

# Islamabad POST

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**Finance Minister talks about reforms at economic forum**

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**Ex-Korean PM gets 23 years Jail sentence**

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**KP CM for wheat stock for public**

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## Pak joins Trump peace board for 'peace' in Gaza

*Pakistan reaffirmed its commitment to playing a constructive role within the Board of Peace to help achieve these objectives and to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people*

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has decided to join US President Donald Trump's Board of Peace (BoP), the Foreign Office announced on Wednesday, as Islamabad aims to contribute to stability in Gaza. The decision has been taken as part of Pakistan's ongoing efforts to support the implementation of the Gaza Peace Plan under the framework of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2003, read the statement issued by the FO. The invitation was extended last week after US President Trump's administration contacted global figures to join the board and related bodies overseeing governance and reconstruction in post-war Gaza. The FO said that Pakistan expressed hope that the establishment of the Board of Peace would pave the way for concrete steps towards a permanent ceasefire in Gaza, a significant scale-up of humanitarian assistance for Palestinians, and the reconstruction of the war-torn territory. The FO said Islamabad also hopes that these efforts would ultimately lead to the realisation of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination through a credible and time-bound political process, in line with international legitimacy and relevant UN resolutions. According to the statement, this process should result in the establishment of an independent, sovereign and contiguous State of Palestine, based on pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Pakistan reaffirmed its commitment to playing a constructive role within the Board of Peace to help achieve these objectives and to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people. The US-backed October deal has not progressed beyond the first-phase ceasefire, under which major fighting stopped, some Israeli forces pulled back, and Hamas freed hostages in return for Palestinian detainees and convicted prisoners. Israel has continued violating the ceasefire, with more than 460 Palestinians killed in clashes since October. Under future phases whose details have yet to be hammered out, Hamas is supposed to disarm, Israeli forces withdraw further, and an internationally backed administration is installed to rebuild the ruined, densely populated territory. But no timetable has been set to implement the plan. A day earlier, Trump suggested that his Board of Peace "might" replace the United Nations, but said, "I believe you got to let the UN continue because the potential is so great," he added. He said, "you got to let the UN continue," when asked about his plans for a so-called "Board of Peace" that has alarmed international experts. "The UN just hasn't been very helpful. I am a big fan of the UN's potential but it has never lived up to its potential," Trump said in a briefing. The White House on Friday named some individuals who will sit on the board, including Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff, former British prime minister Tony Blair and Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner.

## Norway will not participate in Trump's 'Board of Peace'

DNA

OSLO: Norway's government said Wednesday it would not join the "Board of Peace" initiated by US President Donald Trump, who has vented his frustration at the Nordic country after being snubbed for the Nobel Peace Prize.

"The American proposal raises a number of questions" requiring "further dialogue with the United States," State Secretary Kristoffer Thoner said in a statement. "Norway will therefore not join the proposed arrangements for the Board of Peace, and will therefore not attend a signing ceremony in Davos," Thoner said. Norway would continue its close cooperation with the United States, he added. Trump's Board of Peace was originally conceived to oversee the rebuilding of Gaza, but according to its charter the scope does not appear to limit its role to the Palestinian territory. The US administration has asked countries to pay up to \$1 billion for a permanent spot on the board, in which Trump will serve as chairman.

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## Syrian forces enter Al-Hol IS jihadist camp

APP

ALHOL CAMP: Syria's army on Wednesday entered the vast Al-Hol camp that houses relatives of suspected Islamic State jihadists after Kurdish forces withdrew from the site, said an AFP journalist at the scene. The government announced a new ceasefire with the Kurds on Tuesday after taking swathes of north and east Syria that had long been under the control of Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The United States, which has long headed an international coalition and backed the Kurds against IS, said the purpose of its alliance with the SDF had largely ended years after they defeated the jihadists. New, the United States was backing Syria's new Islamist authorities who are seeking to extend their control across the country after years of civil war. Thousands of former jihadists, including many Westerners, have been held in seven Kurdish-run prisons in north and east Syria, while tens of

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DAVOS: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif meets with Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund Ms. Kristalina Georgieva on the sidelines of 56th Annual meeting of the World Economic Forum. — DNA

## In National Assembly

## Bill passed to keep lawmakers assets 'confidential'

Elections Amendment Bill now requires approval from Senate and assent from president before it can become law

## PTI leaders oppose change in voting age

BUREAU REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly (NA) on Wednesday passed the Elections Amendment Bill, 2025, seeking to allow the withholding of public disclosure of lawmakers' assets and liabilities if such disclosure is deemed to pose a serious threat to the life or safety of the member or their family. Under the proposed amendment to Section 138 of the Elections Act, the bill seeks to insert a proviso stating: "Provided that the speaker of the concerned assembly or, as the case may be, the chairman of the senate may, on an application made by a member and for reasons to be recorded in writing, by a ruling delivered in the chamber, determine that the statement of assets and liabilities of that member shall not be published publicly by the commission if such publication would

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## Briefs

### Ishaq Dar gets protective bail

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Lawyer and rights activist Ishaq Dar and her husband Hadi Chhatta, on Wednesday, secured two-day protective bail from the Islamabad High Court (IHC) in a case registered under terrorism and attempted murder charges. IHC's Justice Muhammad Asim Khan approved Mazari and Chhatta's bail plea against surety bonds worth Rs10,000 and directed the couple to appear before the relevant court within two days. The case relates to a first information report (FIR) registered at the Kohsar Police Station on October 27, 2025 in the federal capital relating to the Baluch Yakjehti Committee's (BYC) protest at the National Press Club (NPC).

### Grenade attack at KP minister residence

STAFF REPORT

SWAT: Unidentified assailants hurled a hand grenade on the residence of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Housing Dr Anjum Ali in Svat district on Wednesday morning, police said. According to Svat District Police Officer (DPO) Muhammad Omar Khan, the incident occurred in the Shamozai area of Barikot tehsil, where unidentified suspects hurled a hand grenade at the minister's house. "At the time of the attack, the provincial minister was not present at his residence," the DPO told Dawn. "The explosion caused minor damage to the house's boundary wall," he said, adding that the minister's family members remained safe.

## DAVOS MEET

## Trump says US will not use force to acquire Greenland

Washington has "nothing to do with" Russia-Ukraine conflict, says US president

NEWS DESK

DAVOS: US President Donald Trump on Wednesday ruled out the use of force in his bid to control Greenland, but said in a speech in Davos that no other country can secure the Danish territory. "People thought I would use force, but I don't have to use force," Trump said at the World Economic Forum annual meeting in Switzerland. "I don't want to use force. I won't use force."

Trump made the comments in a close-bywatched economic speech that has been overshadowed by fraying transatlantic ties and tensions with Europe over his push to acquire Greenland. He downplayed the issue as a "small ask" over a "piece of ice" and that an acquisition would be no threat to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato)

alliance that includes Denmark and the United States. "No nation or group of nations is in any position to be able to secure Greenland other than the United States," Trump said, adding "I'm seeking immediate negotiations to once again to discuss the acquisition of Greenland by the United States." Trump, who marked the end of a turbulent first year in office on Tuesday, is set to overshadow the agenda of the WEF, where global elites chew over economic and political trends. Nato leaders have warned that Trump's Greenland strategy could upend the alliance, while the leaders of Denmark and Greenland have offered a wide array of ways for a greater US presence on the strategic island territory of 57,000 people. "We want a piece of ice for world protection, and they won't give it," Trump said in his speech to a congress hall packed with business and political leaders.

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## At UN, Pakistan slams India for water weaponization

The Indus River Basin, the Pakistani envoy said, sustains one of the world's largest contiguous irrigation systems, provides over 80 percent of Pakistan's agricultural water needs, and supports the lives and livelihoods of over 240 million people

DNA

UNITED NATIONS: A senior Pakistani diplomat has told a UN-related event on global water scarcity that India had created an unprecedented crisis for Pakistan's water security and regional stability by "unilaterally" holding in abeyance the 1960 Indus Water Treaty which regulated water sharing between the two neighbours. "This is not nature's doing; This is a nation state deliberately weaponizing water," Ambassador Usman Jadoon, acting permanent representative of Pakistan, said at the roundtable discussion co-hosted by the Nations University (UNU) and the Canadian Mission to the UN on Tuesday, as he highlighted the material breaches, including unannounced disruptions of downstream flows and withholding of hydrological information that followed India's action on the decades-old treaty. "Pakistan's position is unequivocal: the treaty remains legally intact and permits no unilateral suspension or modification," he said. The event followed after the release by UN researchers of their flagship report on 'Global Water Bankruptcy' which calls for fundamental reset of global

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## Journalists asked to sign pledge

NEWS DESK

NEW DELHI: Police in India-occupied Kashmir asked at least three journalists working in the region to sign a pledge vowing not to "disturb peace" in the region, two of them told Reuters on Wednesday. A third journalist, an assistant editor with the Indian Express newspaper, was summoned to a police station in Srinagar, the capital of the federal territory, but did not sign the pledge, the newspaper said in a report published on Wednesday. India has imposed several restrictions in the region after revoking its constitutional autonomy in 2019, laying out rules for how the region is covered and reported. A spokesperson for Srinagar police did not immediately respond to a request for comment from Reuters.

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## National Days and Armed Forces Days

### JANUARY

Jan 01 / CUBA	Revolution Day
Jan 01 / Palestine	Palestine Revolution Day
Jan 01 / Sudan	National Day
Jan 04 / Myanmar	Independence Day
Jan 05 / Iraq	Armed Forces Day
Jan 12 / Tanzania	Armed Forces Day
Jan 14 / Uzbekistan	Armed Forces Day
Jan 15 / Nigeria	Armed Forces Day
Jan 20 / Mali	Armed Forces Day
Jan 20 / Laos	Armed Forces Day
Jan 25 / Thailand	Armed Forces Day
Jan 26 / Australia	National Day
Jan 26 / India	Republic Day

Turkish Airlines.....8494919



### Emergency

Rescue (Police).....15
Bomb Disposal.....15
Fire Services Rawalpindi/
Islamabad.....1122 or 16
Emergency Ambulance.....1122
& Rescue Services.....455122
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Rawalpindi.....9270901-20

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Railway Exchange.....9270831-6
WASA Rawalpindi.....5554589
CAA.....9281092

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MH.....5611116
Cantt Hospital.....9270907-11
DIQ.....5556311-4
RGH.....9290301-7
Holy Family.....9290322-7
PMHS.....9291170-79
Polyclinic.....9218306-09
Shifa International 4603666

### Departments

CDA.....9221334-43
CDA.....9218301-04
Met Office.....9250360-6
RDA.....5555864
TMA.....5770886
Cantonment Board 9270151-3



### Islamabad Metropolitan

Corporation.....9209224
Potshar Town.....9209224
Rawal Town.....5773343

### Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480
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# Ethiopian envoy underscores deep commonalities between Ethiopia, Pak

Ethiopian ambassador Dr. Oumer hosts prominent Pakistani media Editor Ansar Mahmood Bhatti to boost bilateral media ties

### DNA

ISLAMABAD: In a significant step toward strengthening people-to-people and media linkages between Ethiopia and Pakistan, His Excellency Dr. Oumer Hussein Oba, Ambassador of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to Pakistan, hosted Mr. Ansar Mahmood Bhatti, Chief Editor of the Islamabad Post and Diplomatic News Agency (DNA), at the Ethiopian Embassy in Islamabad. The meeting provided a platform for in-depth discussions on matters of mutual interest, with a strong emphasis on exploring potential areas of bilateral cooperation, particularly in the media sector. Both sides highlighted the growing opportunities to enhance collaboration that could bring the two nations closer through accurate and engaging storytelling. Ambassador Dr. Oumer Hussein Oba underscored the deep commonalities between Ethiopia and Pakistan in areas of culture, faith, and shared values. He pointed to the substantial untapped potential for expanded trade, investment, and people-to-people exchanges. Briefing Mr. Bhatti on Ethiopia's evolving media landscape, the Ambassador stressed the critical role of strategic media partnerships. He emphasized that collaborative efforts in journalism and content creation are essential for promoting Ethiopia's rich tourism offerings, historical significance, and vibrant cultural heritage to Pakistani audiences. Mr. Ansar Mahmood Bhatti, a veteran journalist with over 35 years of experience and the Chief Editor of Daily Islamabad Post, Centinel magazine, and DNA News Agency, welcomed the initiative. He noted the rising interest among Pakistani digital influencers and content creators in visiting Ethiopia, describing the country as a historically significant and culturally dynamic hub in Africa. Mr. Bhatti praised Ethiopia's appeal as a destination rich in heritage sites, diverse landscapes, and warm hospitality. The Chief Editor assured the Ambassador of his full support in fostering media cooperation. He committed to



leveraging his platforms to promote positive narratives about Ethiopia-Pakistan relations, including coverage of tourism, cultural exchanges, and economic opportunities, thereby contributing to stronger diplomatic and economic ties. The discussions align with broader efforts to deepen bilateral relations since Dr. Oumer assumed his role in late 2025. Recent

developments include increased engagement with Pakistani business chambers, think tanks, and diplomatic circles, as well as encouragement for Pakistani participation in upcoming forums like the Invest in Ethiopia 2026 Business Forum scheduled for March in Addis Ababa. This courtesy meeting reflects the growing momentum in Ethiopia-Pakistan ties, which have been bolstered by direct

flights via Ethiopian Airlines, a bilateral trade agreement, and active embassy outreach. Media collaboration is seen as a vital bridge to enhance mutual understanding, counter stereotypes, and highlight shared interests in a rapidly changing global landscape. The interaction concluded on a positive and forward-looking note, with both sides expressing optimism about future joint initiatives in media and beyond.

## SC grants bail to accused held under child marriage act

After hearing the arguments, the Supreme Court granted post-arrest bail to the accused, Muhammad Irfan, on submission of surety bonds worth Rs100,000

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Wednesday granted post-arrest bail to an accused, Muhammad Irfan, who had been arrested under the Child Marriage Act, against surety bonds worth Rs100,000. A three-member bench headed by Justice Hashim Khan heard the bail application. After completion of arguments, the court approved the post-arrest bail of the accused. During the hearing, counsel for the complainant argued that the accused, Muhammad Irfan, had allegedly abducted a minor girl and stolen gold and cash from her house. The court was informed that the allegedly abducted girl was 16 years old, named for her own free will. He questioned what the issue was when both husband and

contracted a court marriage with the accused, and that her statement recorded before a magistrate formed part of the judicial record. He further stated that the girl was one of twin sisters, while her other twin sister had been married three years earlier. Justice Hashim Khan remarked that there was no need to draw out the family tree, and questioned whether such arguments were intended to initiate proceedings against other individuals. He further observed that the girl had appeared before a magistrate on three occasions and had clearly stated in her statements that she had married of her own free will. He questioned what the issue was when both husband and

were consenting. During the proceedings, the court inquired about the duration of the accused's custody. Counsel for the defence informed the court that the accused had been in custody since June 2025. Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry, while the hearing, asked whether the trial would proceed under the Child Marriage Act and what punishment was prescribed under the law. The prosecutor informed the court that under the Child Marriage Act, the maximum punishment could extend up to 16 years and four months. After hearing the arguments, the Supreme Court granted post-arrest bail to the accused, Muhammad Irfan, on submission of surety bonds worth Rs100,000.—APP

## Twin cities move closer to permanent water solution

The Capital Development Authority (CDA) on Wednesday said progress had been made on two proposed dams Shahdara and Debara — aimed at providing a permanent solution to the water shortage in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, with the feasibility study of one project completed and the other under way. The development came at a meeting held at the CDA headquarters and chaired by CDA Chairman and Chief Commissioner Islamabad Muhammad Ali Randhawa. Officials informed the meeting that Wapda had completed the feasibility study for the Shahdara Dam and declared the site suitable for construction. Consultants from Nepal have initiated work on the project's detailed design. It was also decided that teams from Wapda and Nepal would jointly visit the Shahdara Dam site in the coming days to review the project's geotechnical investigations and hydrological studies. Regarding the Debara Dam, the meeting was told that Wapda was currently working on its feasibility study.—DNA

## Over 30 beggars detain Blue Area

ISLAMABAD: The district administration has detained more than 30 beggars during a crackdown carried out in Blue Area and other parts of the federal capital, officials said on Wednesday. The action is part of an ongoing effort to discourage professional begging and address related issues in busy public spaces, said the spokesman of ICT administration here. According to officials, teams of the district administration conducted checks at major roads, markets, traffic signals, and commercial areas. During the operation, individuals found involved in professional begging were taken into custody and shifted to police lockups for further action under the law. Authorities said Blue Area remained a key focus of the drive due to high public movement and repeated complaints from citizens and traders. Similar actions were also taken in other sectors of the city where begging was reported on a daily basis. The district administration stated that the crackdown aims to curb organized begging and reduce its presence in public places. Officials said such activities often create problems for pedestrians and motorists, especially at traffic intersections and shopping areas. The administration appealed to citizens to support the campaign against professional beggars. Residents were urged to identify such individuals and report their presence to the relevant authorities. Officials said public cooperation is necessary to ensure that the drive remains effective and sustainable. Authorities also asked citizens not to encourage professional begging by giving money at traffic signals or markets. They said discouraging this practice would help reduce the number of people involved in organized begging. Officials confirmed that action would continue in the coming days and that no area would be excluded from the drive. They said regular monitoring would be carried out to prevent the return of detained individuals to the same locations. The district administration emphasized that the campaign is being conducted in coordination with law enforcement agencies. Police support was provided during the operation to ensure smooth action and maintain order at public places.—DNA

## De-escalation, regional stability as Iran situation unfolds urged

ISLAMABAD: The Centre for Afghanistan Middle East and Africa (CAMEA) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organised a roundtable discussion on the "The Situation in Iran: Regional Consequences & Pakistan's Policy Approach" on Wednesday. The event brought together former diplomats, leading academics, and prominent practitioners to deliberate on Iran's current situation, its regional implications, and Pakistan's current and future policy outlook, said a press release. Participants agreed that the situation in Iran remains fluid and complex, requiring careful assessment, and that Pakistan should continue to emphasise respect for sovereignty and Iran's territorial integrity, restraint, dialogue, and de-escalation, while safeguarding regional stability and Pakistan's own security and foreign policy interests. The meeting was held under the Chatham House Rule.—APP

# Australian envoy pays courtesy call on Malaysian counterpart

### DNA

ISLAMABAD: In a display of growing diplomatic camaraderie among missions in Pakistan's capital, Australia's newly appointed High Commissioner, His Excellency Mr. Timothy Kane, paid a courtesy call on His Excellency Ambassador Dato' Mohammad Azhar Mazlan, High Commissioner of Malaysia to Pakistan, on January 19, 2026, at the Malaysian High Commission in Islamabad. The meeting, held in a warm and cordial atmosphere, provided an opportunity for the two envoys to exchange views on a range of matters of mutual interest. Discussions focused on regional developments, the evolving diplomatic landscape in Pakistan, and potential avenues for enhanced cooperation between their respective countries and missions based in Islamabad. Mr. Kane, who assumed his role as Australia's High Commissioner to Pakistan earlier in 2026 following his appointment announced by the Australian Government in August 2025, is a seasoned diplomat with extensive experience in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). His previous postings include ambassadorships to Brazil and Chile, as well as assignments in Spain, the United States, and Mexico. Since arriving in Pakistan, he has expressed enthusiasm for building ties in areas such as climate action, education, and shared cultural interests like cricket. Ambassador Dato' Mohammad Azhar Mazlan welcomed his Australian counterpart warmly to Pakistan and extended best wishes for a successful and productive tenure. He conveyed confidence that the bilateral engagement between Malaysia and Australia would continue to strengthen through ongoing constructive dialogue and collaboration in both multilateral and regional forums. The courtesy call highlighted the value of sustained interaction among diplomatic representatives in Islamabad, fostering better understanding and coordination on issues affecting the region and beyond. Both High Commissioners reaffirmed their shared commitment to promot-

ing mutual understanding, peace, and cooperation during their respective assignments in Pakistan. Such exchanges are routine yet significant in diplomatic practice, helping new envoys build networks, share perspectives, and explore synergies that can support broader bilateral and multilateral objectives. Malaysia and Australia, both active players in the Indo-Pacific region, maintain strong ties characterized by trade, investment, education exchanges,

and people-to-people connections.

The friendly meeting concluded on a positive note, underscoring the importance of diplomacy in bridging nations and advancing common goals amid a complex global environment. This courtesy call comes amid Mr. Kane's active engagement in Pakistan, where he has already participated in various events and discussions, reflecting Australia's interest in deepening relations with the country.





## Briefs

## Junaid calls for maritime safety

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry on Wednesday said advanced space-based monitoring systems could play a vital role in safeguarding seas, improving maritime management and strengthening responses to environmental threats. Junaid Chaudhry made the remarks during a visit to the headquarters of the Pakistan Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO), marking the first-ever such visit by any maritime affairs minister in the country. During the visit, Chairman SUPARCO Yasir Khan and senior officials provided the minister with a detailed briefing on the organization's operations and technological capabilities. The discussions highlighted SUPARCO's role in satellite monitoring, maritime safety, and port management. The minister was also presented with a satellite-based assessment of potential risks for new ports, reflecting Pakistan's focus on expanding its maritime infrastructure. In addition, officials outlined plans for relief and rescue operations within national maritime boundaries, leveraging satellite technology and artificial intelligence to enhance efficiency and response times. Addressing the participants, Junaid Chaudhry stressed the importance of leveraging satellite technology to tackle environmental and ecological challenges, including the impacts of climate change and disaster risks facing the country's coastline and maritime sector. —APP

## Shezra calls on PTI to play responsible opposition role

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Environment Dr. Shezra Manzil Ali Khan Khair on Wednesday criticized PTI, saying its demand for opposition leaders was fulfilled, but the party remained focused only on securing Imran Khan's release, urging opposition members to play a responsible role in Parliament. While speaking to PTV News channel, she said that a responsible opposition was the key to a strong democracy, adding that all allied parties truly believed in the democratic process and were committed to strengthening parliamentary traditions. She emphasized that constructive criticism and meaningful participation in Parliament were essential for addressing public issues, urging opposition parties to move beyond personal agendas and contribute positively to democratic stability. —APP

## Constructive parliamentary role vital for opposition

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Finance Bilal Ashraf Kayani on Wednesday said the opposition should move beyond conditions, engage in dialogue with the government, and work together on the public agenda, expressing hope that opposition leaders would play a constructive role. While speaking to a local news channel, he said the opposition should move beyond conditions and engage in dialogue with the government. He expressed hope that newly emerged opposition leaders would work constructively in Parliament and help move forward on the public agenda. He mentioned that the dialogue process initiated by the Speaker's leadership was halted due to the non-serious attitude of the PTI. Minister added that despite this, the prime minister had repeatedly extended offers for dialogue to resolve political issues, through consultation. Kayani appealed to opposition leaders to participate in talks earnestly and leave aside any preconditions, adding, making it a single, focused agenda was key to advancing the public interest. —APP

## RCCI hosts meeting with U.S. agri delegation

The delegation included Ms. Sarina Welsh, Southeast Asia Representative, USA Pulses and U.S. Dry Beans Council; Mr. Russell Allen Kehl, President & CEO, Farmer Bean & Seed, LLC (USA); Mr. Shane Durwin Berntson, Manager Food Products

DNA

RAWALPINDI: A high-level meeting with a visiting U.S. agricultural delegation was held at the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce & Industry (RCCI), chaired by RCCI President Usman Shaukat. The delegation was led by Mr. Timothy Paul Welsh, Southeast Asia Representative of USA Pulses and U.S. Dry Beans Council and Managing Director of AgriSource Co., Ltd., Bangkok.

The delegation included Ms. Sarina Welsh, Southeast Asia Representative, USA Pulses and U.S. Dry Beans Council; Russell Allen Kehl, President & CEO, Farmer Bean & Seed, LLC (USA); Mr. Shane Durwin Berntson, Manager Food Products, Merus Companies (USA); Mr. Austin Robert Chandonnet, Marketing & Grower Relations Manager, Bayside Best Beans (USA); and Mr. Mark Dries, Counselor, Office of Agricultural Affairs, U.S. Embassy Islamabad.

Senior Vice President Khalid Farooq Qazi, Vice President Faraz Khan, Former President Dr. Hassan Sarosh Akram, Executive Committee members, and sector-specific representatives also attended the meeting.

During the interaction, both sides discussed strengthening bilateral trade relations, particularly in pulses, dry beans, and agricultural commodities. The U.S. delegation highlighted RCCI's strategic importance as a regional trading hub serving

Punjab and adjoining regions, and emphasized the potential for expanding buyer-seller linkages, market access, and long-term partnerships. President RCCI Usman Shaukat underscored the importance of fostering sustain-

able trade and economic cooperation between Pakistan and the United States. He noted that such engagements help connect local businesses with international markets, encourage knowledge sharing, and enhance mutual trust.

## Food safety, price control provincial subjects

ISLAMABAD, Jan 21 (APP): Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Rana Tanveer Hussain told the National Assembly on Wednesday that poultry prices, food safety enforcement and market price control will remain provincial jurisdiction following the 18th Constitutional Amendment. Responding to questions in the House, the minister said food safety and inspection mechanisms were the responsibility of provincial food authorities established in all provinces. He said Punjab was the first province to set up a food safety authority, which now regularly inspects restaurants, meat shops and other food outlets. On the issue of poultry prices, Rana Tanveer Hussain said price control was a devolved subject and lay entirely with the provinces. "The federal government does not fix prices," he said, advising lawmakers to take price-related issues to their respective provincial governments. He added that provincial administrations, including Punjab, intervened in markets when necessary. The minister said the government was working to expand Pakistan's meat export potential by addressing animal health challenges, particularly foot-and-mouth disease (FMD). He said 15 FMD-free zones had been established in Punjab and were expected to become fully compliant within three years, which would help improve access to international markets. He informed the House that a Rs7.5 billion project had been approved under the Public Sector Development Programme to strengthen disease surveillance, sequencing and treatment of livestock diseases, including FMD and poultry-related illnesses. The project, he said, would also help improve local meat supply, noting that around 45 per cent of meat production was consumed domestically. Referring to trade disputes with Afghanistan, Rana Tanveer Hussain said alternative routes had been explored to sustain exports of key agricultural products. He said exports of kinnow and potatoes had been affected, but shipments worth around \$5 million had been made through alternative routes, including via Iran. He said he was not aware of any major poultry exports being affected by the Afghan border situation, adding that exporters of other agricultural products had raised concerns which were subsequently addressed. Highlighting the government's export-oriented economic strategy, the minister said Prime Minister Sheikh Sharif had emphasised the need to boost exports for sustainable economic growth. "While remittances have reached around \$40bn, long-term stability can only be achieved through an export-based economy," he said. He added that export performance across sectors, including rice, kinnow and maize, was being closely monitored and that the government intervened whenever delays or declines were reported. Referring to recent issues faced by rice exporters, he said a committee had been formed to address the matter and corrective steps had since been approved. He said the success of these measures was expected to become evident in the coming two months, with exports likely to surpass last year's figures. —DNA

## Over 200 illegal cabins outside homes removed

ISLAMABAD: The district administration has removed 223 illegal cabins built outside homes across the federal capital as part of an ongoing drive against encroachments, according to an official report released on Wednesday. The operation was carried out in several sectors, including P-6, P-7, F-10, and other areas of the city. The report said assistant commissioners conducted operations in their respective jurisdictions after receiving clear directions from the Deputy Commissioner Islamabad. The aim of the campaign is to clear public spaces and ensure that no structures are placed outside residential properties in violation of the law. According to the district administration, the action targeted cabins that had been set up outside homes without permission. These structures were found occupying footpaths, green belts, and other public areas meant for common use. The administration stated that such encroachments cause problems for residents and restrict public movement. The operation was carried out with the support of teams from the District Municipal Administration (DMA), Capital Development Authority (CDA), and the Islamabad Police. Officials said joint teams were formed to ensure smooth execution of the drive and to maintain order during the removal process. Deputy Commissioner Islamabad directed all

assistant commissioners to take action without discrimination. He made it clear that no individual or area would be treated differently during the campaign. "There is no permission for anyone to build a cabin or any structure outside their house in the form of an encroachment," the Deputy Commissioner said while issuing instructions to field officers. He further stated that encroachments, regardless of their nature or location, would be removed in all cases. The administration emphasized that public land cannot be used for private purposes and that strict action would continue against violations. Officials said the drive against illegal cabins is part of a broader effort to improve management of public spaces in the capital. The district administration plans to continue inspections in other sectors to identify and remove similar structures. The administration also appealed to citizens to cooperate with authorities. The Deputy Commissioner urged residents to inform the administration about encroachments in their areas. He said public support is important to ensure timely action and to prevent the reappearance of illegal structures. Residents were advised not to set up cabins, stalls, or any form of construction outside their homes. The administration warned that such structures would be removed, and legal action could also be taken where necessary. —APP

## People's train service marks milestone: Abbasi

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Railways, Muhammad Hanif Abbasi Wednesday said that the People's Train Service in Balochistan represents a harmonious blend of cooperation between Pakistan Railways and the provincial government, marking it as a milestone in the provision of affordable and secure transportation in the province. He expressed these views during a meeting with Chief Minister of Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Bugti, at the Chief Minister's Secretariat in Quetta, said a news release. The meeting reviewed and finalized joint development initiatives between the Government of Balochistan and Pakistan Railways. During the meeting, both sides reached a principled agreement on collaborative development projects, including the launch and expansion of the People's Train Service, aimed at providing lowest, safe and reliable train facilities to the people of Balochistan. The minister said that for the first time in the 78-year history of Pakistan Railways, a decision has been taken to devolve railway operations at the provincial level, with Balochistan taking the lead in this historic initiative. He said that such collaboration reflects growing trust and strengthened coordination between the federal and provincial governments. On the occasion, Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti announced that Rs 1.4 billion would be released within the current week for the People's Train Service project. He said that following the Sarhad-Kachhi route, the service would be extended to Mastung and Pishin in the next phase. The Chief Minister reaffirmed that the Government of Balochistan would provide the necessary resources for the construction of railway stations and the upgradation of railway infrastructure. He emphasized that the revival of the railway system and the provision of affordable travel facilities remain among the top priorities of the provincial government. Informing the meeting, Hanif Abbasi said that all three provinces have shown keen interest in launching local railway services; however, Balochistan has demonstrated practical leadership by taking concrete steps in this regard. He lauded Chief Minister Bugti's effective leadership and clear vision, marking it a model of intergovernmental cooperation. Both sides expressed a strong commitment to ensuring fast-track implementation of public welfare projects through sustained collaboration between Pakistan Railways and the Government of Balochistan. —DNA

## Economy faces pressure despite modest signals of recovery

DNA

ISLAMABAD: As recent IMF projections and current account data underscore continued pressure on the Pakistan economy, traders warn that policy mistakes made in determining any gains from a fragile recovery. Following the IMF's decision to lower Pakistan's growth outlook and the return of the current account to a deficit in December, business leader and former president of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce, Shuhid Rashed Butt, said the figures point to structural weaknesses rather than temporary fluctuations. In a statement issued today, Butt argued that flawed tax and energy policies are harming the economy by increasing costs broadly and deterring investment. The IMF has cut Pakistan's GDP growth projection for the ongoing fiscal year to 3.2 percent, down from an earlier estimate of 3.6 percent. Such projections reflect the failure to create conditions for sustained expansion, noting that frequent changes in tax rates and heavy reliance on indirect taxation are hurting consumption and economic activity. He said that high electricity and gas tariffs remain a central constraint, especially for small and medium enterprises operating on thin margins. Many businesses are scaling back production or shifting to the informal sector, limiting job creation at a time when people are already struggling with inflation and weak income growth.

After recording a surplus in November, the current account reverted to a deficit in December, primarily due to a steep rise in imports. The imbalance, intensified by stagnant exports, he observed, Shuhid Rashed Butt noted that remittances continue to provide critical support, but relying on them is not a substitute for export-led growth. He called for a reset in tax and energy policy, specifically recommending targeted incentives, streamlined energy tariffs, and transparency measures to ease pressure on businesses and consumers. He said the public impact of continued inaction will be felt through higher living costs and weaker employment prospects, while businesses face declining competitiveness. The government must focus on structural reforms to simplify the tax code and achieve regulatory consistency to stabilise growth and reduce recurring balance-of-payments stress, rather than on short-term fixes. —APP

## The Silent Witness

HANIA KHALID

When we think of a crime scene, the first thing that comes to our mind is "blood". Blood covering every inch of a crime scene with a body or two is the general image of a crime scene portrayed by movies, novels and news reports. But as the world is progressing and evolving into a digital interconnected system, the minds of the criminals are also getting sharper. As our criminals are more intelligent nowadays than they were before, we usually find a crime scene with no trace of blood or a body. Such a clean evolution!

Though our smart criminals clean the crime scene and make it spotless, they leave a silent witness. This witness doesn't have a face but what it does have is a fingerprint. It's not the usual fingerprint rather it's a special kind of fingerprint widely known as the linguistic fingerprint—the idiolect. What exactly is a linguistic fingerprint? It's our words that we speak, write or type. Every human being has a different selection of words that are as unique as the person's DNA. Just as a fingerprint is one of a kind, so is our linguistic fingerprint. Hence,

criminals leave their linguistic fingerprints, unknowingly, a signature that belongs entirely just to them in the whole universe.

Criminals, whether old-fashioned or modern, have to use language in order to plan, process and execute the crime. Language appears in the form of threat messages, ransom notes, phone calls, texts and the social media accounts of the criminals. Forensic linguists analyze the favorite words, specific spelling mistakes and even the unique way someone uses punctuation to unlock the smart criminals. Sometimes this "silent witness" is the only thing that is left for the crime investigators. In 2009, a man named Christopher Birks called the emergency helpline late at night informing them of a fire that had broken out at his residence. After the arrival of the rescue team he urged them to save his wife named Amanda who was trapped in the bedroom. The team tried their best but the woman didn't survive, with her cause of death unclear but believed to be the fire. The husband was left weeping and shouting, grieving for his wife. During the ongoing investigation, the detectives came across a series of texts from Amanda Birks' phone to her relatives before the fire

broke out. The texts explained Amanda's plans to light candles for some kind of therapy. The forensic linguists informed the detectives that these texts do not match Amanda's idiolect.

The key mistake that gave the investigators away was the use of abbreviations that Amanda had never used in her texts. Later on, as the investigation proceeded, the texts from Amanda during the fire night were found out to be the hundred percent match for her husband's idiolect. The texts that were supposed to save Mr. Birks and his wife were the ones that ultimately led him to jail.

In this age of digital innovations and modernization, criminals may erase their physical and digital footprints but they can't erase their linguistic identity. Forensic linguistics has emerged as a powerful weapon to tackle new evidence-less crime scenes. Nowadays, this silent witness is used to make the smart criminals silent. Hence, language is not just a means of communication; it can also be used to provide justice and for protecting the innocent people. So, be mindful of your words, for they can be used in your favor or against you.

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## Lavish spendings of rulers: a stark contrast to Pakistan's struggling masses

**I**n the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, where the economy teeters on the brink of collapse and millions grapple with abject poverty, the ruling elite continue to indulge in opulent displays of wealth that defy logic and decency. The recent second marriage of Junaid Sadfar, son of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, exemplifies this glaring hypocrisy. Held in Lahore amid extravagant celebrations, the event drew widespread criticism for its lavish spending, with reports highlighting millions poured into designer outfits, bespoke jewelry, and high-end accessories. Maryam Nawaz herself became a focal point of backlash. Social media erupted with accusations of self-obsession and insensitivity, as PML-N leaders, who preach austerity to the masses, flouted their own rules. This isn't just a family affair; it's a symptom of a deeper malaise. Punjab enforces a "one-dish" policy for weddings to curb extravagance and promote simplicity, a measure ostensibly aimed at easing the burden on ordinary citizens during economic hardship. Yet, for the rulers, no such constraints apply. PML-N figures like Marriyum Aurangzeb also drew attention for their glow-ups and ensembles, further fueling perceptions of elitism. They urge the public to embrace frugality while their lifestyles scream excess. This double standard is why Pakistan stagnates: one set of rules for the rich and powerful, another for the impoverished masses. Nowhere in true democracies do such disparities thrive unchecked. In established systems, leaders are held accountable, and public funds aren't siphoned for personal grandeur. But in Pakistan, the divide is stark. As of 2025, approximately 45% of the population lives below the poverty line, based on updated World Bank thresholds of \$4.20 per day. This translates to over 107 million people scraping by on less than PKR 1,200 daily, with extreme poverty affecting 16.5%—a sharp

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rise from previous estimates. The national poverty rate surged to 25.3% in 2023/24, pushing 60.4 million into destitution amid floods, inflation, and instability. Half the population—close to 120 million—struggles below this grim benchmark, with 82% unable to afford a healthy diet. The human cost is heartbreaking. People are dying of hunger; parents, in despair, have resorted to killing their children because they cannot feed them. Women are forced into selling themselves to make ends meet. Undernutrition accounts for nearly half of under-5 child deaths, with 61 per 1,000 live births not surviving to age five. Acute malnutrition affects 18% of children under five, and stunting impairs 40%. These aren't abstract statistics; they're the reality in a nation blessed with resources but cursed by mismanagement. Corruption rules supreme, infiltrating every government department. Not a single sector is free from it. Transparency International's 2025 survey ranks the police as the most corrupt at 24%, followed by tendering and procurement at 16%, and the judiciary at 14%. Bribery is rampant in public services, with inefficient bureaucracy and impunity exacerbating the issue. The IMF's diagnostic highlights systemic weaknesses, estimating that addressing corruption could boost GDP by 5-6.5% over five years. Money makes the more go here—lenders are rigged, budgets opaque, and political capture stifles progress. Officials engage in graft with little fear, as anti-corruption laws are poorly enforced. The economy's fragility compounds this. Pakistan runs on IMF loans and financial support from friends like Saudi Arabia and the UAE, but even that lifeline is fraying. As of January 2026, the government seeks rollovers on \$2.5 billion from the UAE at lower interest rates, including a 1996 loan still unpaid at 6.5%. Saudi deposits total \$5 billion, with maturities in 2026, part of \$12 billion bilateral debts alongside China. Under the IMF's Extended Fund Facility, these must remain intact, but optimism about ditching IMF aid illustrates the new reality amid persistent crises. The country begs for extensions, unable to repay without them. When will we stand on our own feet? When will we stop begging and learn to live with dignity and honor? The rulers' lavish spendings mock the poor's suffering, perpetuating a cycle of inequality that hinders progress. True change demands accountability, transparent governance, and leaders who practice what they preach. Until then, Pakistan's masses will continue to bear the brunt of elite indulgence, while the nation drifts further from prosperity.

## Trump's First Year That Shook the World Order

**Qamar Bashir**



The pressure expanded outward. Warnings were issued to Cuba, Argentina, and Colombia. The terms were simple and direct: align with U.S. policy on trade, security, and resource access, or face economic and political consequences. Cooperation was defined as compliance. Independence was framed as defiance. The Western Hemisphere, once managed through diplomacy and influence, now faced what many governments saw as a return to overt coercion. This posture was reinforced by continued military action beyond the Americas. U.S. strikes in Somalia, repeated operations in Syria, and the ongoing use of drone warfare extended the same logic into Africa and the Middle East

**B**y the time Donald Trump completed his first year in office this January, the world he confronted was no longer governed by the language of partnership, multilateralism, or shared rules. The central message of his presidency, delivered repeatedly in speeches, interviews, and policy actions, was direct and unambiguous: the United States would no longer bind itself to international institutions, international law, or collective decision-making if these did not serve American power, American wealth, and American control. Sovereignty, in this view, did not mean equality among nations. It meant the freedom of the strongest to impose outcomes on the rest. This ideological shift was formalized through the United States' withdrawal from dozens of international and United Nations-linked organizations. The administration described these bodies as ineffective, biased, or obstacles to American objectives. The practical effect was a blunt rejection of the postwar system built on treaties, arbitration, and multilateral governance. The message to the world was clear: rules would no longer be negotiated in international forums; they would be set by Washington. International law, in this framing, was replaced by national power as the final authority. This doctrine did not remain theoretical. It was applied openly, most dramatically in the Western Hemisphere. The sitting president of Venezuela was seized and transported to New York and placed in detention. This was not framed as a quiet legal matter. Donald Trump publicly stated that the purpose was to regain control of Venezuela's oil infrastructure, secure energy supply chains, and redirect those resources toward the economic strength of the United States. The language was explicit: energy and natural resources were strategic assets, and access to them was a matter of American national interest, not international negotiation. The pressure expanded outward. Warnings were issued to Cuba, Argentina, and Colombia. The terms were simple and direct: align with U.S. policy on trade, security, and resource access, or face economic and political consequences. Cooperation was defined as compliance. Independence was framed as defiance. The Western Hemisphere, once managed through diplomacy and influence, now faced what many governments saw as a return to overt coercion. This posture was reinforced by continued military action beyond the Americas. U.S. strikes in Somalia, repeated operations in Syria, and the ongoing

use of drone warfare extended the same logic into Africa and the Middle East. The pattern was consistent: Washington would act where it judged its interests to be threatened, without waiting for international authorization or consensus. Europe felt this shift directly. The administration's stated desire to take control of Greenland, a territory tied to the Kingdom of Denmark, was not presented as a diplomatic proposal but as a strategic objective. European leaders responded with unusually direct language. Governments in Denmark, Germany, France, and across the European Union stated plainly that Greenland's future would be decided only by Denmark and the people of Greenland. The episode became a symbol of a deeper rupture: the United States was no longer seen as a guarantor of European sovereignty, but as a power willing to challenge it. Canada experienced a similar break. Its economy had been deeply integrated with the United States, with the majority of its exports flowing south across the border. Energy, automobiles, agricultural products, electricity, and critical minerals formed the backbone of this relationship. Under Trump's policy, these ties were recast as vulnerabilities. Tariffs and public rhetoric framed Canadian dependence as a weakness that could be exploited for political and economic gain. Ottawa responded by changing course. Trade became a strategic priority, not just as a trading partner but as a political counterbalance. Canada then moved to strengthen ties with China, focusing on infrastructure, technology, Arctic cooperation, and energy development. This was not an ideological shift. It was a calculation of risk. Reliance on a single dominant partner had become a liability. Diversification became national policy. In the Gulf, Canada sought large-scale investment from Qatar, inviting capital into its energy and industrial sectors. The objective was direct: reduce exposure to American pressure by embedding Canada in a wider network of global finance and trade. Similar strategies appeared across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, where governments began to seek alternatives to U.S.-centered economic systems. At the World Economic Forum in Davos, this global reaction was expressed openly. Leaders described a world fractured by economic coercion and unilateral action. The institution designed to manage conflict through negotiation—the United Nations, trade bodies, and international courts—were described as weak

ened by the withdrawal or disregard of their most powerful member. The concern was not abstract. It was practical: without shared rules, global stability would depend on power balances rather than legal frameworks. France's clash with Washington over the proposed "Board of Peace" for Gaza illustrated this new reality. When President Emmanuel Macron declined to commit a billion dollars to the initiative, the response from the United States was a threat of heavy tariffs on French exports, including wine and champagne. The signal was clear: political disagreement would be answered with economic punishment. As these confrontations multiplied, a broader global shift took shape. Countries that felt targeted or marginalized by U.S. policy began to move closer to China. This was not driven primarily by admiration for Beijing's political system. It was driven by calculation. China offered trade, infrastructure financing, and investment without military intervention or explicit political conditions. Through the Belt and Road Initiative, regional trade agreements, and financial partnerships, Beijing positioned itself as an alternative center of gravity in global economics. By the end of the first year, the direction of change was unmistakable. The world was moving away from a system organized around shared institutions and toward one shaped by competing power centers. Regional blocs, bilateral deals, and alternative financial systems began to replace global frameworks. This transformation was neither subtle nor accidental. It was the result of a stated ideology: that strength, not law, should govern international relations; that resources, not agreements, define power; and that alliances exist only as long as they serve national advantage. The first year of this presidency did not merely adjust the global order. It challenged its foundations. The aftershocks continue to spread. Whether this path leads to a more balanced distribution of power or to a more unstable and confrontational world remains the central question facing nations as they navigate the landscape reshaped by this new doctrine.

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## Trump's 'Board of Peace' strips Netanyahu of control

**Osama Al-Sharif**

The National Committee for the Administration of Gaza, the third tier in the Board of Peace's governance structure for the Strip, will be tasked with handling day-to-day operations. It comprises 15 Palestinian technocrats led by Dr. Ali Shaath, a former undersecretary in the Palestinian Authority. Mladenov, as high representative, will liaise between the Gaza body and the Executive Board. The committee convened in Cairo this week and announced it was ready to assume its responsibilities and oversee specific sectors, including the economy, health...

**C**ritics from all sides will have much to say about this week's unveiling by President Donald Trump of his much-touted "Board of Peace," of which he is chairman. The board is an international transitional body that will provide oversight and supervision for Gaza's governance under Trump's peace plan, which was signed and adopted late last year and has created a fragile ceasefire between Hamas and Israel. Trump's White House also showcased several related bodies, including the Executive Board, a National Committee for the Administration of Gaza, and the head of the International Stabilization Force. Seasoned diplomat Nikolay Mladenov has been appointed high representative for Gaza, serving as the on-the-ground link between the Board of Peace and the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza. The Board of Peace is expected to include approximately 10 leaders from Arab and Western countries. Tony Blair, Canada's Mark Carney and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio are among the members, with invitations also extended to the leaders of Jordan, Egypt, Türkiye, Argentina and others. The charter of the Board of Peace establishes a US-led, invitation-only intergovernmental body with a wide peace-building mandate, very strong powers for its chairman and membership and voting rules that heavily privilege states able to pay or contribute at scale. Resolving the Gaza crisis is only one of its responsibilities. Critics believe Trump aims to eclipse the UN and its Security Council in conflict resolution. Although the UNSC gave Trump's board a mandate linked to Gaza, the charter itself does not mention Gaza and instead frames a broad global outreach. The board's charter establishes a US-led, invitation-only intergovernmental body with a wide peace-building mandate. But while those invited to the top board have yet to decide whether to join, it is the membership of the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza — the interim government of Gaza composed of Palestinian technocrats — that has rattled Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. He claimed he was not consulted on the list of Pal-

estian members, a claim rejected by US officials. In reality, Netanyahu was taken aback by the White House's invitation of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to the main board, along with the naming of a Qatari diplomat and Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan to the Executive Board. Netanyahu accused both Türkiye and Qatar of supporting Hamas. Other executive members include Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff, his son-in-law Jared Kushner, World Bank President Ajay Banga and business leaders. The National Committee for the Administration of Gaza, the third tier in the Board of Peace's governance structure for the Strip, will be tasked with handling day-to-day operations. It comprises 15 Palestinian technocrats led by Dr. Ali Shaath, a former undersecretary in the Palestinian Authority. Mladenov, as high representative, will liaise between the Gaza body and the Executive Board. The committee convened in Cairo this week and announced it was ready to assume its responsibilities and oversee specific sectors, including the economy, health and security. US Maj. Gen. Jasper Jeffers has been appointed commander of the International Stabilization Force, meaning he will lead security operations, support comprehensive demilitarization and enable the safe delivery of humanitarian aid into Gaza. (However, there is not yet an official list of countries that have committed to sending troops under the International Stabilization Force banner. With this week's announcements, the Gaza peace plan enters its second phase, under which Hamas is due to begin to disarm and Israel to make further withdrawals from the enclave. Tel Aviv will no longer be involved in logistical operations as aid delivery and will be required to observe the ceasefire. Trump's intricate structure for Gaza and his personal involvement in executing his plan mean he is now the main stakeholder. It will be nearly impossible for Netanyahu to veto the composition of the Board of Peace, the Executive Board or the transitional Palestinian government. But Netanyahu has tried to delay his plan by insisting that the Palestinian group hand over the body of the last Israeli captive, Witkoff has brushed aside these claims, saying

there is no reason not to move to the second phase. Netanyahu was taken aback by the White House's invitation of Turkish President Erdogan to the main board. But what Netanyahu has come to realize is that Trump has effectively stripped him of any cards he once held relating to Gaza. The future of Gaza is no longer in the hands of Netanyahu and his extremist government. Also, forced displacement and permanent occupation of Gaza are no longer on the table. But all this does not mean we know how things will turn out for the people of Gaza. Forcing Israel to open the crossing points and allow the delivery of much-needed aid will be the board's first face-off with Netanyahu. But the most important test will be forcing Israel to start its withdrawal from Gaza — it currently controls more than 50 percent of the enclave. The downside to all this is that Trump has given his Board of Peace a universal mandate that extends beyond Gaza. Leaders who were invited will have to carefully consider whether to get involved in Trump's grand scheme to sidestep the UN and the international law that underpin the current world order. But if Trump wants to give his new board solid credibility, he will want his Gaza plan to succeed. That means ending the humanitarian crisis there and pushing back the Israelis. It also means giving the Palestinians the choice to run their own affairs while providing them with the means to rebuild Gaza and restore a sense of normalcy. The fact that several Arab and Muslim countries are lined up on the board to give their bodies to the plan provides some assurances of a fair approach to the plight of Gazans. But it is also important to ask about the endgame concerning Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. One should be wary of the fact that, while all eyes are focused on Gaza, Israel is accelerating its confiscation of West Bank territory for illegal settlements and imposing collective punishment on millions of Palestinians there. The endgame should be to give the Palestinians the right to self-determination, end the occupation and establish a Palestinian state.

— Osama Al-Sharif is a journalist and political commentator based in Amman. X: @plato1010



## Briefs

## Bill passed to keep lawmakers assets...

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pose a serious threat to the life or safety of the members or, as the case may be, his family, for a period not exceeding one year at a time and subject to the condition that a complete and true statement of assets and liabilities shall be submitted confidentially to the election commission." The bill was moved by Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) lawmaker Shazia Aftab in the lower house. The bill now requires approval from the Senate and assent from the president before it can become law. Under the existing law, members of the National Assembly, Senate and provincial assemblies are required to submit a statement of their assets and liabilities — including those of their spouses and dependent children — to the Election Commission on or before December 31 each year. Section 138 of the Elections Act further mandates the ECP to publish these declarations in the official gazette. The development comes a week after the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) suspended the membership of as many as 159 lawmakers belonging to different legislatures for failing to submit their financial statements. According to the notification issued by the ECP, the member of 32 MNAs, 50 Punjab Assembly members, 33 Sindh Assembly members, 28 KP Assembly members, seven Balochistan Assembly members and nine senators had been suspended.

## PTI leaders oppose change...

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raising the voting age from 18 to 25, with the topic also being discussed on TV shows. It is worth mentioning that no formal bill has been tabled in parliament for raising the voting age in Pakistan. A column published in Dawn on Wednesday also stated that "well-connected people" were floating the idea of raising the voting age to 25 as a possible reform. In the letter, sent by Dawn, the PTI leaders said Pakistan had witnessed its first general elections in 1970, when the voting age was 21 years. However, with the advent of the 21st century, the world transformed into a global village because of which any incident anywhere in the world could be seen in "real time". They said that Pakistan too realized that the voting age limit should be reduced from 21 years to 18 years. And no segment of society objected to it, they added. They said that since the government had set the age for obtaining a passport at 18 and getting married at 18 years, there was no justification for increasing the voting age.

## Trump says US will not use force...

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In his speech, Trump also took aim at Canada, saying it "should be grateful" to Washington, a day after Prime Minister Mark Carney warned of a rupture to the US-led global system. "I watched your prime minister yesterday. He wasn't so grateful," Trump said of Carney's speech, which drew a rare standing ovation from the Davos audience. "Canada fires because of the United States. Remember that, Mark, the next time you make your statements," he added. The US president said that he would meet with his Ukrainian counterpart, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, to discuss ending the war with Russia, but slammed NATO and stressed Washington had "nothing to do with" the conflict. "I'm dealing with President Putin, and I believe, I'm dealing with President Zelenskyy and I think he wants to make a deal. I'm meeting him today," Trump said, adding that NATO has "to work on Ukraine, we don't. We have nothing to do with it".

# ICC 'writes' to ICC backing Bangladesh

## Bangladesh say won't not back down to "coercion" and play their T20 World Cup matches in India

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has written to the International Cricket Council (ICC) expressing support for Bangladesh's concern regarding travelling to India for the T20 World Cup 2026, just ahead of the governing body's meeting on the matter, ESPNcricinfo reported. In its correspondence, the PCB backed the Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) reluctance to play matches in India amid regional political instability. Sources said that the letter was also circulated among ICC Board members. The ICC is reportedly set to make a final decision on Bangladesh's involvement in the 2026 men's T20 World Cup in its board meeting today (Wednesday). The ICC will deliberate on Bangladesh's re-

quest to relocate its World Cup fixtures to Sri Lanka, citing security concerns in India. However, it remains unclear whether the PCB's correspondence prompted the ICC to convene the meeting. While the timing of the PCB's intervention has drawn attention, it is believed to have little bearing on the ICC's current position. The governing body has so far stood firm on maintaining the existing tournament schedule, not allowing Bangladesh to play its matches in Sri Lanka, one of the event's co-hosts alongside India, as requested. The ICC reiterated this stance to the BCB during discussions held last week. Backed by the Bangladesh government, the BCB has maintained its refusal to travel to India for the group-stage fixtures. Despite multiple rounds of talks between the ICC and the BCB, including a recent meet-

ing in Dhaka over the weekend, neither side has shifted its position. The ICC continues to insist that the matches proceed as scheduled, while the BCB remains unwilling to send its team to India. The PCB's entry into the issue follows days of speculation about its potential role in resolving the deadlock. Unconfirmed reports suggested that Pakistan had offered to host Bangladesh's matches and that the PCB was even reconsidering Pakistan's own participation in the World Cup, depending on the outcome of Bangladesh's case. The PCB has so far made no public statement on the matter. Indian media reported that Bangladesh had been told to agree to play in India by the ICC or risk being kicked out of the tournament. But the Dhaka government said they would not be pressured

into changing their stance. Bangladesh said they would not back down to "coercion" and play their T20 World Cup matches in India, casting doubt on their participation. "We have logically requested a change of venue for valid reasons," Asif Nazrul, Youth and Sports Adviser in the Bangladesh interim government, told the state-run BSS news agency late Tuesday. "We cannot be forced to play in India through illogical pressure or unreasonable coercion." Bangladesh captain Litton Das said he had no idea if the team would take part. "From where I stand, I'm uncertain, everyone is uncertain," Das told reporters after a domestic match on Tuesday, asking back: "Are you sure we will play the World Cup?" "I think at this moment, the whole of Bangladesh is uncertain," he added in comments reported by Dhaka's Pratham Ad newspaper.

## Journalists asked to sign pledge

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The Indian Express, one of India's most respected dailies, said its journalist was summoned four times between January 15 and 19 and asked to sign the pledge on January 16. "He has not signed the bond as asked by the police. The Indian Express is committed to doing what is necessary to uphold and protect the rights and dignity of its journalists," the paper's chief editor, Raj Kamal Jha, said in the report. Two other journalists Reuters spoke to said they had also been summoned, but one of them was travelling and the other did not go to the police station. They declined to be named because of the sensitive nature of the issue.

## Norway will not participate...

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"For Norway, it is important how this proposal is linked to established structures as the UN, and to our international commitments," Thoner added. The government representative added that Norway shared Trump's "goal of lasting peace in Ukraine, Gaza and in other situations." Trump has reportedly said he believes he deserves the Nobel Peace Prize. Last year's prize went to Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado. In a message to Norway's Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store published Monday, Trump said having been denied the prize he no longer felt "an obligation to think purely of Peace". Store said in a statement: "I have clearly explained, including to President Trump, what is well known. The prize is awarded by an independent Nobel Committee."

## Syrian forces enter Al-Hol...

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Thousands of their suspected family members live in the Al-Hol and Al-Roj camps. At Al-Hol, the AFP correspondent saw soldiers open the camp's metal gate and enter, while others stood guard. The camp in a desert region of Hakkari province holds around 24,000 people, including some 6,200 women and children from around 40 nationalities. The defence ministry said Tuesday it was ready to take responsibility for Al-Hol camp "and all its prisoners" after Kurdish forces said they had been "compelled to withdraw" from the site to defend cities in Syria's north, before the truce was announced.

## At UN, Pakistan slams...

FROM PAGE 01

Water agenda as irreversible damage pushes many basins. The Indus River Basin, the Pakistani envoy said, sustains one of the world's largest contiguous irrigation systems, provides over 80 percent of Pakistan's agricultural water needs, and supports the lives and livelihoods of over 240 million people, with the time-tested Treaty's framework providing for equitable and predictable management of the waters. "We are a semiarid, climate-vulnerable, low-precipitation country facing floods, droughts, accelerated glacier melt, groundwater depletion, and rapid population growth, all of which are placing immense pressure on already stressed water systems," Ambassador Jafon said. On its part, he said Pakistan is strengthening its water resilience through integrated planning, flood protection, irrigation rehabilitation, groundwater replenishment, and ecosystem restoration, including through initiatives such as "Living Indus" and "Recharge Pakistan" to meet the challenges facing it. "Yet systemic water risk cannot be managed by national action alone, particularly in shared river basins," the Pakistani envoy said, adding "Predictability, transparency, and cooperation in transboundary water governance are matters of survival for downstream populations."



ISLAMABAD: A view of the broken car in the nullah along the road side at Sector G-10 as the speeder car was over a turn due to tyre blast, the driver and passenger is in extreme injured condition. — Online

## Ali Amir hockey club clinches championship

SARGODHA: Ali Amir Hockey Club clinched the 3rd Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Inter-Club Hockey Championship 2025 title after defeating Punjab Hockey Club 5-1 in the final match held at the Sargodha AstroTurf Hockey Stadium. The winning team displayed exceptional coordination and aggressive gameplay throughout the final encounter, securing a convincing victory over their opponents. The Chief Guest, Colonel (Col) Muhammad Sarfaraz Awan, inaugurated the final match and distributed trophies and prizes among the winners, runners-up, and match officials during the concluding ceremony. Addressing the gathering, the Chief Guest lauded the outstanding performances of the players and described them as future stars of the national sport. The tournament was supervised by professional match officials, including Sajid Abbas, Kamran Asif, and Awan Abbas, who were also awarded prizes in recognition of their technical services. The General Secretary of the District Hockey Association, Chaudhry Fayyaz Ahmed Hanjra, expressed gratitude to the Pakistan Army and the Chief of Army Staff for providing a strong platform to promote young talent. He emphasized that such initiatives were crucial for nurturing the glory of hockey in the country, while also acknowledging the technical support provided by the Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) and Sports Board Punjab. — DNA

## World has entered new era of 'water bankruptcy,' UN report

UNITED NATIONS: The world has moved beyond a water crisis into a state of global water bankruptcy, according to a new flagship report released Tuesday by UN researchers. For decades, they said, scientists, policymakers and the media warned of a "global water crisis," implying temporary shock — followed by recovery. What is now emerging in many regions, however, is a persistent shortage whereby water systems can no longer realistically return to their historical baselines. "For much of the world, 'normal' is gone," said Karim Madani, Director of the UN University Institute for Water, Environment and Health. "This is not to kill hope but to encourage action and an honest admission of failure today to protect and enable tomorrow," he told a press briefing in New York on Tuesday. Madani emphasized that the findings do not suggest worldwide failure — but there are enough bankrupt or near-bankrupt systems, interconnected through trade, migration and geopolitical dependencies, that the global risk landscape has been fundamentally altered. The burdens fall disproportionately on smallholder farmers, Indigenous Peoples, low-income urban residents, and women and youth, while the benefits of secure access accrue to more powerful actors. The report introduces water bankruptcy as a condition

defined by both insolvency and irreversibility. Insolvency refers to withdrawing and polluting water beyond renewable inflows and safe depletion limits. Irreversibility refers to the damage to key parts of water-related natural capital, such as wetlands and lakes, that makes restoration of the system to its initial conditions infeasible. But all is not lost: comparing water action to finance, Madani said that bankruptcy is not the end of action. "It is the start of a structured recovery plan: you stop the bleeding, protect essential services, restructure unsustainable claims, and invest in rebuilding," he noted. The world is rapidly depleting its natural "water savings accounts," according to the study: more than half the world's large lakes have declined since the early 1970s, while around 35 per cent of natural wetlands have been lost since 1970, Madani said. The human toll is already significant. Nearly three-quarters of the world's population live in countries classified as water-insecure or critically water-insecure. Around four billion people experience severe water scarcity for at least one month each year, while drought impacts cost an estimated \$307 billion annually. "If we continue to manage these basins as temporary 'crises' with short-term fixes, we will only deepen the ecological damage and fuel social conflict," Madani warned. — Agencies

## Balochistan govt, NBP launch subsidized electric scooter scheme

The MoU signing ceremony was held at the Chief Minister's Secretariat in Quetta, attended by Chief Minister Mir Sarfaraz Bugti, Provincial Minister Mir Sadiq Umrani, senior provincial officials, and top representatives from the National Bank of Pakistan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Government of Balochistan and the National Bank of Pakistan have signed a formal agreement to promote electric scooters on subsidized installments to students, working women, and the general public, aiming to improve mobility and promote sustainable transportation. The MoU signing ceremony was held at the Chief Minister's Secretariat in Quetta, attended by Chief Minister Mir Sarfaraz Bugti, Provincial Minister Mir Sadiq Umrani, senior provincial officials, and top representatives from the National Bank of Pakistan. Chief Minister Bugti described the initiative as a significant step toward ensuring safe, affordable, and dignified commuting options, especially for students and working women. He noted that the scheme will not only reduce daily travel challenges but also encourage the adoption of eco-friendly transport alternatives, contributing to cost-effective and sustainable mobility. Highlighting the government's focus on public welfare, the Chief Minister emphasized that such initiatives directly improve citizens' daily lives, empower women and youth, and reflect Balochistan's commitment to inclusive development. He reiterated that the provincial government will continue to roll out projects that provide tangible benefits and support long-term economic and social progress across the province.





## Briefs

Rupee gains  
01 paise  
against US  
Dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Wednesday appreciated by 01 paise against the US Dollar in interbank trading and closed at Rs 279.90 compared to the previous day's closing at Rs 279.91. 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 282.5, respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by Rs 0.67 to close at Rs 327.85 from the previous day's close of Rs 327.18, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese Yen went up by 01 paise and closed at Rs 1.77, whereas the exchange rate of the British Pound witnessed a decrease of Rs 1.15 and closed at Rs 376.12 compared to the previous day's Rs 377.27. The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham lost 01 paise and closed at Rs 76.20, whereas the Saudi Riyal remained unchanged at Rs 74.64.—APP

Gold price  
surges to all-  
time high

ISLAMABAD: Gold prices surged to an all-time high in the local market on Wednesday as the price of 24-karat gold per tola jumped by Rs 12,700 to settle at Rs 506,362. The price of 10 grams of 24-karat gold also jumped by Rs 10,888 to Rs 434,123, while the price of 10 grams of 22-karat gold rose by Rs 9,881 to Rs 397,960, according to the All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association.

Silver prices also witnessed an upward trend, with the price of 24-karat silver per tola increasing by Rs 4 to Rs 9,933, whereas the price of 10 grams of silver went up by Rs 54 to Rs 8,515. In the international market, gold prices climbed by \$127 to reach \$4,840 per ounce, marking a fresh record, while silver prices rose by \$0.64 to \$94.58 per ounce, the association reported.—APP

Pakistan,  
China discuss  
enhanced  
agri trade,  
economic coop

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan on Wednesday held a meeting with the Chinese Ambassador Jiang Zaidong and discussed ways to enhance agricultural trade and economic cooperation. The meeting took place on the sidelines of the ongoing Pakistan-China Agriculture Investment Conference, underscoring the strategic priority both nations place on strengthening economic ties, said a news release.

Pakistan's delegation, led by the Commerce Minister, comprised key stakeholders in the nation's trade ecosystem. It included the Secretary of Commerce, the Chief Executive of the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP), and senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Minister welcomed the Chinese Ambassador and reaffirmed Pakistan's steadfast commitment to boosting its exports through a multifaceted strategy. He placed particular emphasis on leveraging Government-to-Government (G2G) cooperation, in addition to Business-to-Business (B2B) channels, to accelerate trade growth and deepen the economic partnership between the two all-weather friends. The substantive discussions focused on identifying and exploiting concrete opportunities to enhance bilateral trade in agricultural products. Both sides engaged in a detailed review of the existing trade landscape and potential avenues for expansion. The Chinese Ambassador acknowledged the critical role of robust agricultural trade. He provided an overview of China's current import regulatory framework. The two sides agreed to maintain positive momentum by continuing their dialogue. The meeting concluded on a cordial note, reflecting the enduring strength and resilience of the Pakistan-China partnership, which continues to evolve to meet new economic opportunities and shared goals.—B



BEIJING: Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq meeting with Chairman Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Wang Huning.

## Haroon links MSME uplift to sustainable growth

The Special Assistant said policy interest rates had been reduced from 22 per cent to 10.5 per cent, inflation had declined to around 4-5 per cent, and power tariffs had been brought down from Rs42 to around Rs34-35 per unit, with further reductions expected

ISLAMABAD: Announcing the launch of Pakistan's first "Made in Pakistan SME Cluster Showcase Expo 2026" to be held in Lahore from January 24, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Haroon Akhtar Khan on Wednesday linked sustainable economic growth to the strengthening of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). "MSMEs are the backbone of Pakistan's economy and essential for achieving sustainable GDP growth of 6-7 per cent," he said while addressing a press conference here. He was accompanied by Secretary Ministry of Industries and Production Saif Anjum. He said, the three-day expo will be held at the Lahore Expo Centre from January 24 to 26 to showcase the country's untapped entrepreneurial and industrial potential and bring together thousands of MSMEs from the country. He highlighted that MSMEs were essential for inclusive growth, employment generation, noting that Pakistan had around seven million MSMEs, compared to only a few thousand large-scale manufacturing units. He

said the Expo would feature a wide range of sectors including sports goods, gems and jewellery, surgical instruments, cutlery, textiles, garments, leather goods, auto parts, household appliances, plastics, agri-based products, cosmetics, packaging, handicrafts and light engineering, with a separate pavilion dedicated to women entrepreneurs. He described the event as Pakistan's national platform for small businesses, featuring over 30 MSME cluster pavilions, participation from 174 representatives and special pavilions are being established for women entrepreneurs and micro businesses. International delegates from Azerbaijan, Kenya, and Malaysia will also attend, enhancing global exposure for Pakistani MSMEs. He added, the country had successfully achieved macroeconomic stabilization after a severe downturn and was now entering into a sustainable growth phase. He said multilateral institutions including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and Asian Development Bank (ADB) had acknowledged the stabilisation,

while improved performance of the stock exchange reflected restored investor confidence. The Special Assistant said policy interest rates had been reduced from 22 per cent to 10.5 per cent, inflation had declined to around 4-5 per cent, and power tariffs had been brought down from Rs42 to around Rs34-35 per unit, with further reductions expected. He acknowledged that high interest rates and taxation during the stabilization phase had caused difficulties for businesses, but said these measures were unavoidable to control the fiscal deficit and lay the foundation for long-term growth. Haroon Akhtar said large-scale manufacturing (LSM) had shown a strong recovery, recording 10.37 per cent year-on-year growth in November 2025, while cumulative growth during the first five months of the fiscal year exceeded six per cent, reversing previous negative trends. He said the government was finalising a comprehensive industrial policy, to be announced soon, focusing on access to credit, bankruptcy reforms, restructuring

of sick units, export promotion and ease of doing business. The Special Assistant said several sectoral policies were also in the pipeline, including a National Tariff Policy, Gems and Jewellery policy, Mobile phone manufacturing policy, Vaccine manufacturing policy, Solar and battery storage policy, Auto and home appliances policies, and initiatives for semiconductors and agri-food industries. Highlighting the Prime Minister's special focus on MSMEs, he said micro enterprises had been formally brought into the policy framework, including women-led and home-based businesses, to provide registration, access to finance and credit facilitation. Meanwhile, Secretary Ministry of Industries and Production Saif Anjum said the MSME Expo 2026 would be a family-friendly event. He said the Expo would feature around 250 stalls with variety of locally made products ranging from furniture, handicrafts and olive, gems and other SMEs goods.

## Syria army enters Al-Hol camp holding relatives of Daesh militants

AL-HOL CAMP: Syrian Syria's army on Wednesday entered the country's vast Al-Hol detention camp that houses relatives of suspected Daesh militants, from which Kurdish forces withdrew the day before, according to an AFP journalist at the scene. The correspondent saw a large number of soldiers open the camp's metal gate and enter, while others guarded the entrance. Al-Hol, located in a desert region of Hama province, holds around 24,000 people, including 15,000 Syrians and about 6,300 foreign women and children of 42 nationalities. Kurdish forces announced on Tuesday that they had been "compelled to withdraw" from the camp to defend cities in Syria's north threatened by the army, before a ceasefire was announced. The camp is the largest for suspected militants established by Kurdish forces, who spearheaded the fight against Daesh with help from an international coalition over the past decade before Daesh was defeated in Syria in 2019. The Syrian defense ministry said Tuesday it was ready to take responsibility for Al-Hol camp "and all Daesh prisoners." The announcement came as US envoy to Syria Tom Barrack said "the original purpose" of Kurdish forces as the primary anti-Daesh force had "largely expired." The Syrian army deployed on Monday across vast parts of northern and northeastern Syria from which Kurdish forces had withdrawn.

An agreement between the two sides stipulates that the Syrian state becomes responsible for Daesh prisoners and that the Kurdish administration be integrated into Syrian state institutions.—APP

## PSX sheds 1,588 points to close at 187,033 points

ISLAMABAD: The benchmark KSE-100 Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) on Wednesday turned out to be a bearish trend, losing 1,588.52 points, a decline of 0.84 per cent, to settle at 187,033.27 points compared to 188,621.78 points on the previous trading day, according to PSX data. During the session, the trading market recorded a trading volume of 1,325,597 million shares with a traded value of Rs 69,583 billion, against 1,225,807 million shares valuing Rs 63,808 billion in the previous session. Market capitalization declined to Rs 21,134 trillion from Rs 21,305 trillion a day earlier. Out of 488 active companies in the ready market, 118 advanced, 331 declined, while 39 remained unchanged. K-Electric Limited topped the volume chart with 263,237 million shares, followed by Itasca Petroleum with 100,763 million shares and Fauji Foods Limited with 74,973 million shares. The top gainer was PIA Holding Company Limited (PI), which rose by Rs 301.17 to close at Rs 21,267.50, and Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited, which increased by Rs 10.16 to settle at Rs 28,224.00. In the losing side, Rafhan Maize Products Company Limited declined by Rs 119.40 to close at Rs 9,900.60, while Khyber Textile Mills Limited fell by Rs 81.05 to close at Rs 1,717.95. In the futures market, turnover stood at 257,227 million shares with a traded value of Rs 15,113 billion, compared to 234,020 million shares worth Rs 16,606 billion in the previous session. Out of 316 futures-market companies, 69 recorded gains, while 247 declined and none remained unchanged.—APP

## Dar opens Pathfinder group's Pakistan pavilion

DNA

DAVOS: Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar inaugurated the Pathfinder Group's Pakistan Pavilion on the sidelines of the Annual Meeting 2026 in Davos. DPM/PM appreciated the initiative to showcase Pakistan's vast economic potential and emerging opportunities on a global platform, while highlighting the dynamism and innovation of Pakistani start-ups. He underscored the critical role of startups in advancing socio-economic development and driving innovation across diverse sectors. He reaffirmed the Government's commitment to facilitating and promoting entrepreneurs and startups, particularly those led by youth, to fully realize Pakistan's economic potential.



## FASP Magnolia meeting held



ISLAMABAD: The monthly meeting of FASP Magnolia was held at Serena Islamabad. The meeting started with recitation of Quran verse, by Hina Kamran. Then the minutes of previous meeting was read by Bushra Masood. This time the meeting was a learning session by our very senior, seasoned floral artist Ghazala Abdullah, she is a senior founding member and an ace floral artist. The techniques she taught is called "Monobotanic technique." A monobotanic design is an advanced floral arranging technique where the designer uses multiple parts (blooms, stems, foliage, roots, stems, etc.) from plants belonging to only one family or genus. She made very innovative and beautiful designs. It was a very good learning experience for the new comers and the old ones as well. Birthday gifts were given to the members born in January. Tea was served after the programme.—DNA



ISLAMABAD: Mrs. Aisha Zahid presenting token of thanks to Mrs. Ghazala Abdullah and President of Magnolia Chapter Naheeda Raza is standing on extreme right.—DNA

## Egypt says it paid \$5b to foreign oil partners, targets arrears cut

CAIRO: Egypt has paid about \$5 billion in overdue bills to foreign oil and gas partners and aims to bring remaining arrears down to \$1.2 billion by June 2026, Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly said. Arrears stood at \$6.1 billion on June 30, 2024, he said in a statement, adding the government was also meeting the partners' monthly invoices. A foreign currency shortage forced Egypt to delay payments to international oil companies operating in Egypt, slowing investment and contributing to a drop in gas output that forced it to rely heavily on imports from 2022, whether from neighboring Israel or costly LNG cargoes. But following a giant \$35 billion deal in 2024 with the United Arab Emirates for the rights to develop a prime stretch of Egypt's Mediterranean coast, Egypt started paying back all oil companies. Egypt produced 3,635 million cubic meters of gas in October last year, up slightly from 3,525 million cubic meters in September, but down from 3,861 million cubic meters in October 2024, according to the Joint Organizations Data Initiative.—APP



## Brief

## Gold crosses Rs500,000 mark

## NEWS DESK

**PARACUÍ:** Gold price in Pakistan surged to unprecedented levels on Wednesday, with the precious metal trading at more than \$1,000 per troy ounce for the first time in the country's history, reflecting growing uncertainty in global financial markets. The price of gold rose sharply by Rs2,720, taking it to Rs656,392 per troy ounce, the price of 10 grams of gold rose by Rs2,720, taking it to Rs65,639.2 to settle at Rs44,123. The sharp rise in domestic prices came in line with a global surge in gold prices, where precious metals hit fresh peaks as investors sought safety. Gold fetched yet another record high, crossing the \$1,000 mark for the first time in an ounce in international trade, while silver touched \$59.89 an ounce, underscoring the growing demand for safe-haven precious metals.

Equities were mixed on Wednesday following a rough start to the week fueled by concerns over a potential trade war, amid a backdrop of a linked tariff threats, while the uncertainty rattling through trading floors saw investors seeking refuge in safe assets but fresh record highs. Markets have sunk globally this week, and Wall Street's three main indexes tumbled after a long weekend.

**Gul Plaza  
'won't be  
demolished  
until all missing  
recovered'**

## BUREAU REPORT

**KARACHI:** As the search and rescue operation at Karachi's old Glaz Plaza entered fifth day with the death toll climbing to 30 on Wednesday, District South Deputy Commissioner Iqbal Khan said that the building would not be demolished as long as even one person remains missing. Speaking to the media, DC Khosro said that 85 people were rescued from the aftermath of the blaze and added, "When everything is complete, the entire building will be demolished".

He said that the location of 39 missing people were traced back to the shopping centre, while 17 bodies recovered from the site are yet to be identified. He said that 10 bodies had been identified so far.

The port city's biggest fire in over a decade started late on Saturday at Glaz Plaza, a multi-story shopping centre spread across an area larger than a football field.

The blaze in Karachi's historic centre raged for more than 12 hours before being extinguished. Expanding on the search operation, DC Khosro stated today that there are parts of the building that have not yet been able to access because

## Pak delegation hectic schedule in Beijing

## DNA

BEIJING, Pakistan's parliamentarian delegation, led by National Assembly Speaker Saeed Ayyaz Sadiq now in Beijing had a hectic schedule including high-level talks with Chinese leadership. The delegation was visiting Beijing from 22-27 April. Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), Jia Qingguo, met with senior leadership, including NPC Chairman Zhao Leji and Wang Huijun, Chairman of National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Jia Ping. The delegation includes Ms. Romina Khurshid Alami (Coordinator to the Prime Minister on Climate Change and Convenor of the Pakistan-China Parliamentary Environment Group), Minister of Environment, Muhammad Nusrat, and the Parliamentary Secretary Ms. Zeh Jaffar, and MNA Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri.

## UN strongly condemns Israeli demolition of UNRWA HQs

The move represents “a new level of open and deliberate defiance of international law, including of the privileges and immunities of the United Nations, by the State of Israel”, the UNRWA Commissioner-General said on X

## DNA

UNITED NATIONS: The demolition underway on Tuesday of the headquarters of UN agency UNRWA by Israeli forces in occupied East Jerusalem - reportedly "under the watch of lawmakers and a member of the Israeli Tel Aviv Government" - has prompted swift condemnation from the global body.

Responding to the dramatic development, head of the UN agency tasked with delivering humanitarian services to millions of Palestinians, Philippe Lazzarini, described it as an "unprecedented attack" against the UN, whose premises are protected under international law. The move represents "a new level of open and deliberate defiance

of international law, including of the privileges and immunities of the United Nations, by the State of Israel," the UN-RWA Commissioner-General said on 10 June. UN Secretary-General António Guterres condemned the demolition "in the strongest terms". The UN chief has repeatedly and unequivocally stated that the compound remains UN premises and is "inviolable and immune from any form of interference." "The Secretary-General views as wholly unacceptable the continued escalatory actions against UNRWA," the statement from his office continued. Guterres called on Israel to halt the demolition and to allow UNRWA to return to "without delay." Echoing those concerns, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk expressed his "outrage" at the

incident, which marks a sharp escalation of tensions between the Israeli authorities and UNRWA. "It compounds what we've been seeing for a while; attacking aid groups and UN actors who are trying to help," said Ravina Shamdasani, spokesperson for the High Commissioner.

On 14 January, Israeli forces entered an UNRWA health centre in East Jerusalem and ordered it to close. At the time of the incident, the agency said its workers were "terrified". In the coming weeks, water and power supplies to UNRWA facilities are scheduled to be cut, including to buildings used for health care and education. "This is a direct result of legislation passed by the Israeli parliament in December, which stepped up existing anti-UNRWA laws adopted in 2024," Lazzarini said.

Previously, UNRWA premises have been targeted by arsonists amid a "large-scale disinformation campaign" against it by Israel, the agency's Commissioner General maintained. This was despite a ruling last October by the UN's top court, the International Court of Justice, which restated that Israel was obliged "to facilitate UNRWA's operations, not hinder or prevent them. The court also stressed that Israel has no jurisdiction over East Jerusalem," Lazzarini noted.

"What happens today to UNRWA will happen tomorrow to any other international organization or diplomatic mission, whether in the Occupied Palestinian Territory or anywhere around the world," he added. "International law has come under increasing attack for too long and is risking irrelevancy in the absence of response by Member States."

## Russian strikes kill two in Ukraine

KYIV: Overnight Russian strikes on the central Ukrainian city of Kyryvi killed two people and injured a woman, authorities said Wednesday, while officials in Russia said an drone strike by Ukraine had wounded 11. A 77-year-old man and a 72-year-old woman were killed. A 53-year-old woman was injured. The Russian Ministry of Defense said that Oksana Gazda, the head of the regional military administration, in a statement posted on Telegram. The missiles and drone attack also damaged several buildings, he added. Kyryvi, Kyiv, about 80 kilometres (50 miles) from the frontline in the east, is a major city. The city's mayor, Vadym Kolesnyk, has been frequently targeted by Russian strikes since Moscow launched its February 2022 invasion. The head of Russia's Adygea Republic in the country's southern west, meanwhile, said a Ukrainian drone strike overnight ignited a fire at a residential building and parking lot in Tskaltubo, a coastal resort town. He said the fire was caused by an updated information, 11 people were wounded, nine of whom were hospitalised, including two children," the official, Murat Kumpilov, posted on Telegram. The region, which sits near the strategically important Black Sea and Sea of Azov, is a frequent target of Ukrainian strikes. Ukraine says it has shot down several Russian aircraft and that Russia depends on to finance its offside. —AFP

## Bad news for solar panel users

*The shift comes amid ongoing systemic issues, including a backlog of pending net-metering applications that Discos have yet to resolve*

## MONITORING DESK

**LAHORE:** Marking a major policy shift with wide-ranging implications, the federal government has initiated the process to abolish the net metering system and replace it with a net billing policy. Under the previous system, electricity units imported from and exported to the grid were balanced one-for-one at comparable retail rates. Whereas as per the new policy, electricity drawn from the grid will be charged at the full national tariff, while solar electricity exported back to the grid will be credited at a significantly lower differential.

rate. The economic impact of this policy return is expected to be severe; a consumer exporting 300 units and importing a similar volume could now face a bill of approximately \$210,000, compared to nearly zero under the outgoing system. The government and power companies are expected to have defended the change, saying it is necessary to cover grid infrastructure costs and mitigate alleged revenue losses. However, critics argue that it effectively penalizes consumers who invested their own funds to strengthen their power grids. The move is also expected to amid ongoing systemic issues, including a backlog of pending net-metering applications that Discos have yet to resolve. Additionally, thousands of installed solar systems remain unmetered and unconnected. Distribution companies are not expected to suspend sales of new solar meter installation cases, following directives from the federal ministry.

## South Korean ex-PM Han gets 23 years jail for martial law role

*The sentence is eight years longer than prosecutors demanded. The 76-year-old career technocrat was ordered to report to prison immediately after the ruling*



**SEOUL** Former South Korean prime minister Han Duck-soo was sentenced to 23 years in prison on Wednesday for aiding and abetting a declaration of martial law that briefly suspended civilian rule and plunged the country into chaos. The defendant "disregarded his duty and responsibility as prime minister until the very end," said Judge Lee Jin-gwan, of the Seoul Central District Court.

"We sentence the defendant to 23 years in prison."

The sentence is eight years longer than prosecutors demanded. The 76-year-old career technician was ordered to report to prison immediately after the ruling.

Judge Lee said the martial law decree by Han's boss Yoon Suk Yeo in December 2024 was intended with the "aim of subverting the constitutional order" and amounted to insurrection. Yoon's stunning imposition of martial law saw armed troops deployed to the National Assembly and the National Election Commission before it was vetoed by the opposition-led parliament. In the aftermath, Yoon was impeached and removed by the Constitutional Court in April, triggering an election two months later. Han is one of many former officials – including Yoon – who have stood trial over their roles in the martial law attempt.

The defendant is deemed to have played a significant role in the insurrectionary acts of Yoon and others by ensuring, at least formally, compliance with the procedural requirement," Judge Lee said in a televised sentencing.

Lee pointed out that while Han "voiced concerns to Yoon" over the move, he failed to "explicitly oppose it" or urge other cabinet members to dissuade Yoon from it. During the course of the trial, Han denied wrongdoing, insisting he had never supported or helped the martial law declaration.

## Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb highlights economic reforms at WEF

## DNA

**ISLAMABAD:** Federal Minister for Finance, Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, held a series of important meetings in Davos on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual meeting, focusing on advancing Pakistan's economic reform agenda, strengthening international partnerships, and promoting investment-led growth.

The minister met with President of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Dr. Masatsugu Asaumi, to discuss economic reforms and discuss ways to further deepen the long-standing partnership between Pakistan and ADB, said a press release issued by the finance ministry here on Wednesday. During the meeting, the ADB President noted that Pakistan was entering a significant phase of economic transformation, with renewed momentum in reforms and growth. He expressed confidence in Pakistan's economic strength and expanding engagement in Pakistan and ex-

pressed optimism about the country's economic direction, underscoring ADB's commitment to supporting Pakistan through a close and forward-looking partnership. He thanked the ADB President for his continued support and guidance, noting that Pakistan's relationship with ADB had entered a new and more strategic phase. He shared that the past year marked a decisive shift toward macroeconomic stability, with this positive trajectory continuing. The minister highlighted the government's commitment to strengthening foreign exchange reserves, improving investor sentiment, all reflecting renewed confidence in Pakistan's reform path. He briefed the ADB President on progress in structural reforms, particularly the government's renewed focus on privatization and private sector participation. He noted that the government is also giving high priority to infrastructure and helped establish important benchmarks, with additional projects in the pipeline across multiple sectors.

Discussions emphasized the importance of continued collaboration with development partners, including ADB, to support these reforms and unlock Pakistan's growth potential. Discussions also covered efforts to modernize Pakistan's energy sector and advance sustainable and clean energy solutions. He highlighted ongoing reforms aimed at improving efficiency, strengthening systems, and supporting long-term economic sustainability. Both sides agreed to maintain close coordination to identify practical solutions that support inclusive and durable growth. The ADB President reaffirmed the Bank's commitment to Pakistan and emphasized the importance of private sector participation, noting ADB's role in ensuring the timely delivery of infrastructure and development outcomes. Earlier, the minister met with Chairperson of Menzies Aviation, Hassan El Houry, to discuss opportunities for enhancing cooperation in the aviation sector.

## Japan to restart world's biggest nuclear plant

KARIWA: The world's biggest nuclear power plant is set to restart on Wednesday for the first time since the 2011 Fukushima disaster, its Japanese operator said, despite persistent safety concerns among residents. The governor of Niigata province, where the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant is located, approved its resumption last month, although public opinion remains sharply divided. After receiving the final green light Wednesday, TEPCO said they were "proceeding with preparations... and plan to remove the control rods after 7:00 pm today and start up the reactor".

toxicologists are testing dozens of mushrooms — mostly edibles — braved freezing temperatures to demonstrate in the snow near the plant's entrance, says a spokesman for the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan's coast. "It's Tokyo's electricity that is produced in Kashiwazaki, so why should the people here be put at risk? That makes no sense," says the spokesman. A cabinet minister, lead AFP. Avarado 60 percent of residents opposed the restart, while 37 percent support it, according to a survey conducted in September. Japan's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, the world's biggest nuclear power plant by potential capacity, although just one reactor of seven is restarting Wednesday. After the 9.0-magnitude earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan pulled the plug on nuclear power after a colossal earthquake and tsunami sent three reactors at the Fukushima atomic plant into meltdown in March, however, resource-poor Japan now needs to revive atomic energy to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels, achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and meet growing energy needs from artificial intelligence. — APF



**ISLAMABAD:** Richard Lindsay UK Special Envoy to Afghanistan, FICDO Deputy Director for Afghanistan and Pakistan met Ambassador Shakeeb, Taliban representative in Pakistan and discussed regional security issues and the impact of Taliban policies on women and girls. – DNA



SEOUL: Former South Korean prime minister Han Duck-soo was sentenced to 23 years in prison on Wednesday for aiding and abetting a declaration of martial law that briefly suspended civilian rule and plunged the country into chaos. The defendant "discarded his duty and responsibility as prime minister until the very end," said Judge Lee Jingwan, of the Seoul Central District Court. "We sentence the defendant to 23 years in prison." The sentence is eight years longer than prosecutors demanded. The 76-year-old career technocrat was ordered to report to prison immediately after the ruling.



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**General Practice**  
**HOSPITAL**

# We Are OPEN

General Practice Hospital is a state-of-the-art healthcare facility offering comprehensive medical services to the community. Our Hospital is equipped with advanced diagnostic and treatment modalities, including specialised OPD clinics, on urgent care unit, a modern radiology unit, well-equipped IPD rooms, operation theatres, an on-site laboratory for practice diagnostics, dialysis services, and comfortable inpatient wards. We are dedicated to providing quality, easily accessible, and patient-centred healthcare in a welcoming and professional environment.













AMBULANCE



FIRST AID KIT



X-RAY



MRI



ULTRASOUND



LABORATORY



DIALYSIS



INPATIENT



OPD



MEDICAL RECORDS



FIRST AID KIT



X-RAY



MRI



ULTRASOUND



LABORATORY



DIALYSIS



INPATIENT

General Physician Services

Medicine

Emergency & Triage Services

Diagnostics & Medication

General Surgery

Urgency

Pharmacy & Child Health

Vision Services

Eye Care & Vision

Dentistry

Neurology

Neck, Chest & Throat

Physiotherapy & Sports Medicine

Orthodontics

Paeds & Neonatal Surgery

Paediatrics

Neurophysiology

Physiotherapy & Rehabilitation

Physiotherapy & Sports Medicine

*Empire is Caring for everyone*

We know that seeking medical care can be overwhelming, but you're not alone. With empathy at the heart of our care, we listen, understand, and support you every step of the way. In our clean, premium environment, you'll feel safe, valued, and truly cared for. Book your appointment today and experience healthcare with compassion.

[+91 88 57 47 31 03](tel:+91 88 57 47 31 03)


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