. We have consistently maintained that the agreement is illegal and invalid," he said at a press conference in response to a question from

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ISLAMABAD: Patrick Johansson, President and Head of Market Area Europe, Middle East and Africa at Ericsson called on PM Shehbaz Sharif – DNA

Attack widely condemned

4 peace committee members killed in Bannu gun attack

Victims were returning from jirga when they came under attack, say police

BUREAU REPORT

BANNU: Four members of a local peace committee were killed in a gun attack by unidentified assailants in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Bannu district on Tuesday, police said. The victims were reportedly returning from a jirga in the Gulbadeen Lundai area when they came under attack. Following the incident, police shifted the bodies to the district headquarters hospital for medico-legal formalities. Police said that a search operation has been initiated in the area to apprehend the attackers and ensure the safety of local residents. The incident occurred amid a fresh wave of terrorism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as a day earlier, at least seven cops were martyred when an improvised explosive device (IED) hit their armoured vehicle on Gomal Bazaar road in the province's Tank district. The incident occurred amid a fresh wave of terrorism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as a day earlier, at least seven cops were martyred when an improvised explosive device (IED) hit their armoured vehicle on Gomal Bazaar road in the province's Tank district. The martyred police personnel were identified as SHO of Gomal Bazaar Police Station, Ishaq Ahmed Khan, Additional SHO

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Ulema extend unwavering support for armed forces

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Ulema and Mashaikh have expressed unwavering solidarity with the Pakistan Armed Forces and reaffirmed their collective resolve to counter anti-state narratives and hostile propaganda. This commitment was expressed by a delegation of the National Paigham-i-Aman Committee (NPAC), led by its Chairman Hafiz Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi, during a meeting with Director General ISPR Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry in Rawalpindi today. Assuring full cooperation in promoting the national narrative, the committee strongly condemned Fitna-al-Khawarij as well as the Afghan Taliban, stressing that terrorism has no justification under any circumstances.

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Briefs

Trump urges Iranians to keep protesting

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump urged Iranians on Tuesday to keep protesting and said help was on the way, without giving details, as Iran's government tackled the biggest demonstrations in years. The unrest, sparked by dire economic conditions, has posed the biggest internal challenge to Iran's rulers for at least three years and has come at a time of intensifying international pressure after Israeli and US strikes last year. An Iranian official, speaking to Reuters, said that people he called terrorists were behind the deaths of both protesters and security personnel. The official, who declined to be named, did not give a breakdown of who had been killed. On Monday evening, Trump announced 25% import tariffs on products from any country doing business with Iran — a major oil exporter.

Qatar warns against any military escalation

NEWS DESK

DOHA: A military escalation between the United States and Iran would have grave consequences for the region, Qatar said on Tuesday after Washington threatened strikes in response to a government crackdown on protests in the Islamic Republic. "We know that any escalation ... would have catastrophic results in the region and beyond, and therefore we want to avoid that as much as possible," Qatar's foreign ministry spokesman Majed al-Ansari said at a press conference in Doha. In June, Iran targeted the United States' Al Udeid military base in Qatar in response to earlier American strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities.

Threat to environment

Govt, allies at loggerheads over tree-cutting drive

Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) leader Dr Farooq Sattar also raised questions over the move

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The ongoing tree-cutting drive in Islamabad has put ruling coalition partners at odds, with key allies questioning the government's plan in the National Assembly on Tuesday. Addressing the NA session, Pakistan Peoples Party's (PPP) Shazia Marri, citing reports, said that thousands of trees had been cut down in various parts of the capital, including Shakarparian and called the matter "very serious". Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) leader Dr Farooq Sattar also raised questions over the move, saying that some old trees have also been cut down due to construction in the capital, which should not have happened. The Islamabad district administration, last week, asserted that the tree-cutting campaign was targeted at paper mulberry trees, saying they were causing health issues in the federal capital. Taking the floor, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Ali Mohammad Khan said that cutting

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WWF turns down official stance on tree cutting

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: WWF-Pakistan on Tuesday disputed the Islamabad authorities' stance that paper mulberry trees were removed in the capital due to allergies, stating that the action was also linked to infrastructure development. Recently, large-scale tree removal took place in at least three locations in the federal capital, including acres of tree cover around Shakarparian. Islamabad's Capital Development Authority (CDA) has maintained that only paper mulberry trees were removed as they had been causing pollen allergies, and earlier on Tuesday Minister of State for Interior Tallal Chaudhry assured

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Pakistan, Morocco explore defence, political relations

The Defence Minister will hold a meeting with Morocco's Minister Delegate for National Defence Administration, Abdellatif Loudiyi, and lead delegation-level talks to explore avenues of cooperation in areas of mutual interest

DNA

CASABLANCA: Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif arrived in Morocco on a three-day official visit aimed at strengthening bilateral defence cooperation. Upon his arrival at Casablanca Airport, he was warmly received by Major General Ahmed Hattout, Commander of the Casablanca Army, senior Moroccan officials, and Pakistan's Ambassador to Morocco, Syed Adil Gilani. This visit comes at a significant moment, as Morocco has recently appointed its first-ever Defence Attaché in Islamabad — a landmark step that reflects Rabat's growing interest in deepening defence and security ties with Pakistan. The appointment is seen as a major institutional development, providing a permanent channel for defence diplomacy and coordination between the two countries. During the visit, Pakistan and Morocco are set to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enhance defence collaboration. The agreement marks a historic ad-

vancement in consolidating bilateral defence ties. The Defence Minister will hold a meeting with Morocco's Minister Delegate for National Defence Administration, Abdellatif Loudiyi, and lead delegation-level talks to explore avenues of cooperation in areas of mutual interest. The MoU is expected to establish an institutional framework for sustained defence relations, opening new opportunities for collaboration in military training, exchange of expertise, capacity building, and other joint initiatives. In addition, both sides are expected to discuss potential defence deals, including cooperation in aviation and the possible purchase of fighter jets, underscoring the strategic nature of the partnership. Minister Asif's visit reflects the deep-rooted friendship between Pakistan and Morocco and underscores the shared commitment to expanding cooperation in defence, security, and other fields of common interest. The timing of the visit, following Morocco's appointment of its Defence Attaché in Islamabad, highlights the seriousness of both nations in elevating their defence relationship to new heights.



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Senator voices concern over gas outages, low pressure

KARACHI: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Sindh General Secretary Senator Waqar Mehdi has expressed concern over persistent gas shutdowns, load-shedding and extremely low gas pressure in Karachi and various parts of Sindh. In a statement, Senator Waqar Mehdi said that regardless of whether it is summer or winter, residents of Karachi continue to suffer due to prolonged gas outages, low pressure and load-shedding, causing severe hardship to the public. He urged the Federal Govt to take immediate notice of the ongoing gas shortages in Karachi and ensure prompt corrective measures. **_APP**

Call for intensifying outreach campaign for Yasin's release

RAWALPINDI: Mushaal Hussein Malik, Chairperson of the Peace and Culture Organisation and wife of jailed Kashmiri Hurriyat leader Muhammad Yasin Malik, on Tuesday called for intensifying the ongoing public outreach campaign to secure her husband's release and promote peace in the region. Addressing traders in Rawalpindi's Trench Bhatta area, she said Yasin Malik had renounced violence and adopted the path of peace and dialogue, and he even continued his struggle for justice and peace despite imprisonment. She recalled that Yasin Malik had launched his freedom movement from Trench Bhatta, saying the area remained a symbol of his resolve and sacrifices. She stressed that lasting peace in the region was not possible without justice and meaningful dialogue. Mushaal Malik appealed to the global conscience and the Indian authorities to ensure justice for Yasin Malik and release him to help create a conducive environment for peace. She said the Kashmiri people were showing patience and restraint, but warned that such patience could not be sustained indefinitely in the absence of justice and dialogue. **_APP**

FIA, Immigration Sialkot Airport releases annual

SIALKOT :The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), Immigration Sialkot Airport on Tuesday released its annual performance report. According to an FIA spokesperson, during the year 2025, FIA Immigration successfully processed more than 900,000 passengers arriving and departing internationally at Sialkot Airport. During 2025, a total of 480,000 passengers departed from Sialkot Airport on 2,824 flights, while 460,000 passengers arrived at Sialkot Airport from different countries on 2,825 flights. The FIA Immigration Sialkot arrested 116 accused wanted in serious crimes. Among them, 43 accused were arrested while attempting to flee abroad, whereas 73 accused were arrested upon their arrival in Pakistan. **_APP**



ISLAMABAD: A stunning view of the model of the historical Badshahi Mosque in the private town, which is located in the slums of Federal Capital.

Efforts afoot to regularize Darra Adam Khel arms cluster

PESHAWAR: An important meeting of the committee established to regularize the arms manufacturing business cluster of Darra Adam Khel (DAK) was held here with KP Minister for Law Aftab Alam in the chair on Tuesday. Besides, the Managing Director (MD) Small Industries Development Board (SIDB), Deputy Managing Director of KP TEVTA, KP Economic Zone Development and Management Company (KP-EZDMC), Law Department, Home Department, 11 Corps officials, District Administration Kohat, Kohat Police, manufacturing representatives associated with arms manufacturing and officers from other relevant departments attended the meeting. Addressing the participants, the Minister for Law, Aftab Alam said that the arms manufacturing business cluster of Darra Adamkhel is of exceptional importance for skilled workers across the country and bringing this industry within a regulated and legal framework is the need of the hour. Aftab Alam said that regularization will not only provide legal protection to this industry but will also help in boosting the local economy, employment opportunities and government revenue. The meeting discussed in detail the survey report presented by the Ko-

hat district administration. According to which, the survey of 467 units has been completed so far, while there is scope for further progress. The participants were also informed about the Terms of Reference (TORs) agreed upon by the committee after a meeting held on May 26, 2025.

It was agreed in the meeting that regularizing the business cluster would enable the availability of accurate data, the establishment of organized product distribution centers, and better revenue collection. The incentives given at the provincial level to involve local industrialists in the project, especially the one-time exemption in excise duty, were also discussed in detail. The meeting also reviewed the performance of two sub-committees. The first sub-committee is working on necessary amendments to the rules and regulations for the proposed industrial zone or inclusion of a separate chapter in the existing laws, while the second sub-committee is completing the detailed survey required for the industrial zone, in which authentic and comprehensive data of manufacturing units and dealers is being collected. The meeting also considered aspects of getting the views of stakeholders, simplifying the complex procedures and providing government support

for timely completion of the project. The Law Minister said on the occasion that the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has a personal interest in this project and the full support of the provincial government will continue in this regard. The meeting was informed that work on the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the dilapidated TEVTA building in Darra Adam Khel will be started in next month, which will promote the technical and technical capabilities of local skilled workers.

On this occasion, emphasis was also laid on the preparation of SOPs related to arms manufacturing, promotion of industry in accordance with the law and further improvement of the skills of skilled workers. At the end of the session, it was resolved that close communication between all stakeholders and relevant institutions would be further strengthened to implement the proposed industrial zone, while the project would be made successful through possible relaxation of legal facilities and rules and regulations.

During the meeting, 11 Corps officials also proposed adopting the Sialkot business cluster model as a study for the proposed industrial zone in Darra Adamkhel. **_APP**

Kundi calls for urgent provincial action

PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Tuesday expressed serious concerns over a sharp increase in terrorist incidents across both settled and merged districts of the province, urging the provincial government to take urgent and sincere measures to restore lasting peace. Addressing a press conference here at Governor House, the Governor said that police and armed forces were making immense sacrifices in ongoing counterterrorism operations, while the provincial government appeared reluctant to respond effectively to the worsening security situation. He stressed that the growing threat of terrorism required immediate and serious policy decisions. Governor Kundi criticized the provincial government for demanding evidence of Afghan soil being used in terrorist activities, saying that the entire world had already acknowledged that Afghan territory was being exploited for terrorism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Pakistan. He questioned why proof was being sought from outside when accountability within the state was also essential. He urged the provincial government to stop "representing Afghanistan and the TTP" and instead focus on ensuring sustainable peace within the province and the country. Referring to recent developments, the Governor said that after Kurram district, residents of district Khyber had also begun migrating, warning that the government must immediately prepare for the management and rehabilitation of temporary displaced persons (TDPs). The Governor also called on the federal government not to ignore Khyber Pakhtunkhwa due to political differences. He appealed to the Prime Minister to visit the province and initiate major development projects such as laptop distribution schemes and the establishment of Danish Schools to strengthen public trust in the federal government. He further urged the Pakistan Cricket Board to develop international standard stadiums in Peshawar and other districts of the province. **_DNA**



ISLAMABAD: Former Punjab Provincial Minister for Health, Dr. Jamal Nasir, along with Dr. Irshad Khan, visits the residence of Pakistan Muslim League (N) Chairman, Raja Muhammad Zafar-ul-Haq, to inquire about his health.

Punjab providing conducive environment for global investors

LAHORE :Punjab Assembly (PA) Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan said on Tuesday that Punjab is offering a friendly and conducive environment for global investors. He added that Pakistan is fully prepared to elevate its global trade relations to new heights. He expressed these views during a meeting with a 20-member global business delegation from the United States of America, Malaysia, Qatar, Norway, South Korea, and Canada at the Punjab Assembly Chamber. The meeting focused on the promotion of global trade relations, available investment opportunities in Punjab, and strengthening business-to-business linkages. Addressing the delegation, the speaker emphasized the importance of business partnerships, investment promotion, and effective coordination. He briefed the delegation on ongoing governmental reforms, business-related challenges, and concrete measures being taken to facilitate local and foreign investors. He stressed that the timely and effective resolution of issues faced by the global business community is an urgent necessity, adding that the Pakistani diaspora within the global business sector is playing a vital role as a bridge between different countries. The global business delegation expressed keen interest in investment opportunities across Punjab and termed the government's reforms as encouraging. Delegation members stated that the business-friendly environment and effective policies have significantly enhanced investor confidence. They also conveyed their willingness to engage in future joint ventures and long-term business partnerships with the Government of Punjab and the Punjab Assembly. Provincial Law Minister Rana Muhammad Iqbal Khan, Chairman Public Accounts Committee Syed Ali Haider Gilani, Chairman PEMRA Malik Ahmad Saeed Khan, and Mohsin Shah Nawaz Ranjha were also present on the occasion. Members of the Punjab Assembly Zulfiqar Ali Shah, Chaudhry Ahmad Iqbal, Khurram Warraich, Nausheen Adnan, Asma Ihtesham-ul-Haq, Chaudhry Iftikhar Hussain Chhachhar, Rana Muhammad Arshad, Muhammad Ahmad Khan Leghari, Principal Secretary Amad Hussain Bhalli, Malik Ali Ahmad Khan, Director General Information & Public Relations Mahira Rafiq, and Rao Majid Ali, Director Media, Punjab Assembly, also attended the meeting. **_APP**

Ayesha pledges resolution of business community issues

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chief Commissioner, Regional Tax Office (RTO) Islamabad, Ms. Ayesha Farooq, along with her team members, visited the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) and held an interactive session with the business community to discuss key tax-related issues, facilitation measures and avenues for strengthening cooperation between tax authorities and stakeholders. Addressing the session Ms. Aisha Farooq paid tribute to the business community for its vital role in the economic development and prosperity of Pakistan. She emphasized that collaborative efforts between the tax authorities and the business community are essential for sustainable economic growth, adding that her office fully committed to resolving genuine issues faced by taxpayers. She further stressed the importance of continuous dialogue and announced that RTO, Islamabad shall convene sector-wise meetings to attend industry-specific challenges that are raised by the taxpayers. The Chief Commissioner apprised the session of digital transformation undertaken by FBR. She further stated that POS is an essential feature which will ensure lead to automatic facilitation for filing returns later on. She added that for the finalization of Valuation Table the business community will be taken on board and that as far as the inclusion of non-residents in ATL is concerned the process will be expedited. Welcoming the Chief Commissioner and her delegation, President Islamabad Chamber of

Commerce and Industry appreciated the constructive engagement and highlighted several key proposals aimed at improving tax facilitation and ease of doing business. He raised problems faced by the overseas Pakistanis for issuance of non-resident certificate, claiming refunds or filing returns to avail ATL status and proposed the posting of Inland Revenue Service (IRS) attachés at Pakistani Embassies in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), United Arab Emirates (UAE), United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (USA), and key European Union countries to facilitate the large Pakistani diaspora and overseas business community by providing on-site assistance for tax-related matters and enhancing compliance

through improved access. The Chamber also strongly recommended the restoration of the office of the Commissioner (Appeals), stating that its absence has created serious difficulties for taxpayers seeking timely and effective redress of tax disputes. ICCI emphasized that reinstating this office would ensure an efficient, transparent and accessible mechanism for appeal resolution, thereby strengthening confidence in the tax system. Furthermore, ICCI proposed that the Additional Commissioner (Headquarters), RTO Islamabad, be formally designated as the focal office for grievance redressal for the business community.



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National Days and Armed Forces Days

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Jan 01 / CUBA
Revolution Day

Jan 01 / Palestine
Palestine Revolution Day

Jan 01 / Sudan
National Day

Jan 04 / Myanmar
Independence Day

Jan 06 / Iraq
Armed Forces Day

Jan 12 / Tanzania
Armed Forces Day

Jan 14 / Uzbekistan
Armed Forces Day

Jan 15 / Nigeria
Armed Forces Day

Jan 20 / Mali
Armed Forces Day

Jan 20 / Laos
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Cantonment Board 9270151-3

Islamabad Metropolitan

Corporation.....9209224

Potohar Town.....9209224

Rawal Town.....5773343

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480



ISLAMABAD: German Ambassador Ina Lepel interacts with madrasa students of Mohra Sharif. The Ambassador remained with students for quite some time and praised their interest in their religious studies. DNA

Role of governance critical in ensuring human security

He reiterated that security ensures development and development reinforces security, and that comprehensive security can only be realized through balanced progress across all fronts of national life

ISLAMABAD: Major-General (R) Ehsan Mehmood Khan, a human security expert and former Director-General of Institute for Strategic Studies, Research & Analysis (ISSRA), emphasized that Pakistan is maintaining effective comprehensive deterrence against threats while existential challenges still require traditional security responses whereas governance reforms, and the role of internal systems is critical in ensuring human security, service delivery and sustainable development. He expressed these words at a lecture titled "Comprehensive Security and Sustainable Development: Concepts and Practices", organized by Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), here, said a press release issued on Tuesday. Tracing the history of the concept of security from ancient times to the modern state system, Maj-Gen (R) Ehsan Mehmood Khan argued that the core purpose of the state should be peace, security, and

inclusive prosperity. Stressing the need for viewing security and development through a combined lens, he noted that prosperity cannot be achieved without comprehensiveness in national objectives. Referring to his book Human Security in Pakistan, published in 2013 and taught at international institutions including the National Defense University in Washington, he said national security has no fixed definition and has evolved over centuries, often shaped by conflict and war. He cited the 1947 US National Security Act as a milestone that institutionalized national security frameworks later replicated in dozens of countries. Security is not merely the absence of threats but also the capability to deal with them, with the state remaining the primary securitizing actor, he said, adding that national power is both a means and an end, dynamic in nature and difficult to measure absolutely. Maj-Gen (R) Ehsan recalled Dr

Mahbub ul Haq's seminal contribution and the UN Human Security paradigm, which broadened security to include economic, food, health, environmental and social dimensions. He stressed that human development and human security are deeply interdependent, which form the foundation for sustainable stability. Presenting his conceptual model for Pakistan's Comprehensive National Security, he identified three key rungs: global security, state security and human security, with the latter two forming the core of comprehensive national security. He argued that true security can only be achieved when territorial, political, diplomatic, economic, cultural and human dimensions advance together, creating a "corridor of prosperity". During the question/answer session, the expert underscored that human security cannot be imagined without state security, and that strong state security does not inherently undermine

human security. He noted that weak governance and poor resource utilization, however, can negatively impact service delivery and human wellbeing. He said Pakistan is maintaining effective comprehensive deterrence against threats, while existential challenges still require traditional security responses. Emphasizing governance reforms, he highlighted the role of internal systems in ensuring human security, service delivery and sustainable development. He also pointed to Pakistan's socio-economic strengths, including over 10 million overseas Pakistanis, strong remittance inflows, and the world's third-largest freelance community, urging the nation to move beyond and focus on strengthening internal capacities. He reiterated that security ensures development and development reinforces security, and that comprehensive security can only be realized through balanced progress across all fronts of national life.—DNA

Govt vows expanded non-formal edu nationwide

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Federal Education and Professional Training Ms. Wajiha Qamar on Tuesday highlighted the vital role of teachers in shaping the country's future and reiterated the government's resolve to bolster non-formal education nationwide. She delivered remarks at the inaugural session of a five-day capacity-building workshop for 201 teachers of Basic Education Community Schools (BECS) from Azad Jammu and Kashmir, organised by the Directorate General of Non-Formal Education at the Federal College of Education, Islamabad. Director General BECS, Haeed Niazi, welcomed the chief guest and participants and briefed the gathering that the Basic Education initiative has been serving underprivileged segments of society for the past three decades, enabling millions of children to complete their foundational education and move forward in their academic journey. At present, around 10,000 chil-

dren, mostly girls, are enrolled in 201 community schools operating in Azad Kashmir. The workshop has been designed to equip teachers with modern teaching methodologies and enhance their professional skills. Educational materials have recently been provided to students after four years, while this training is being conducted after a gap of eight years to further improve teaching standards and school performance. In her address, Ms. Wajiha Qamar lauded the efforts of the Directorate General of Non-Formal Education and BECS under the leadership of DG Haeed Niazi, emphasizing that such training initiatives are vital to align teachers with contemporary educational requirements. "Teachers are our greatest asset. You have travelled from Azad Kashmir to Islamabad, and after a long interval, this training is being organized. We are committed to making such programs a regular

feature and ensuring they continue every year," she said. She assured the participants that the government would provide continuous support, including timely provision of Teaching and Learning Material (TLM) for students. The minister announced that an honorarium of at least Rs. 37,500 for teachers has been approved and will take effect from the next financial year. Ms. Qamar reaffirmed the government's commitment to ensuring that no child is denied education, stressing that teachers remain at the forefront of this collective mission. She assured educators that her office would remain fully accessible to them. In her concluding remarks, she reiterated that training initiatives would continue in Islamabad and be expanded to Azad Kashmir, aimed at strengthening teachers' professional growth and advancing quality education in every part of the region.—APP

Farah leads delegation at Shah Allah Ditta Caves

ISLAMABAD: In a major step toward safeguarding Pakistan's invaluable cultural legacy, the Department of Archaeology and Museums, under the National Heritage and Culture Division, organized a high-level official visit to the Buddha Caves at Shah Allah Ditta Caves, located in the Margalla Hills along the historic route leading to the ancient city of Taxila. Dating back nearly 2,400 years, the site stands as a powerful testament to the region's rich Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic heritage. The visit and overall coordination of efforts were led by Ms Farah Naz Akbar, Parliamentary Secretary, National Heritage and Culture Division, who also formed part of the official delegation. Her leadership ensured effective interdepartmental collaboration and a focused review of preservation priorities at this historically significant site. The distinguished delegation comprised Mr. Aurangzeb Khan Khichi, Federal Minister; Mr. Asad Rehman Gilani, Federal Secretary; Mr. Amanullah, Director General, Department of Archaeology and Mu-

seums (DoAM); and Syed Zeeshan Ali Naqvi, Focal Person to the Chairman, Prime Minister Youth Program. During the visit, Mr. Muhammad Azeem Project Director DoAM Islamabad brief the participants for ongoing conservation and restoration initiatives and participants closely examined the recently

explored Buddhist stupa at site. As a result of systematic documentation, conservation, and restoration activities, the retaining walls of the ancient Buddhist caves have emerged, unveiling critical structural features and significantly enhancing understanding of the site's original historical layout.—APP



Islamabad inter-city bus terminal feasibility completed

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, on Tuesday met a delegation of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to review progress on the proposed Islamabad Inter-City Bus Terminal project. ADB consultants briefed the meeting that the initial feasibility study for the project has been completed. They said the bank is now working on developing a suitable financial model for the terminal, which will be integrated with Islamabad's Metro Bus and Electric Feeder Bus services. The participants were told that the project will also include modern electric vehicle charging stations. The ADB delegation further informed the meeting that the bank is providing technical assistance for the preparation of the Islamabad Transport Master Plan. Chairman CDA said ADB's technical support should also be sought for securing carbon credits for environmentally friendly projects. He said efforts were under way to provide residents of Islamabad with modern and sustainable transport facilities.—APP

Zero tolerance for financial fraud and crime: Minister

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry on Tuesday told the National Assembly that there was "zero tolerance" for financial fraud and criminal misconduct, assuring the House that all cases highlighted by lawmakers were being investigated and acted upon. Responding to a point of order raised by Member National Assembly Sher Afzal Marwat, he said the incident reported by the member in which money was allegedly taken from citizens had led to the arrest and charging of the police officials involved. He said such complaints were taken very seriously and that there was zero tolerance for this kind of behaviour within the police. Referring to another case mentioned by MNA, a Rs 100 million incident, Talal Chaudhry said it had not yet been established that any police official was involved.

‘CT batteries management and recycling bill 2025 introduced

ISLAMABAD: A private member's bill aimed at regulating the environmentally sound management and recycling of batteries was introduced in the House on Tuesday, despite initial reservations from the government. The ICT Batteries Management and Recycling Bill 2025, moved by MNA Sehar Kamran, seeks to ensure proper management of the battery life cycle, prevent environmental pollution, protect public health, and promote a circular economy. Presenting the bill, Kamran said improper disposal of batteries posed serious environmental and health risks and that Pakistan needed a clear legal framework to meet its multilateral environmental commitments. She noted that private member bills were often resisted on the grounds that the government was already working on similar initiatives, but stressed that the issue required urgent legislative attention. The proposed law, she argued, could serve as a model for broader national adoption, encourage recycling, and enable the recovery of valuable materials from used batteries. Opposing the bill initially, Minister of State Dr. Shizra Mansab Ali Khan Kharal informed the House that a government-led working group had already been constituted on June 2, 2025, involving relevant ministries including IT and Industry. She said a national policy framework on battery management was under development and that the bill did not introduce provisions beyond what was already being considered. However, following a brief exchange, the minister agreed to allow the bill to be referred to the relevant committee for further consideration.—APP

Polio-free Gwadar prepares for Pak's first nationwide campaign

ISLAMABAD: Gwadar authorities have stepped up preparations for Pakistan's first nationwide polio drive of 2026, underlining the district's importance in maintaining polio-free status. District officials held a high-level coordination meeting Friday to finalize arrangements for the February campaign, part of the National Immunization Days (NID), Gwadar Pro reported. The meeting was chaired by Deputy Commissioner Gwadar Nageebullah Kakar and attended by senior officials from health, administration, law enforcement and partner organizations. Participants reviewed operational planning, logistics, security and surveillance measures for the drive, which will be the first countrywide polio campaign of the new year. Officials said a target of 35,364 children has been set for Gwadar district. Representatives of the World Health Organization presented a detailed review of the previous campaign, including updates on suspected cases, environmental samples and demographic trends. The deputy commissioner assessed challenges faced by frontline polio workers and directed departments to take immediate steps to address operational gaps, stressing worker motivation and close field-level monitoring. Security arrangements were also discussed in detail, with instructions to finalize and implement the security plan promptly to ensure the campaign is conducted peacefully and effectively. The February 2026 drive follows the successful completion of Pakistan's fifth and final nationwide polio vaccination campaign of 2025, held in late December. During that campaign, more than 44.6 million children received polio drops across the country, with strong coverage reported in all provinces and regions. Balochistan alone vaccinated more than 2.5 million children. According to official data available with Gwadar Pro, Pakistan reported 30 polio cases in 2025, including 19 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, nine in Sindh, and one each in Islamabad and Gilgit-Baltistan — a sharp decline from 74 cases in 2024. Notably, Balochistan reported zero polio cases in 2025, after recording 27 cases in 2024. The province had reported a single case in 2021 and remained polio-free in 2022 and 2023 before last year's spike. Gwadar itself has not reported a single polio case since 2015, positioning it as a critical district in Pakistan's eradication push. Officials, however, stress that continued immunization remains essential. Under enhanced nationwide surveillance, nine environmental (sewage) samples collected from nine districts between May 8 and May 23, 2025 were tested at the Regional Reference Laboratory for Polio Eradication at the National Institute of Health Islamabad.—DNA

Briefs

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Water-related challenges, threats to be addressed on priority: Ahsan

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal on Tuesday said that the government will address water-related challenges and threats on a priority basis, with a focus on practical, timely and sustainable solutions. He was chairing the first meeting of the Task Force on National Water Security, directing the formation of a special working group under the Ministry of Water Resources to submit actionable recommendations to the Planning Commission within 15 days, said a news release. During the meeting, the participants were informed that in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region the rate of snowmelt increased by a record 65 percent during the decade 2011–2020 compared to previous decades, while the Siachen Glacier is melting at a rate of 50 to 60 meters per year. The rate of snowmelt in the Himalayas mountains has reached 30 meters annually.

Addressing the meeting, Ahsan Iqbal expressed serious concern over the alarming impact of climate change on Pakistan's water resources. The minister said that climate change had accelerated glacier melting to a dangerous level, noting that since 1960 around 23 percent of glaciers had melted and been destroyed. He warned that Pakistan was likely to face a serious and long-term water crisis due to climate change if urgent measures were not taken. Ahsan Iqbal directed the authorities to convene an immediate technical workshop to convert existing water policies into practical and implementable projects. He stressed that the task force should not only diagnose problems but also propose immediate and workable solutions, supported by a clear timetable to deal with the looming water crisis. Highlighting regional concerns, the minister termed India's suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty a serious threat to regional peace and Pakistan's water rights. —APP

Japan extends a grant aid of 2,910m Yen for child healthcare

H.E. Mr. AKAMATSU Shuichi, Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan said: Today's signing marks an important step in our continued cooperation to improve the quality of health services for children in Pakistan

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Japan has extended a grant aid of 2,910 million Japanese Yen to Pakistan for the Project for the Improvement of Child Health Care Facilities in South Punjab. Notes to this effect were signed and exchanged between H.E. Mr. AKAMATSU Shuichi, Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan and Mr. Muhammad Humair Karim, Secretary of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, in Islamabad on January 13th, 2026. Subsequently, Grant Agreement was also signed and exchanged between Mr. MIYATA Naoaki, Chief Representative of JICA Pakistan Office and Mr. Miran Mohiyuddin Soomro, Senior Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Economic Affairs.

In this project, a new child health care facility will be constructed at Children Hospital Multan which is a public medical institution serving as the regional hub hospital in Multan district. The new facility will have the departments of Emergency, Pediatric ICU, Neonatal ICU, Surgery and Laboratory. The objective of the project is to strengthen the diagnostic and treatment systems in the Children's Hospital and the Institute of Child Health Multan. This project also seeks to improve its function as a specialized tertiary care hospital and a disaster response hub hospital in the region through the expansion of the facility and the provision of medical equipment. These improvements are necessary to provide



the healthcare services for high-risk neonates, infants and children with serious illness or injuries. This project will contribute to improving the quality of healthcare services for children in south Punjab and neighboring provinces. H.E. Mr.

AKAMATSU Shuichi, Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan said: Today's signing marks an important step in our continued cooperation to improve the quality of health services for children in Pakistan. I am confident that this project

will make a significant contribution to pediatric health care in South Punjab and beyond." Mr. MIYATA Naoaki, Chief Representative of JICA Pakistan Office said: "This project will help in achieving the targets of sustainable de-

velopment goals by reducing the infant mortality rates and raising the standard of pediatric emergency care". This project will also serve as a center of excellence meeting the requirement of a modern teaching hospital with inter-

national standards. It will not only alleviate the pressure of tertiary hospitals in other surrounding cities but also open up opportunities for families from all over southern part of Punjab, with improved accessibility and better chances of saving lives.

ML-I project to begin from Karachi Port in July 2026:Abbasi

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi has announced that work on the Main Line-I (ML-I) project will commence from Karachi Port in July 2026. During his recent visit to Karachi and a meeting with Chairman Karachi Port Trust (KPT), Rear Admiral (R) Shahid Ahmed, the minister said that a joint strategy has been finalized to enhance the port's logistics and cargo handling performance. Both sides agreed to strengthen the railway system to ensure efficient transportation of cargo from Karachi Port, said a press release issued here on Tuesday. The minister outlined major reform initiatives in the cargo transport sector, stressing that serious efforts are underway to shift freight movement from road to rail in order to improve efficiency and reduce logistics costs. He said Pakistan Railways would significantly expand its cargo handling capacity in the coming months.

As part of this initiative, the railway infrastructure connected to Karachi Port will be upgraded and made more effective. Hanif Abbasi further announced that the 54-kilometer railway section between KPT and Pipri will be modernized to facilitate faster and smoother cargo movement. He said that Pakistan Railways plans to operate four freight trains daily within the next five months, a step expected to play a crucial role in promoting rail-based cargo transportation. Chairman KPT Rear Admiral (R) Shahid Ahmed reaffirmed that bulk cargo transportation would be prioritized through rail and stated that KPT would upgrade its internal railway tracks to support enhanced freight operations. Both sides reiterated their commitment to jointly improving Karachi Port's logistics efficiency, with the aim of strengthening Pakistan's trade and transport network. —DNA

Only 2 days left for M-Tag registration

ISLAMABAD: Director Excise and Taxation Department Islamabad, Bilal Azam, on Tuesday said that with only two days remaining before the January 15 deadline, vehicle owners have again been reminded to complete M-Tag registration. After the deadline, no vehicle will be allowed to travel within the federal capital without a valid M-Tag, he said. In a message, Bilal Azam said the policy had already been announced by the minister. Under this decision, every vehicle moving within Islamabad will be required to have an M-Tag. The aim is to ensure smooth movement, proper record-keeping, and compliance with the system already in place. He said the deadline is now very close, with only two days left before January 15. —APP

Minister declares Asghar Mall college national heritage

RAWALPINDI: Federal Minister for Culture and National Heritage Aurangzeb Khan Khichi announced on Tuesday that the historic Government Graduate College Asghar Mall, Rawalpindi, has been declared as national heritage, with a formal ceremony to be held by the end of February to officially notify the status. Addressing the oath-taking ceremony of newly elected members of the Students' Council at the college, the minister said the college is not merely a building of concrete, but a living symbol of knowledge, consciousness, character-building and national history. He extended heartfelt congratulations to the newly sworn-in council members, describing their oath as the beginning of a journey of responsibility, integrity, leadership, and service to the nation. "The real purpose of education is not just acquiring degrees, but character building, which shapes the destiny of nations," he stressed. Highlighting the college's century-old legacy, the minister observed that Government Graduate College Asghar Mall has produced generations of intellectuals who have significantly contributed to Pakistan's intellectual, educational and administrative framework. "The corridors of this college breathe history, and its walls bear witness to teachers and students who made knowledge a form of work and discipline", he added Aurangzeb Khan Khichi praised the college administration and faculty for their silent yet pivotal role in nurturing future leaders. He addressed the students, calling the young boys the hope and the young girls the confidence of the nation. —APP

NADRA amendment bill to ease NIC renewal for senior citizens

ISLAMABAD: A bill seeking to amend the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) Ordinance 2000 was introduced in the National Assembly on Tuesday, aiming to simplify identity card renewal procedures for senior citizens. The National Database and Registration Authority Amendment Bill 2025 was moved by Pakistan Peoples Party MNA Sharmila Farooqui. Explaining the bill's objectives, Farooqui said that citizens aged 60 and above often face undue hardship when applying for reissuance or renewal of their National Identity Cards (NICs). She noted that NADRA frequently rejects applications and demands documents that are several decades old, including parents' identity records, which many elderly citizens do not possess. —APP

China signs multiple industry-edu agreements with Pakistan

BEIJING, Jan 13 (): Ten Chinese educational institutions signed cooperation agreements with Pakistan's National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC) and the China-Pakistan TVET-Industry Center of Excellence (CPTICE) during the visit Pakistani delegation led by Gulmina Bilal, Chairperson of NAVTTTC and Co-Chairperson of CPTICE, to Anhui Province. The agreements cover multiple fields, including new energy vehicles, traditional Chinese medicine, smart manufacturing, energy and infrastructure, agriculture and animal husbandry, and information technology, Gwadar Pro reported on Tuesday. According to the official statement, the signing "marks a substantive step forward in Anhui-Pakistan industry-education collaboration, laying a solid foundation for subsequent project implementation." The agreements were signed on the sidelines of the Anhui-Pakistan International Exchange and Cooperation Forum on Industry-Education Integration, held on Jan 12, 2026, in Anhui Province. The forum was jointly organized by the Anhui Education Development Foundation (AEDF), the Anhui Vocational Education International Development Alliance, and the China-Pakistan TVET-Industry Center of Excellence, and hosted by Anhui Communications Vocational & Technical College. It was held under the guidance of the Department of Education of Anhui Province and the Anhui Provincial People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries. Representatives from 19 universities and vocational colleges across Anhui Province attended the forum. Seven institutions presented their cooperation intentions in sectors including mineral resources, traditional Chinese medicine, smart manufacturing, agriculture, information technology, new energy vehicles, and environmental protection. —APP

60,000 more trees to be planted by March: Talal

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry on Tuesday informed the National Assembly that only the allergy-causing paper mulberry trees had been removed in Islamabad, saying that the capital is now "greener than before" and that 60,000 additional trees would be planted by the end of March. Responding to a calling attention notice moved by MNA Muhammad Riaz Fatyana regarding wanton tree cutting in Islamabad, Talal Chaudhry said the issue had been widely debated on social and electronic media, but facts established that only specific categories of trees were removed — primarily paper mulberry, long identified as a source of severe aller-

gies and health issues. Talal Chaudhry explained that tree removal in Islamabad generally occurred under three circumstances: development activities executed under the city's original master plan where brown-area sectors remained unbuilt, infrastructure requirements such as new roads, underpasses and overhead structures, and removal of hazardous species, especially paper mulberry. He noted that areas publicly perceived as green were, in fact, brown-area zones in the original master plan. Citing the example of Embassy Road's expansion in 2016–17, he said trees planted temporarily on unbuilt road space were later removed and replaced with

four times more trees once the road was constructed in accordance with the plan. The minister emphasised that no infrastructure project undertaken during the past eighteen months had removed trees without due process. He said every project went through mandatory public hearings, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) review, certification, and mapping through SPARCO imagery and NDVI (Normalized Difference Vegetation Index), an internationally recognised method for assessing green cover. He said over 40,000 mature trees — 8 to 10 feet tall — had already been planted, and 60,000 more would be planted by March. —APP



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Integration of armed factions remains one of Syria’s biggest challenges

CHARLES LISTER

WHEN Syria's civil conflict ended in December 2024 with the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime, hundreds of thousands of citizens were still bearing arms. Throughout the nearly 14 years of war, armed factions proliferated: from the broad spectrum of armed opposition factions in the northwest and the regime's array of military and militia forces in central and western Syria, to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the northeast and a complex network of militias throughout the south, and not to forget the likes of ISIS and al-Qaeda. In this context, the task of demilitarising society and reunifying the country has posed a truly formidable challenge for Syria's transitional authority. Indeed, the process of disarming, demobilising, and reintegrating armed groups while simultaneously establishing new armed forces and a reformed security sector stands at the core of Syria's transitional state building project. Days of heavy conflict between government forces and the SDF in Aleppo this past week highlighted the consequences of a failure to resolve the integration challenge. As a first step in December 2024, the al-Assad regime's armed forces were swiftly dissolved and a process of status settlement was initiated, whereby all previous soldiers – both officers and conscripts – could register using their national ID and apply for release to civilian life or to re-enlist in the new army. Thousands of men chose to undertake this settlement process across the country, to clear their names and start life anew. But thousands of others abstained, especially in the coastal region, where the Alawite minority dominates. While many of those who avoided the process melted back into rural communities, hundreds ended up forming anti-government factions that conducted low-level attacks on government forces, culminating in a huge coordinated campaign on March 6 that killed more than 100 government personnel – triggering a chaotic and brutal week of violence that left more than 1,000 people dead. In the months since, several thousand former regime personnel have undergone training and joined Syria's new security forces across the country. Nevertheless, the fighting persists, due in part to financial support from prominent al-Assad regime figures now in exile in neighbouring Lebanon, as well as in Russia. That continues to undermine Syria's ability to heal ties with Lebanon and Russia, but also complicates the geopolitical standing of such countries among the wider region, which has stood squarely behind the new government in Damascus in the hope of transforming Syria into a base of stability and prosperity. Meanwhile, Syria's transitional government is also seeking to rebuild the Ministry of Defence (MOD) with an army, navy and air force and the Ministry of Interior (MOI) with provincial public security directorates, and dedicated “counterterror-

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ism”, counternarcotics and cyber forces. In this transitional phase, the MOD has emerged as the umbrella under which the broad spectrum of opposition armed factions have been folded. While all former opposition groups have technically dissolved, some remain largely in form, constituting the army's nearly 20 divisions. Those factions with longstanding ties to Türkiye – particularly from the northern Aleppo-based Syrian National Army (SNA) – appear to have benefitted from greater levels of military support and arms supplies than others previously based in Idlib. Some have leaders with controversial pasts, including outstanding international sanctions designations for violent crimes and corruption. In the earlier phases of Syria's transition, the MOD was the force tasked with responding to security challenges and with securing territory through checkpoints and local deployments. This was not an effective “post-war” approach to security, and the ministry's serious shortcomings in terms of discipline, cohesion and command and control gave way to grievous errors of judgement and restraint – most notoriously on the coast in March 2025, but also in Suwayda in July, when MOD forces intervened in bloody clashes between local Druze and Bedouin communities. Through the second half of 2025, the MOD took a back seat when it came to domestic security and was replaced by the MOI, whose public security forces have assumed responsibility for local security across the country. Unlike the MOD's divisions, the MOI's forces are dominated by newly recruited men from across the country. While the MOI's specialist units remain dominated by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) personnel, the relative lack of previous factional affiliations in the broader public security forces has led to significant improvements in some of the most challenging environments. In fact, Syria's coastal region has transformed from being the most consistently dangerous and deadly region of the country in the first half of 2025 to the most stable and least violent region at the end of the year – even with a low-level rebellion continuing. That is almost entirely due to the MOI's assumption of security responsibility, and a months-long effort to engage and build trust with local communities. The most strategically significant challenge Syria's transition faces today is from its unresolved territorial issues in the northeast with the Kurdish-dominated SDF and in the southern Druze-majority governorate of Suwayda. In both regions, armed groups are presenting themselves as alternatives to Damascus's rule – and both are resulting in persistent tensions and conflict. While the United States government has worked intensively to facilitate and mediate talks to achieve the SDF's integration into Syria, those negotiations have yet to bear fruit. With multiple deadlines for such a deal now passed, tensions have been sky-high for weeks. An SDF drone attack on a checkpoint manned by government forces in eastern rural Aleppo late on January 5 triggered a spiral of hostilities that ended in the expulsion of SDF-linked militia from northwestern districts of Aleppo city by January 10. This latest bout of fighting has dealt a blow to integration talks, but also highlighted the consequences of their failure. The very real prospect of hostilities now spreading to front lines in eastern Aleppo could kill the talks altogether. In Suwayda, a tense standoff remains after the violence in July that killed more than 1,400 people. Druze militias have united under a “National Guard” that is receiving support from Israel. The dominant role played by former al-Assad regime officers within this formation's leadership has driven a more than 400 percent rise in drug trafficking towards Jordan, according to data collected by the Syria Weekly media outlet – triggering Jordanian air strikes in late December.

Israel–US Image Warfare Against Iran

Qamar Bashir



Several elements within the widely shared video <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZS5ntmNFQ/> raised immediate concerns. First, the behavior and structure of the crowd itself. Genuine mass demonstrations are inherently chaotic. Human gatherings fluctuate in density, form pressure points at intersections, and show visible irregularities along sidewalks and side streets. Movement is uneven; space opens and closes unpredictably. In the video under scrutiny, the crowd density remains remarkably uniform across extraordinary depth—from the foreground to the far horizon

WARS in the modern era are no longer fought only with bullets, missiles, fighter jets, or nuclear deterrence. Increasingly, they are fought long before any kinetic action begins—on a quieter, more deceptive battlefield: the battlefield of perception. Images, videos, and narratives now travel faster than diplomacy, bypassing borders, institutions, and even reason. In this new reality, social media has become one of the most dangerous weapons ever devised—capable of destabilizing societies without firing a single shot. Over recent weeks, a flood of videos has emerged on social media platforms claiming to show massive demonstrations across Iran. The imagery is dramatic: endless crowds filling wide boulevards, national flags lining streets with striking uniformity, and aerial perspectives suggesting a country on the verge of total upheaval. There is no denial that Iran, like many nations under economic pressure and political strain, experiences dissent and protest. That fact is neither new nor controversial. What demands scrutiny, however, is whether the specific videos being circulated reflect organic reality or constructed spectacle. Having worked as a news producer during a formative period from the late 1980s into the early 1990s, and having remained engaged with media management and state-level communication thereafter, I approach such material with trained skepticism. In professional journalism, the first rule is simple: never accept the image at face value. Images must be interrogated, contextualized, and tested against known patterns of human behavior, geography, and political reality. Several elements within the widely shared video <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZS5ntmNFQ/> raised immediate concerns. First, the behavior and structure of the crowd itself. Genuine mass demonstrations are inherently chaotic. Human gatherings fluctuate in density, form pressure points at intersections, and show visible irregularities along sidewalks and side streets. Movement is uneven; space opens and closes unpredictably. In the video under scrutiny, the crowd density remains remarkably uniform across extraordinary depth—from the foreground to the far horizon. There are no visible bottlenecks, no dispersal patterns, no natural thinning at the edges. Such visual consistency is rare in real-world human assemblies and suggests construction rather than spontaneous congregation. Second, the perspective and scaling appear inconsistent with physical reality. Buildings recede naturally with distance, but the human forms within the crowd retain disproportionate clarity far beyond what optics and aerial resolution would allow. In authentic drone footage, individuals quickly lose definition as distance increases, blend-

ing into texture and motion. Here, human figures remain visually distinct deep into the frame, defying the expected behavior of light, distance, and atmospheric interference. Third, the symbolic repetition is striking. Flags appear at near-identical intervals, with uniform size, color saturation, and orientation. In real protest environments, symbols are irregular: some flags hang limp, others ripple unpredictably; many are partially obscured or tilted at varying angles. Perfect visual repetition is a hallmark of design, not of lived reality. Fourth, there is an absence of micro-chaos. Even a single frame extracted from authentic protest footage captures motion blur, raised hands, head turns, banners at differing angles, and small disturbances rippling through the crowd. The video in question presents magnitude without motion—an image that appears alive but lacks the subtle disorder that defines real human movement. Fifth, the information environment itself raises questions. Iran is among the most tightly controlled digital spaces during periods of unrest. Internet throttling, platform disruptions, and communication blackouts are common responses to internal instability. Under such conditions, high-definition, uninterrupted aerial footage does not typically circulate freely or repeatedly. Scarcity, not abundance, defines information flow from closed environments. The sudden frequency and clarity of this material therefore contradict known patterns of access and control. This contradiction prompted further scrutiny. History provides sobering lessons. Before Iraq was invaded, narratives and visuals prepared global opinion. Before Libya collapsed, selective imagery framed intervention as humanitarian necessity. Before Syria descended into prolonged catastrophe, emotionally charged footage simplified complex realities into moral binaries. In each case, media preceded missiles. Images softened resistance, manufactured urgency, and created justification for actions whose consequences were later measured in human tragedy. The current moment bears uncomfortable similarities. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has once again openly revived the language of regime change in Iran, addressing the Iranian public directly and encouraging confrontation with the existing state. This rhetoric is not accidental nor unprecedented. It follows a long-established pattern in which internal unrest is amplified externally to legitimize future action. At the same time, the familiar and highly combustible narrative of Iran's alleged nuclear ambitions has been reintroduced with renewed intensity. Despite years of inspections, contradictory intelligence assessments, and shifting red lines, nuclear alarmism is once again being used to mobilize fear—particularly within Western

political circles. Its function is clear: to draw the United States back into a regional confrontation centered on Israeli security calculations. Statements from Washington reinforce this trajectory. When American leadership publicly warns that Iran will be struck “where it hurts” if unrest is met with force, such language serves as a signal—not merely to Tehran, but to global audiences. It signals that escalation is conceivable, that internal disorder could justify external intervention, and that public opinion must be conditioned in advance. Simultaneously, the re-emergence of Reza Pahlavi, son of Iran's former monarch, as a proposed alternative leadership figure follows a familiar script. His sudden prominence, international exposure, and expressed willingness to lead mirror past efforts to elevate external figures as symbols of legitimacy during periods of destabilization. History shows that such figures often resonate more with foreign audiences than with populations on the ground—but they serve an important narrative function nonetheless. It is within this convergence—Israeli advocacy for regime change, American military signaling, revived nuclear fear narratives, and the elevation of an external political alternative—that the circulation of dramatic protest imagery must be understood. These visuals do not merely document events; they construct inevitability. They suggest total collapse, universal opposition, and moral urgency—all prerequisites for public acceptance of actions that would otherwise face resistance. This does not mean dissent does not exist in Iran. It does. But exaggeration, fabrication, and narrative inflation have historically been used to convert limited unrest into justification for catastrophic intervention. The consequences of such manipulation are not abstract. They are measured in destroyed cities, displaced populations, and generations condemned to instability. Today, wars begin not with sirens but with shares. Not with explosions but with engagement metrics. By the time missiles are launched, the psychological battlefield has already been won. The responsibility therefore lies with citizens, journalists, and analysts alike to resist reflexive belief. To pause. To question. To distinguish between organic human expression and manufactured spectacle. Justice demands evidence. Peace demands restraint. And truth demands patience. In the age of instant imagery, seeing is no longer believing. Verification is.

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

Turning Deterrence into Dividends

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



International reaction was unusually forthcoming. The crisis was widely seen as having been defused through disciplined command rather than chance. Then U.S. President publicly credited General Munir for preventing nuclear escalation, an acknowledgment that carried symbolic weight given Washington's long-standing emphasis on crisis stability in South Asia

FIELD Marshal General Syed Asim Munir's stewardship of Pakistan's armed forces has coincided with a period of rare convergence between military credibility, diplomatic momentum, and emerging economic possibilities. The brief but consequential India–Pakistan conflict of May 7–10, 2025 stands as the pivotal moment that redefined Pakistan's posture in a volatile region and repositioned its leadership on the global stage. India's missile strikes, launched under the codename Operation Sindoor in the wake of so-called terrorist incident in Kashmir, were widely interpreted as an attempt to impose a new coercive normal upon Pakistan. Instead, the response it provoked altered strategic calculations across capitals. From the outset, General Munir adopted a posture that combined clarity with restraint. His public warning that any aggression would meet a “swift and intense” response was not rhetorical flourish but a calibrated signal of resolve. At the same time, he repeatedly emphasised that Pakistan sought deterrence, not escalation, reminding the world that recklessness between two nuclear-armed states carried incalculable risks. Under his command, Pakistan's armed forces executed precise counterstrikes, downed multiple Indian aircraft, and demonstrated operational superiority without crossing thresholds that might have triggered full-scale war. This balance between force and restraint restored deterrence while allowing diplomatic channels to reassert themselves. International reaction was unusually forthcoming. The crisis was widely seen as having been defused through disciplined command rather than chance. Then U.S. President publicly credited General Munir for preventing nuclear escalation, an acknowledgment that carried symbolic weight given Washington's long-standing emphasis on crisis stability in South Asia. Such praise strengthened Pakistan's global standing and enhanced the domestic legitimacy of

its military leadership, reinforcing the perception of Pakistan as a responsible nuclear power capable of managing conflict under extreme pressure. The months that followed marked a notable evolution in General Munir's role. He emerged as a central figure in what many observers described as Pakistan's geopolitical re-entry after years of diplomatic drift. High-level engagement with the United States resumed, ties with Saudi Arabia deepened—symbolised by the award of the King Abdulaziz Medal—and defence diplomacy expanded across the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Joint military exercises, counterterrorism cooperation, and economic discussions increasingly ran in parallel, reflecting a recognition that security and economics are now inseparable in global statecraft. This context frames the most consequential question facing Pakistan today: can enhanced military credibility and diplomatic outreach help loosen the country's long-standing dependence on foreign debt and the International Monetary Fund? Pakistan's external debt now exceeds \$100 billion, hovering around 70 per cent of GDP, with an IMF Extended Fund Facility of approximately \$7–8 billion extending into the latter half of the decade. While reform projections suggest a gradual easing of pressure, structural vulnerabilities remain deeply entrenched. Against this backdrop, defence exports have emerged as a strategic instrument rather than a peripheral activity. General Munir's support for leveraging Pakistan's indigenous defence industry reflects a broader understanding that military capability can generate economic dividends. The performance of Pakistani weapons systems during the May 2025 crisis functioned as an unintended but powerful demonstration to potential buyers. Cost-effective, combat-tested, and supported by flexible financing arrangements, these systems suddenly commanded renewed attention. The JF-17 Thunder fighter jet has become the centrepiece of this strategy. Azerbaijan's \$4.6 billion

agreement for forty JF-17 Block III aircraft stands as Pakistan's most significant defence export success to date. Indonesia is in advanced negotiations for dozens of jets and drones, a deal that could generate several billion dollars while anchoring long-term defence cooperation in Southeast Asia. Sudan is nearing an agreement initially valued at \$1.5 billion, with expansion potential exceeding \$4 billion, encompassing aircraft, drones, weapons, training, and logistics. Saudi Arabia has explored either a direct \$4 billion procurement or the conversion of roughly \$2 billion in loans into aircraft purchases. Iraq and Bangladesh have also expressed interest, reinforcing the breadth of Pakistan's defence diplomacy. If even a portion of these agreements materialises, the financial inflows could reach into the tens of billions of dollars. Such earnings would bolster foreign exchange reserves, ease balance-of-payments stress, and support debt servicing, thereby reducing reliance on emergency IMF interventions. Defence Minister Khawaja Asif's assertion that sustained arms exports could help Pakistan avoid future bailouts may be optimistic, yet it reflects a growing recognition that traditional export models alone are insufficient. Economists caution, however, that defence exports cannot by themselves resolve Pakistan's economic challenges. Arms sales must be embedded within broader fiscal discipline, export diversification, and institutional reform. Non-defence exports have shown only modest growth, underscoring the need for parallel progress across the wider economy. Still, opportunities rarely present themselves so clearly. Field Marshal Munir's leadership during crisis, followed by diplomatic consolidation and economic outreach, has opened strategic space that Pakistan has long lacked. If this moment is matched by coherent economic policy and sustained reform, the gains achieved through strength and restraint may yet translate into greater financial autonomy and a more secure national future.

Briefs

4 peace committee members killed in...

FROM PAGE 01
Sher Aslam, driver Abdul Majeed, and Elite Force personnel Arshad Ali, Shaukat Ali, Hazrat Ali, and Ehsanullah. The identity of the deceased passerby could not be ascertained. In a similar incident of violence against peace committee members, seven of them were shot dead by terrorists in Bannu's Hoveed area on November 21 last year. Pakistan has experienced a rise in cross-border terrorist incidents since the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan in 2021. The provinces of KP and Balochistan, which border Afghanistan, have been particularly affected by these attacks. Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Director General Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry, in his presser on January 6, said that law enforcement agencies carried out 75,175 IBOs across the country in 2025. Giving a breakdown, he said 14,658 IBOs were conducted in KP, 58,778 in Balochistan, while 1,739 operations took place in the rest of the country. Lt Gen Chaudhry said that 5,397 terrorism incidents were reported nationwide during the last year. Of these, 3,811 incidents, he said, occurred in KP, 1,557 in Balochistan, and 29 incidents were reported in other parts of the country. He said that 2,597 terrorists were killed during counter-terror operations last year. While providing details of 10 major terror attacks across the country, he said that civilians and soft targets had been deliberately targeted, and Afghan militants were involved in all attacks. Meanwhile, Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Tuesday condemned a militant attack on peace committee members in Bannu, expressing deep sorrow over the martyrdom of four members in the incident.

Ulema extend unwavering support...

FROM PAGE 01
The National Paigham-i-Aman Committee announced plans to disseminate the message of Islamic unity, social harmony, and constitutional equality across the country through mosques and other religious platforms. It was also agreed to adopt a zero-tolerance policy against hate speech, sectarianism and takfiri narratives. The committee further proposed enhancing awareness and guidance sessions in mosques, madaris, and universities to effectively promote the state narrative. Speaking on the occasion, the Director General ISPR emphasized that unity and consensus on matters of national security and narrative are the need of the hour. He said a comprehensive discussion was held on internal security challenges in the context of Fitna-al-Khawarij, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and Tehreek-e-Taliban Afghanistan, which further strengthened the shared stance of all stakeholders. Reiterating Islamabad's principled position on Kashmir and Gaza, Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said supporting oppressed peoples is Pakistan's moral responsibility. He stressed that public awareness and a truth-based narrative are decisive tools in countering the enemy's psychological warfare. Terming the meeting as highly productive, the Director General ISPR expressed hope for further progress in building trust and enhancing practical co-operation in the days ahead.

WWF turns down official...

FROM PAGE 01
lawmakers that more trees would be planted in the coming months. "WWF-Pakistan's field assessments indicate that vegetation loss in the capital is not limited to Paper Mulberry management alone, but is also linked to infrastructure development in multiple locations," the environmental body said on social media. "Beyond pollen and allergies, Islamabad's recent tree removal reflects broader challenges in urban planning," it added.



GUJRANWALA: Players of Rising Stars Hockey Club in a group photo with the management of Mir Lateef Hockey Club Gujranwala. Rising Stars Club defeated Mir Lateef club by 5-3. – DNA

Tahir Presses PFF for Strict Disciplinary Measures

Loralai Football Association Secretary Muhammad Tahir Nasar said that he has formally written to the Pakistan Football Federation, demanding immediate disciplinary action against those responsible

OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The affairs of the Loralai Football Association (LFA) have taken a serious turn following alleged interference by the Balochistan Football Association (BFA), prompting an urgent appeal to the Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) to initiate disciplinary action. According to details, the controversy escalated after alleged threats and an incident involving the display of a weapon by individuals associated with the Secretary of the Balochistan Football Association and the President of the Loralai Football Association at football house. The incident has raised



serious concerns regarding security, governance, and discipline within football administration in the region. Speaking to the media, Loralai Football Association Secretary Muhammad Tahir Nasar said that he has formally written to the Pakistan Football Federation, demanding immediate disciplinary action against those responsible. He stated that such behavior not only violates established codes of conduct but also brings disrepute to the game of football. Muhammad Tahir stressed that intimidation, threats, and the use or display of weapons have no place in sports administration. "These actions have severely damaged the image of football and created an atmosphere of fear among officials and players. Strong and timely action is essential to restore confidence and ensure transparency in football governance," he added. In his letter to the PFF, the LFA Secretary further highlighted that the alleged interference and misconduct have disrupted the smooth functioning of the association and adversely affected grassroots football activities. He urged the federation to conduct a thorough inquiry and take strict disciplinary measures to prevent such incidents in the future. Muhammad Tahir expressed hope that the Pakistan Football Federation would take prompt notice of the matter and act in accordance with its constitution and disciplinary regulations to uphold the integrity and credibility of the sport.

Variawa wins Dakar 8th stage, Al-Attiyah retains overall lead

WADI AL-DAWASIR: Saoud Variawa won the eighth stage of the Dakar Rally in a South African one-two with Henk Lategan on Monday as Nasser Al-Attiyah saw his overall lead cut to four minutes in the Saudi desert. Dacia Sandriers driver Al-Attiyah finished fifth and one minute and 16 seconds behind 20-year-old Toyota SA driver Variawa, who beat factory entry Lategan by three seconds on the 483km loop around the southern city of Wadi Al-Dawasi. The Qatari's closest rival Mattias Ekstrom was third for Ford in the longest stage of the 48th edition of the rally. Last year's Dakar runner-up Lategan moved up to third overall, six minutes and eight seconds off the lead with five stages remaining before Saturday's finish in the Red Sea port of Yanbu. The one-two was the fourth ever by South African drivers in the car category. Ford's Nani Roma and Carlos Sainz were fourth and fifth respectively. "We made a little mistake close to the finish and we lost around three minutes," said Al-Attiyah, a five times Dakar winner. "But OK, I am really happy from the performance. We don't lose a lot of time. I think we did a good job." Predictions that this year's Dakar would be the closest battle yet were backed up by the top five in the standings, from three different teams, being separated by 10 minutes and 39 seconds. Sixth-placed Sebastien Loeb, the nine-times world rally champion driving for Dacia, remained in contention and was within 17 minutes of his leading teammate. Reigning Dakar champion Yazeed Al-Rajhi of Saudi Arabia withdrew last week. In the motorcycle category, Argentina's Luciano Benavides took his third stage win in four days and seized the overall lead for the first time in his career from Australian KTM teammate and defending champion Daniel Sanders. Benavides, who had started the day nearly five minutes adrift, leads Sanders by 10 seconds with American Honda rider Ricky Brabec third and four minutes 47 seconds off the pace. "These last two stages were a little bit faster and in these conditions I feel really good, I can read the roadbook super well and take really good decisions," said Benavides. The Dakar began in 1978 as a race from Paris across the Sahara to the Senegalese capital but switched to South America in 2009 for security reasons. It moved to Saudi Arabia in 2020. The race is the first round of the World Rally-Raid Championship season. – Agencies

BCB and ICC Hold Video Conference

DNA

DHAKA: A video conference between the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and the International Cricket Council (ICC) was held this afternoon to discuss the participation of the Bangladesh National Cricket Team in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026. Representing the BCB were President Md Aminul Islam, Vice Presidents Md Shakawat Hossain and Faruque Ahmed, Director and Chairman of the Cricket Operations Committee Nazmul Abedeen and Chief Executive Officer Nizam Uddin Chowdhury. During the discussions, the BCB reaffirmed its position regarding the decision not to travel to India, citing security concerns. The Board also reiterated its request for the ICC to consider relocating Bangladesh's matches outside India. While the ICC highlighted that the tournament itinerary has already been announced and requested the BCB to reconsider its stance, the Board's position remains unchanged. Both parties agreed that discussions will continue to explore possible solutions. The BCB remains committed to safeguarding the well-being of its players, officials and staff while engaging constructively with the ICC to address the matter.

Slot angered by 'weird' Szoboszlai error in Liverpool FA Cup win

LIVERPOOL: Dominik Szoboszlai produced a sublime goal and a ridiculous error as Liverpool eased to a 4-1 win over third-tier Barnsley to reach the FA Cup fourth round. The Hungarian international unleashed a rocket into the top corner from long range to open the scoring at Anfield on Monday before Jeremie Frimpong doubled the home side's lead. But Szoboszlai gifted the League One side a route back into the tie when he fluffed an attempted backheel inside his own box and Adam Phillips gratefully smashed home. Barnsley boss Conor Hourihane claimed Szoboszlai's lax move was disrespectful and not one he would have tried in a Premier League game. Arne Slot was also far from happy with his midfielder, who has been Liverpool's outstanding performer

so far in a difficult season for the English champions. "I don't think you should do that in a FA Cup game, or a League Cup game, or in a friendly game, or in a training session. It was a weird choice," said Slot. "I also have my opinion about it but I prefer to keep that to myself and speak about that with Dom." Hourihane was furious his side were not awarded a penalty midway through the second half for a trip by Szoboszlai on Reyes Cleary. Slot was forced to empty his bench of key players as Florian Wirtz, Hugo Ekitike, Ibrahim Konate and Ryan Gravenberch were introduced just after the hour mark. Liverpool laboured going forward for most of the second period until their star duo of attacking substitutes clicked to clinch victory in the final six minutes plus added time. – Agencies



China rejects India claim

FROM PAGE 01

India's state-owned public television broadcaster Doordashan. The Indian spokesperson added that New Delhi also does not "recognise the so-called China-Pakistan Economic Corridor". "The entire union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh are an integral and inalienable part of India," he maintained, adding, "This has been clearly conveyed to Pakistani and the Chinese authorities several times". He added that India had "consistently protested with the Chinese side against attempts to alter the ground reality in Shaksam Valley". Mao Ning, in response to the Indian foreign ministry spokesperson's comments, said that China and Pakistan had in the 1960s signed a boundary agreement and delimited the boundary between the two countries, terming it "the right of China and Pakistan as sovereign countries".

PTI formally nominates Achakzai...

FROM PAGE 01

It referred to rule 39 of the Rules of Procedures of Conduct of Business in the National Assembly, 2007, saying that the "leader of the opposition is to be appointed from among the members of the house who belong to the opposition and who commands the confidence of the majority of the members sitting on the opposition benches". "In view of the foregoing, we hereby affirm that Mehmood Khan Achakzai enjoys the confidence and support of the majority of the members belonging to the opposition, and is, therefore, the most suitable person to hold this constitutional office.

Govt, allies at loggerheads over tree...

FROM PAGE 01

down wild mulberry trees due to pollination is understandable, but questioned why trees 40 to 50 years old were cut. The government's allies and the opposition leaders demanded to refer the matter to the NA's Standing Committee on Environment. Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry informed the House that only the allergy-causing paper mulberry trees had been removed in Islamabad. He said that the capital is now "greener than before" and that 60,000 additional trees would be planted by the end of March. Responding to a calling attention notice moved by MNA Muhammad Riaz Fatyana regarding wanton tree cutting in Islamabad, Chaudhry said the issue had been widely debated on social and electronic media, but facts established that only specific categories of trees were removed. He explained that tree removal in Islamabad generally occurred under three circumstances: development activities executed under the city's original master plan where brown-area sectors remained unbuilt, infrastructure requirements such as new roads, underpasses and overhead structures, and removal of hazardous species, especially paper mulberry.

Alonso leaves Real Madrid, Arbeloa appointed as coach

Real Madrid Sack Xabi Alonso After Super Cup Loss, Appoint Former Defender Alvaro Arbeloa as Head Coach Ahead of Copa del Rey Clash following turbulent eight-month spell and Barcelona defeat

MADRID: Real Madrid said Monday that coach Xabi Alonso has left the Spanish giants by mutual consent, to be replaced by Alvaro Arbeloa. A day after the team lost the Spanish Super Cup final against Barcelona, the club parted ways with the Basque coach eight months after his arrival and immediately appointed former Madrid player Arbeloa, who was coaching the reserve side. "Real Madrid announces that, by mutual agreement between the club and Xabi Alonso, it has been decided to bring his tenure as first-team coach to an end," said the Los Blancos in a statement. In a separate statement Madrid then announced Arbeloa would take Alonso's place, without specifying the length of the 42-year-old's contract. "Arbeloa has been the coach of Castilla since June 2025 and has developed his entire coaching career in Real Madrid's academy since 2020," said Los Blancos. Arbeloa's first match at the helm is a Copa

del Rey last-16 visit to face second-tier Albacete on Wednesday. The Spaniard played 238 times for Madrid between 2009-2016, winning two Champions League titles and La Liga once, among other silverware. Arbeloa also lifted the World Cup with Spain in 2010, as well as the European Championship in 2008 and 2012, playing alongside Alonso for club and country. Alonso joined in June, replacing veteran Carlo Ancelotti, but Madrid struggled to find consistency under the Basque coach and are second in La Liga, four points behind Barcelona. Los Blancos were outplayed in a 3-2 defeat in Saudi Arabia on Sunday by Hansi Flick's side, the 44-year-old's last at the helm. Alonso was close to the sack towards the end of 2025 but a run of five consecutive wins kept him in his position, until the Super Cup defeat. Alonso had signed a three-season deal at the Bernabeu after

leaving German side Bayer Leverkusen, with whom he won the Bundesliga in 2024. Real Madrid were thrashed 4-0 by Paris Saint-Germain in July in the Club World Cup semi-finals, which was an early setback for the coach. A 5-2 drubbing by Atletico Madrid in September was another blow for Alonso, although it was the team's only league defeat until December. Despite a Clasico win over Barcelona in October, it appeared president Florentino Perez had not fully warmed to Alonso, who had intended to bring a modern coaching approach to the team. While Ancelotti, who led Madrid to three Champions League wins across two spells in charge, was hailed for his man-management, Alonso was appointed for his tactical nous. Early on during his time in charge Alonso said the "rock'n'roll" was about to begin, but it never came, with few entertaining attacking displays, despite the

superb output of French superstar Kylian Mbappe, La Liga's top scorer. Madrid struggled through a run of poor form amid an injury crisis, losing at home against Celta Vigo, and away at Liverpool in Europe, as well as drawing several domestic games. In that period many of the tactical ideas Alonso had tried to implement, including high pressing, faded away, amid reports some star players had fallen out with him. Brazilian wingers Vinicius Junior and Rodrygo Goes dropped out of form, going several months without finding the net. Spanish media also said Alonso would be ousted if they failed to beat Manchester City in the Champions League in December. Madrid lost against Pep Guardiola's side but the performance enough of an improvement that Alonso was given more time to try and save his job. However, the defeat by Barca in Jeddah was the final straw for Madrid, who agreed a deal with Alonso for him to depart. – Agencies

Briefs

PSX gains 1,567 points to close at 183,951 points

ISLAMABAD: The benchmark KSE-100 Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) on Tuesday closed bullish, gaining 1,567.36 points, a positive change of 0.86 percent, to settle at 183,951.50 points compared to 182,384.15 points on the previous trading day, according to PSX data. During the session, the ready market witnessed a trading volume of 1,037.262 million shares with a traded value of Rs 62.704 billion, against 1,058.795 million shares valuing Rs 48.237 billion in the previous session. Market capitalization surged to Rs 20.769 trillion from Rs 20.599 trillion a day earlier. Out of 480 active companies in the ready market, 177 advanced, 265 declined, while 38 remained unchanged. Bank of Punjab topped the volume chart with 73.893 million shares, followed by Media Times Limited with 67.419 million shares and WorldCall Telecom with 43.448 million shares. The top gainers included Atlas Honda Limited, which rose by Rs 75.32 to close at Rs 1,610.32, and Pakistan Services Limited, which increased by Rs 36.13 to settle at Rs 1,057.74. On the losing side, PIA Holding Company Limited (B) declined by Rs 500.00 to close at Rs 22,500.00, while Hoechst Pakistan Limited fell by Rs 152.28 to close at Rs 4,200.22. In the futures market, turnover stood at 200.068 million shares with a traded value of Rs 16.493 billion, compared to 201.570 million shares worth Rs 11.830 billion in the previous session. Out of 313 futures-market companies, 146 recorded gains, while 162 declined and share 5 remained unchanged. Among futures contracts, BOPJAN led with 27.330 million shares, followed by PTCJAN with 21.832 million shares and NBPJAN with 12.480 million shares.—APP

Rupee gains 01 paisa against US Dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Tuesday appreciated by 01 paisa against the US Dollar in interbank trading and closed at Rs 280.00 compared to the previous day's closing at Rs 280.01. According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs 280.7 and Rs 282.7, respectively. The price of the Euro decreased by Rs 0.73 to close at Rs 326.52 from the previous day's close of Rs 327.25, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese Yen came down by 01 paisa and closed at Rs 1.76, whereas the exchange rate of the British Pound witnessed an increase of Rs 0.25 and closed at Rs 376.99 compared to the previous day's Rs 376.74. The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal remained unchanged and closed at Rs 76.23 and Rs 74.66, respectively.—APP

Gold prices surge by Rs900 per tola

ISLAMABAD: Gold prices increased sharply in the local market on Tuesday, as the price of 24-karat gold per tola surged by Rs.900 to settle at Rs.481,862, while the price of 10 grams of 24-karat gold went up by Rs.771 to Rs.413,118, according to the All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association. Likewise, the price of 10 grams of 22-karat gold increased by Rs.707 to Rs.378,705, whereas silver prices also registered an increase, with 24-karat silver per tola going up by Rs.180 to stand at Rs.9,075 and 10 grams of silver increasing by Rs.154 to Rs.7,780. In the international market, gold prices went up \$9 to \$4,595 per ounce, while silver increased by \$1.80 to \$86.00 per ounce, the association reported.—APP

Pak, Saudi Arabia strengthen mining coop, investment plans

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia Boost Mining Cooperation, Explore Joint Investments at Future Minerals Forum 2026 as Ministers Highlight Tethyan Belt Potential, Technology Sharing, Workforce Strength and Broader Mineral Value Chain Collaboration

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik met Saudi Minister of Industry and Mineral Resources Bandar Ibrahim Al-Khorayef in Riyadh to discuss avenues for strengthening bilateral cooperation in the mining and minerals sector. Malik is leading Pakistan's delegation to the Future Minerals Forum (FMF) 2026, hosted by the Saudi Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources. On the sidelines of the Forum, the talks centered on exploring joint investment opportunities and enhancing collaboration across the mineral value chain, underscoring the two countries' commitment to deepening economic ties in the sector. The Saudi Minister appreciated Pakistan's participation in the Forum, noting that global focus has increasingly shifted toward mining and critical minerals. He highlighted the vast potential for Pakistan-Saudi cooperation in the minerals sector and assured that Saudi Arabia's knowledge resources and technical expertise would be available to support Pakistan's mineral sector. He also underscored Pakistan's young and dynamic workforce as a key asset. Federal Minister Ali Pervaiz Malik reiterated the strong brotherly relations between the two countries and emphasized Pakistan's commitment to deepening cooperation. He shared that the Geological Survey of Pakistan is working to collaborate with



the Saudi Geological Survey, and highlighted the immense mineral potential of the Tethyan Belt, of which Reko Diq is only a small part. He further noted that fertilizer production and medical equipment manufacturing also offer promising avenues for joint ventures. The Pakistani delegation comprises senior policymakers, heads of state-owned enterprises, private sector representatives, and leading mining

sector stakeholders, including PPL, OGDCL, Mari Energies, GHPL, FWO, PMDC, Saindak Metals, and Balochistan-based mineral companies, along with specialized service providers. Pakistan's participation at FMF 2026 is being organized by Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL) in collaboration with the Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division). Under the theme "Mineral Marvel - Unleash-

ing Pakistan's Mineral Revolution," the Pakistan Pavilion showcases the country's rich geology, flagship mining projects, and investment opportunities. Nawaf bin Saeed Ahmad Al-Malkiy, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Pakistan, welcomed the Pakistani delegation and extended full support for Pakistan's participation. He commended the leadership of Prime Minister

Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and Federal Minister Ali Pervaiz Malik, noting that Pakistan's presence at FMF 2026 would further strengthen the longstanding brotherly relations between the two countries. During his visit to the Pavilion, Bandar Ibrahim Al-Khorayef appreciated the Pakistani team's efforts, particularly the Pavilion's distinctive design and strong visual impact.—DNA

Syrian army declares closed military zone east of Aleppo

ALEPPO, Syria: The Syrian army on Tuesday declared an area east of the northern city of Aleppo a "closed military zone," potentially signaling another escalation between government forces and fighters with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces. Several days of clashes in the city of Aleppo last week that displaced tens of thousands of people came to an end over the weekend with the evacuation of Kurdish fighters from the contested neighborhood of Sheikh Maqsood. Since then, Syrian officials have accused the SDF of building up its forces near the towns of Maskana and Deir Hafer, about 60 km (37 mi) east of Aleppo city, something the SDF denied. State news agency SANA reported that the army had declared the area a closed military zone because of "continued mobilization" by the SDF "and because it serves as a launching point for Iranian suicide drones that have targeted the city of Aleppo." On Saturday afternoon, an explosive drone hit the Aleppo governorate building shortly after two Cabinet ministers and a local official held a news conference on the developments in the city. The SDF denied being behind the attack. The army statement Tuesday said armed groups should withdraw to the area east of the Euphrates River. The tensions come amid an impasse in political negotiations between the central

state and the SDF. The leadership in Damascus under interim President Ahmad Al-Sharaa signed a deal in March with the SDF, which controls much of the northeast, for it to merge with the Syrian army by the end of 2025. There have been disagreements on how it would happen. Some of the factions that make up the new Syrian army, formed after the fall of former President Bashar Assad in a rebel offensive in December 2024, were previously Turkey-backed insurgent groups that have a long history of clashing with Kurdish forces. The SDF has for years been the main US partner in Syria in fighting against the Daesh group, but Turkey considers the SDF a terrorist organization because of its association with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, which has waged a long-running insurgency in Turkey. A peace process is now underway. Despite the long-running US support for the SDF, the Trump administration in the US has also developed close ties with Al-Sharaa's government and has pushed the Kurds to implement the March deal. Shams TV, a station based in Irbil, the seat of northern Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region, had been set to air an interview with Al-Sharaa on Monday but later announced it had been postponed for "technical" reasons without giving a new date for airing it.—DNA

Swedish intelligence chief says 'risk' of security situation deteriorating

It has been at that level since May last year, when it was lowered from four. Sapo had raised the level to four in August 2023, after a slew of protests involving Qur'an burnings and desecrations had made the country a "prioritized target"

STOCKHOLM: The head of Sweden's intelligence service told AFP Tuesday that there was a "risk" that an already serious security situation would continue to deteriorate, pointing primarily to a threat from Russia. Charlotte von Essen said Russia had conducted "security-threatening activities against Sweden and in Sweden" for a number of years. "This involves everything from intelligence gathering, influence operations, and illegal technology acquisition. But it also involves sabotage activities," she added. There had also been sabotage in the Baltic states and in Germany, said von Essen, head of the Swedish Security Service (Sapo). But amid recurring reports of suspected drone flights, she cautioned about attributing too much to Russia. "One might get the impression that Sweden has been subjected to extensive hybrid activities," von Essen said, saying her service did not share "that view. Some of the drone sightings had not checked out and some suspected sabotage had turned out to have been things like break-ins related to more traditional crime. Von Essen insisted that some activities, such as cyberattacks, could still be linked to "foreign powers." "We need to be careful before we speculate and draw conclusions, because Russia is not behind everything," von Essen said. Attributing too much to foreign powers risked playing into their hands and could lead to a misallocation of resources. Apart from Russia, von Essen said that both China and Iran posed threats to Swedish security. "We've previously pointed out that Iran uses criminal networks in Sweden as proxies to carry out attacks here to achieve its objectives," she said. When it came to China, the threat was mostly about Chinese attempts to access Swedish research "in order to build, among other things, its own military capability." Last week von Essen decided to keep the terrorist threat assessment at an "elevated" level — keeping it at three on a five-point scale. It has been at that level since May last year, when it was lowered from four. Sapo had raised the level to four in August 2023, after a slew of protests involving Qur'an burnings and desecrations had made the country a "prioritized target."—APP

School resumes in tents under shadow of Gaza's 'yellow line'

This is not safe, and safety depends on God, but this is what we can do," said Yara Abu Ghalweh, a school supervisor. Israel's assault on Gaza has killed more than 71,000 people, according to the enclave's Health Ministry. The war was triggered by a Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023

GAZA/CAIRO: She spends her lessons in the wintry cold on the floor of a crowded tent, her teacher interrupted by regular gunfire and explosions from Israeli-controlled territory less than 1,000 meters away. But Toulin Al-Hindi, 7, is grateful to be in school at last after more than two years of war. She is one of some 400 children attending lessons at the makeshift North Educational School, set up in blue plastic tents in the ruins of northern Gaza's community of Beit Lahiyah, within eyesight of the "yellow line" held by Israeli forces. During a recent lesson, more than a dozen girls sat on the floor in two rows in one small tent, keeping warm in sweaters and puffy jackets, their notebooks out in front of them on a handful of slatted wooden crates. They cheerfully sang out numbers while their teacher drew shapes on a chalkboard. "Al-

though we do not sit on chairs, thank God we started attending school," said Toulin. "During the war, there were no schools, and we were bored." Her mother, Yasmine Al-Ajouri, says she worries from the moment her daughter leaves for school until she comes home. "Take care, take cover next to a wall, be quick on the road," Yasmine said she tells her daughter. Under the ceasefire in place since October, Israel still occupies more than half of the Gaza Strip and bars civilians from other areas. Nearly all buildings in the Israeli-controlled sector have been leveled and residents driven out. That leaves virtually the entire population of more than 2 million people confined to around a third of Gaza's territory, mostly in makeshift tents and damaged buildings, where life has resumed under the control of an administration

led by Hamas. Although major fighting has been halted, Israel has routinely opened fire at Palestinians it accuses of approaching the yellow line, saying it aims to eliminate threats to troops. More than 440 Palestinians have been killed since the October deal came into effect. Palestinians say Israeli forces have been moving some of the yellow concrete markers westward, encroaching into unoccupied territory. Israel denies this. Staff at Toulin's school said they hear fire daily. "We taught the children that as soon as we hear fire ... to lie down. This is not safe, and safety depends on God, but this is what we can do," said Yara Abu Ghalweh, a school supervisor. Israel's assault on Gaza has killed more than 71,000 people, according to the enclave's Health Ministry. The war was triggered by a Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023.—Agencies

Ex-UK envoy apologizes to Epstein victims

LONDON: Former British ambassador to Washington Peter Mandelson has offered an "unequivocal" apology to the victims of Jeffrey Epstein for his friendship with the late US sex offender. Mandelson had faced criticism after failing to apologize in his first broadcast interview, which aired on Sunday, since he was fired as Britain's top diplomat in Washington last September over the issue. "I was wrong to believe him following his conviction and to continue my association with him afterwards," Mandelson said in a statement released to the BBC's Newsnight program late on Monday following the backlash. "I apologize unequivocally for doing so to the women and girls who suffered." Prime Minister Keir Starmer sacked the exspin doctor and former government minister four months ago after emails emerged showing he had maintained contact with Epstein even after the American was convicted of child sex offenses in 2008. In the interview aired on Sunday, Mandelson had said it was "misplaced loyalty" and "a most terrible mistake on my part." He also suggested Epstein excluded him from the "sexual side" of his life because he was gay. Dubbed the "Prince of Darkness" during his years as a media adviser, Mandelson was twice forced to resign from Tony Blair's Labour government in the late 1990s and early 2000s over allegations of misconduct.—APP

Spain says Venezuela freed 3 more Spanish prisoners

MADRID: Venezuela has freed three more Spanish prisoners following the US ouster of longtime strongman Nicolas Maduro, after five were released last week, Spain's foreign minister said on Tuesday. The releases on Monday concerned three Spanish-Venezuelan dual nationals, with one deciding to stay in the South American country and another set to return to Spain, Jose Manuel Albares told Catalunya Radio. "This is a second step that we consider very positive, and in this new phase we encourage the Venezuelan government to continue moving forward in that direction," he said.—APP

Ugandan opp denounces 'military state' ahead of election

KAMPALA: As dark clouds gathered overhead, young and old members of Uganda's longembattled opposition gathered for prayers at the home of an imprisoned politician — the mood both defiant and bleak. The mayor of Kampala, Erias Lukwago, told the gathering on Sunday that this week's election was a "face off" between ordinary Ugandans and President Yoweri Museveni. "All of you are in two categories: political prisoners and potential political prisoners," he said. Museveni is widely expected to extend his 40-year rule of the east African country in Thursday's election, thanks to his neartotal control of the state and security apparatus. The 81-year-old came to power as a bush fighter in the 1980s and has maintained a militarised control over the country, brutally cracking down on challengers. The latest campaign has seen hundreds of opposition supporters arrested and at least one killed, with the police claiming they are confronting "hooligans." The main opposition candidate Bobi Wine, real name Robert Kyagulanyi, is rarely seen in public without his flak jacket and has described the campaign as a "war." He has been arrested multiple times in the past and tortured in military custody. The only other significant opposition leader, Kizza Besigye, was kidnapped in Kenya in 2024 and secretly smuggled to a Ugandan military prison to face treason charges in a case that has dragged on for months. His wife, UNAIDS director Winnie Byanyima, hosted Sunday's prayer meeting at their home. She said Uganda has only a "thin veneer" of democracy.

"We are really a military state," she told AFP. "There's total capture of state institutions by the individual who holds military power, President Museveni." "The police officers I have met have never looked at themselves as neutral," said Jude Kagoro, a researcher at the University of Bremen who has spent more than a decade studying African police.—APP

Briefs

Trump says
nations doing
business
with Iran face
25% tariff

Washington urges US citizens to "leave Iran now" and have a plan to depart country without relying on govt

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump said on Monday any country that does business with Iran will face a tariff rate of 25% on trade with the US, as Washington weighs a response to the situation in Iran, which is seeing its biggest anti-government protests in years. "Effective immediately, any country doing business with the Islamic Republic of Iran will pay a tariff of 25% on any and all business being done with the United States of America," Trump said in a post on Truth Social.

Tariffs are paid by US importers of goods from those countries. Iran has been heavily sanctioned by Washington for years.

"This order is final and conclusive," Trump said without providing any further detail. There was no official documentation from the White House about the policy on its website, nor information about the legal authority Trump would use to impose the tariffs, or whether they would be aimed at all of Iran's trading partners. The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

Iran, which had a 12-day war with US ally Israel last year and whose nuclear facilities the US military bombed in June, is seeing its biggest anti-government demonstrations in years.

HAMAS
to hold
leadership
election

DNA

GAZA CITY: Hamas is preparing to hold internal elections to rebuild its leadership following Israel's killing of several of the group's top figures during the war in Gaza, sources in the movement said on Monday.

"Internal preparations are still ongoing in order to hold the elections at the appropriate time in areas where conditions on the ground allow it," a Hamas leader told AFP. The vote is expected to take place "in the first months of 2026."

Much of the group's top leadership has been decimated during the war, which was sparked by Hamas's unprecedented attack on Israel in October 2023.

The war has also devastated the Gaza Strip, leaving its more than two million residents in dire humanitarian conditions. The leadership renewal process includes the formation of a new 50-member Shoura Council, a consultative body dominated by religious figures.

Its members are selected every four years by Hamas' three branches: the Gaza Strip, the occupied West Bank and the movement's external leadership. Hamas prisoners in Israeli prisons are also eligible to vote.

Afghan Taliban
appoint first
envoy to India

DNA

NEW DELHI: Afghanistan's Taliban government has appointed their first senior official in India since the group returned to power in 2021, charged with leading their embassy in Delhi.

India has not officially recognised the Taliban government, but the move signals a deepening engagement, with New Delhi seeking to exploit divisions between Islamabad and Kabul. Noor Ahmad Noor, a Taliban foreign ministry official, assumed responsibility as charge d'affaires, and has already held meetings with Indian officials, the embassy said in a statement. "Both sides emphasised the importance of strengthening Afghanistan-India relations," the Afghan Embassy said, in a post on X late Monday.

Pak calls for 'meaningful'
Russia-Ukraine dialogue

Ambassador Asim Ahmad especially commended the efforts by many countries, particularly the US, for the resolution of this conflict, giving primacy to dialogue

UNITED NATIONS: Pakistan has urged Russia and Ukraine to enter into a "sustained, meaningful and structured dialogue" to resolve their raging conflict which will mark the four-year anniversary next month.

"The international community has been deeply perturbed by the continuing, and relentless hostilities, leaving behind a trail of death, destruction, economic losses and immense human suffering," Ambassador Asim Ifkhar Ahmad, permanent representative of Pakistan to the United Nations, told the UN Security Council on Monday.

(The conflict began when Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, arguing it was a "special military operation" for Ukraine's "demilitarization", protecting Russian speakers from "genocide," and preventing NATO expansion.)

"We are alarmed by the recent intensification in fighting with escalation in attacks from both sides, further worsening the already dire humanitarian situation," the Pakistani envoy said in a debate in the situation in Ukraine, warning that such actions not only perpetuate the conflict, they also undermine trust, and the ongoing efforts for peace. From the outset, he said, Pakistan's position has been that dialogue was the only viable path for lasting peace.

"Now, more than ever before, the overwhelming global opinion is on the side of ending this conflict through peace-



ful means," Ambassador Asim Ahmad pointed out.

"Diplomacy and genuine engagement in the past have delivered – as we saw in the case of Black Sea Grain Initiative in July 2022," he said, referring to other actions, including Security Council resolutions seeking a peaceful end to the conflict. Ambassador Asim Ahmad especially commended the efforts by many countries, particularly the United States, for the resolution of this conflict, giving primacy to dialogue. "We hope that all sides would make full use of the ongoing diplomacy, demonstrate genuine political will, and engage constructively to make meaningful strides towards a peaceful and negotiated settlement of the conflict, starting with an immediate ceasefire," leading to peace and security in Europe.

"The imperative to deliver millions from agony must remain paramount," the Pakistani envoy said.

Pakistan, he added, supports all efforts aimed at resolving the issue peacefully, in a comprehensive and durable manner. Opening the debate, Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, said, "The start of the new year has brought no peace or even respite to Ukraine." She said large-scale aerial assaults by the Russian Federation against civilians and civilian infrastructure have resulted in "horrific" levels of destruction and suffering. – APP

Somalia cancels
all agreements
with UAE

Mogadishu accuses Abu Dhabi of
undermining national unity as rift
deepens over breakaway regions

NEWS DESK

ABU DHABI: Somalia has severed all agreements with the United Arab Emirates, annulling deals spanning key port operations, security cooperation and defence, citing "harmful actions" that undermine the country's unity and sovereignty. After the Council of Ministers announced the decision on Monday, Defence Minister Ahmed Moalim Fiqi said in a post on X that the move was based on "reliable reports and evidence indicating practices linked to the United Arab Emirates that undermine the sovereignty of the Somali Republic, its national unity and political independence". Somalia's announcement appears to be linked to Israel's recognition in December of Somaliland, a self-declared independent region in northwestern Somalia that broke away in 1991 but lacks international recognition, said Abdinor Dahir, an independent Somalia analyst. "Many Somalis believe the UAE facilitated Israel's recognition of Somaliland," Dahir told Al Jazeera. "The Somali cabinet's decision [to cancel agreements] is therefore widely seen as a pushback against the UAE, which is accused of backing non-state actors and separatist forces in Africa, including the [paramilitary] RSF in Sudan," Dahir said. Abu Dhabi has long denied accusations that it is arming the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in its war with Sudan's military rulers. While the UAE declined to sign a joint Arab-Islamic statement in December condemning Israel's recognition of Somaliland, on January 7 it released a joint statement with the African Union pledging "support for Somalia's sovereignty, territorial integrity, security and stability". Somaliland, which has declared independence from Somalia, has over the past decade emerged as a key hub for Emirati commercial and security investment, including a 30-year concession at the strategic Berbera port held by the UAE company DP World.

Finance Minister meets
icon technology delegation

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, today held a meeting with a visiting delegation from Icoin Technology Inc. led by its Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Chet Silvestri. During the meeting, the Finance Minister briefed the delegation on the Government of Pakistan's ongoing efforts to develop a structured and responsible framework for digital assets. He also apprised the delegation of the progress made toward the establishment of a Pakistan Crypto Council and the Pakistan Virtual Assets Regulatory Authority (PVARA), outlining the rationale, sequencing of policy actions, and the broader implications of these initiatives for market development, financial inclusion, transparency, and consumer protection. The Minister highlighted Pakistan's growing participation in global digital asset activity, as reflected in international analytics, and emphasized the government's resolve to channel this activity into a well-regulated environment that safeguards users

while encouraging innovation and investment.

The Finance Minister underscored that regulation was essential to balance opportunity with risk, particularly in light of increasing volumes of digital asset usage by Pakistani citizens. He noted that the evolving policy framework aims to provide clarity to market participants, align with international best practices, and ensure coordination among regulators, including the central bank, to enable orderly market development and institutional participation.

Mr. Chet Silvestri shared insights from the United States and Canadian markets, drawing on Icoin Technology's experience of working with banks, exchanges, and large-scale consumer platforms. He outlined how regulatory clarity in mature markets has enabled traditional financial institutions to engage with digital assets through existing infrastructure, rather than reinventing core banking systems. He explained the role of wallet-based middleware and switching technologies that allow banks to connect securely with exchanges, manage liquidity, enhance compliance, and offer digital asset services to customers through familiar banking applications.

Russian attack
on Ukraine's
Kharkiv kills four

"The number of people killed in
the enemy attack on the outskirts
of Kharkiv has reached four,"
Oleg Synegubov posted on Telegram

KYIV: A Russian attack on Ukraine's northeastern city of Kharkiv killed four people and wounded several others, the regional governor said Tuesday. "The number of people killed in the enemy attack on the outskirts of Kharkiv has reached four," Oleg Synegubov posted on Telegram. He also said six people were wounded in the overnight hit.

White helmeted emergency workers could be seen clambering through the still-smoking wreckage of a building occupied by postal company Nova Poshta, in a video posted by the regional prosecutor's office. Within Ukraine's second city, Kharkiv Mayor Igor Terekhov said a Russian long-range drone struck a medical facility for children, causing a fire. No casualties were reported. The overnight strikes hit other regions as well, including southern city Odessa. Residential buildings, a hospital and a kindergarten were damaged, with at least five people wounded in two waves of attacks, regional governor Sergiy Lysak said.

Moscow has pummeled Ukraine with daily drone and missile barrages in recent months, targeting energy infrastructure and cutting power in the frigid height of winter.

Russia's use last week of a nuclear-capable Oreshnik ballistic missile on Ukraine sparked condemnation from Kyiv's allies, including Washington, which called it a "dangerous and inexplicable escalation of this war". Moscow on Monday said the missile hit an aviation repair factory in the Lviv region and that it was fired in response to Ukraine's attempt to strike one of Russian President Vladimir Putin's residences – a claim Kyiv denies. – APP

Pakistan, UAE to sign 'pre-
immigration clearance' pact

New immigration system to be launched initially
on pilot basis with implementation in Karachi



NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have agreed to sign a "pre-immigration clearance" agreement, allowing UAE-bound travellers to complete clearance in Pakistan and exit the airport directly, similar to domestic passengers in the Gulf nation.

The development came during a meeting between Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and a UAE delegation led by Director General of Customs Al Dara Border Crossing Ahmed Abdullah Bin Lahej Al Falasi. The new immigration system will be launched initially on a pilot basis, and it will be implemented in Karachi in the first phase. Once implemented, passengers will not need to go through the lengthy immigration process, the minister added, pointing out that not only will travelling become convenient, but the new process will save considerable time and improve passengers' overall experience. Once the pilot project turns out to be successful, the immigration system will be gradually expanded to more

locations, according to the official statement.

The initiative comes against the backdrop of the offloading of passengers owing to improper, incomplete documentation in recent months, in light of stern measures implemented by the authorities to curb human trafficking and illegal travel abroad. Last week, Naqvi had directed authorities concerned to enforce strict screening of passengers' travel documents at all airports across the country and had ordered the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) to ensure the effective implementation of immigration laws and strengthen airport immigration systems along with rigorous screening of travellers' documents.

Earlier this month, the government also launched "Pre-Departure Facilitation Desks" for assisting passengers travelling abroad. The desks, as per the interior minister, will provide guidance and assistance to international travellers on immigration procedures and clearances, ensuring a smoother and more hassle-free travel experience.

The desks are accessible in person and also via help-lines and email, and relevant details are available at airports, border points and on the FIA website.

Denmark,
Greenland
officials to
meet Vance,
Rubio

COPENHAGEN: Denmark's foreign minister said Tuesday that he and his Greenlandic counterpart would meet with US Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio at the White House on Wednesday.

US President Donald Trump has been talking up the idea of buying or annexing the Arctic territory for years, and further stoked tensions on Sunday by saying that the United States would take the territory "one way or the other".

Danish Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen told reporters in Copenhagen that he and his Greenlandic counterpart Vivian Motzfeldt had requested a meeting with Rubio, and Vance had asked to "take part in that meeting and will host it." "Our reason for requesting the meeting has been to move the entire discussion... into a meeting room, where you can look each other in the eye and talk through these issues," Lokke said following a foreign policy meeting in Denmark's parliament.

Meanwhile Danish Defence Minister Troels Lund Poulsen said he would be meeting with NATO's Secretary General Mark Rutte on Monday to discuss Arctic security, also together with Motzfeldt. – Agencies

Zelensky
wary of
EU allies

NEWS DESK

LONDON: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky says European allies have not given him sound guarantees that they will protect his country in the case of a new Russian aggression.

"I am asking this very question to all our partners and I have not received a clear, unambiguous answer yet," he told reporters on Wednesday. His comments come a day after the UK and France signed a declaration of intent on deploying troops in Ukraine if a peace deal to end the war with Russia is agreed.

But full security guarantees have not been agreed. The US, which has been leading efforts to end the invasion, reportedly did not sign such a pledge at talks in Paris on Tuesday.

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