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US President Trump warns Canadian PM over China relations

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Iranian supreme leader warns against attack

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CM Maryam inaugurates Danish school

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Operation completed: govt

US, France among other nations slam Balochistan attacks

"US remains steadfast partner in its efforts to ensure peace and stability," says Charge d'Affaires Natalie Baker

DNA

ISLAMABAD: International condemnations have poured in following the coordinated attacks across several districts in Balochistan, which left 18 civilians and 15 security personnel martyred. In a statement issued on Sunday, US Charge d'Affaires Natalie Baker condemned the attacks by the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), which targeted both security personnel and civilians. "I extend our deepest sympathies and condolences to the victims of terrorism, their families, and all those affected. The Pakistani people deserve to live free from violence and fear."

"The US remains a steadfast partner of Pakistan in its efforts to ensure peace and stability. We stand in solidarity with Pakistan during this difficult time," remarked the US envoy. The condemnation comes as terrorists affiliated with India-sponsored Fitna al-Hindustan (FAH) carried out multiple attacks targeting civilians in Quetta, Mastung, Nushki, Dalbandin, Kharan, Panjgur, Tump, Gwadar, and Pasni. The French Embassy in Pakistan issued a strong condemnation of the recent wave of terrorist attacks across Balochistan province. In a message posted on its official social media accounts, France expressed

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QUETTA: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi, Chief Minister Balochistan Sarfraz Bugti, and the Corps Commander Balochistan visited injured police personnel at CMH Quetta. — DNA

Naqvi, Bugti visit injured police jawans

Corps commander also accompanied them

BUREAU REPORT

QUETTA: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi, Chief Minister Balochistan Sarfraz Bugti and the Corps Commander Balochistan visited injured police personnel at CMH Quetta. The Interior Minister, Chief Minister Balochistan, and the Corps Commander Balochistan appreciated the high morale of the injured personnel. Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi said, "You confronted the terrorists' attacks like lions and defeated them." The Chief Minister Balochistan said, "I salute your courage for foiling the conspiracy to create instability in Balochistan."

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Iran warns against attack

Iran in discussions' with US, Trump says, as military threat looms

Iran began two-day live-fire naval exercise on Sunday in the Strait of Hormuz - one of the world's most important shipping lanes and a key route for energy supplies

CENTRELINE REPORT

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump said Iran was in "serious discussions" following the build-up of US military forces nearby, as Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei warned any attack would spark a regional conflict. The US president said he hoped negotiations would lead to something "acceptable". Iran's top security official Ali Larijani also said a framework for negotiations was progressing. Trump has threatened to intervene in Iran over its nuclear ambitions and after its deadly crackdown on anti-government protests.

"The Americans should know that if they start a war, this time it will be a regional war," Khamenei was quoted as saying by the semi-official Tasnim news agency. [Trump] regularly says that he brought ships... The Iranian nation shall not be scared by these things." Iran began two-day live-fire naval exercise on Sunday in the Strait of Hormuz

Trump says India will buy oil from Venezuela

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: United States President Donald Trump on Saturday said India will buy Venezuelan oil, as opposed to purchasing oil from Iran. "We've already made that deal, the concept of the deal," Trump told reporters while on Air Force One, en route to Florida from Washington, DC. Trump also said on Saturday that China was also welcome to make a deal with the US to buy Venezuelan oil. Trump's comment came a day after the US told Delhi it could soon resume purchases of Venezuelan oil to help replace imports of Russian oil, three people familiar with the matter told Reuters.

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Briefs

No room for weakness: CM Afridi

DNA

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Suhail Afridi, has stated that terrorist attacks in Balochistan are a blatant assault on state sovereignty and national security. In a statement on Sunday, he emphasized that there is no room for weakness or ambiguity in the war against terrorism and reaffirmed that the sacrifices of the martyrs will not go in vain. Praising the operations carried out by security forces in Balochistan, Suhail Afridi said that Pakistan will continue to confront terrorists with full force. He added that terrorism is a shared challenge for the entire country and prayed that Almighty Allah prevails lasting peace in Pakistan.

Solidarity with Bangladesh

Pakistan to play T20 World Cup but boycott India match

Govt says team "not take the field in the match scheduled on February 15 against India"

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: In an unprecedented move, Pakistan on Sunday announced that it would participate in the T20 World Cup 2026 but would boycott the match against arch-rival India. The decision, announced by the Pakistani government, follows the International Cricket Council's (ICC) removal of Bangladesh from the tournament after Dhaka raised security concerns over playing in India. "The Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan grants approval to the Pakistan Cricket Team to participate in the ICC World T20 2026," the government said in a post on X. "however, the Pakistan Cricket Team shall not take the field in the match scheduled on 15th February 2026 against India." The reasons behind Pakistan's decision not to

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NEWS DESK

LAHORE: Mohammad Nawaz's brilliant five-wicket haul, supported by a collective bowling effort, helped Pakistan defeat Australia by 111 runs and complete a clean 3-0 T20I series sweep at Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium on Sunday. The thumping victory has served as the final preparation for both sides heading into the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026, scheduled to be co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka from February 7 to March 8.

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DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Ministers of Pakistan, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and the United Arab Emirates issued a joint statement strongly condemning Israel's repeated violations of the ceasefire in Gaza. These violations have reportedly resulted in the killing and injuring of more than a thousand Palestinians. The ministers warned that such actions risk escalating regional tensions and undermining

Continued on Page 06

SERENA HOTELS



Bara alliance extends support

PESHAWAR: The Bara Political Alliance on Sunday announced complete solidarity, sympathy and support for all families temporarily displaced from Tirah. The announcement was made during an important jirga convened by the Bara Political Alliance in Bara, Khyber to discuss the Tirah issue, where prominent tribal elders addressed the gathering. Participants of the jirga strongly voiced their support for peace and sharply criticized the provincial government over alleged incompetence and corruption in the funds allocated for the Tirah affected. Tribal elders stated that corruption and political interference in the distribution of Rs 4 billion earmarked for Tirah victims is unacceptable. The agenda of the national jirga was presented by former Chairman of the Bara Political Alliance, Haji Shireen Afridi. Speaking on the occasion, he said that jirgas were held twice with the Khawari.

Balochistan Terrorists Strike

Questions of governance, responsibility and response

The latest terrorist strike is not just a tragedy—it is a wake-up call. Security forces have proven their valor, but without political will, institutional reform, and investment in infrastructure, Balochistan will remain vulnerable

ANSAR M BHATTI

BALOCHISTAN has once again been shaken by a brutal terrorist strike, leaving behind grief, anger, and pressing questions about governance. The Chief Minister of Balochistan admitted that authorities had prior information about the attack. This revelation raises a troubling question: if intelligence was available, why were so many precious lives lost? The tragedy underscores the gap between information and effective action, a gap that continues to cost the province dearly. Security forces, however, deserve immense praise for their courage and sacrifice. In fierce counter-operations, they eliminated over 150 terrorists, preventing further devastation. Several personnel embraced martyrdom in the line of duty, a reminder of the heavy price paid by those who stand on the frontlines. Their role in safeguarding the nation remains beyond any doubt. Yet, the lack of political will and coordination has left them carrying the entire burden of responsibility. Civilian institutions under the provincial government have failed to deliver, leaving the military and paramilitary forces to shoulder duties that should be shared. The Balochistan government must urgently strengthen

its civil institutions. Police and Levies forces, often under-equipped and underpaid, need modern weapons, training, and fair compensation to encourage them to serve effectively. Without these reforms, the reliance on military forces alone will continue, perpetuating a cycle where civilian governance remains weak. Corruption within civilian institutions further erodes trust and efficiency, making reforms not just desirable but essential. Beyond security, Balochistan remains a neglected province. Infrastructure is minimal, with people living in miserable conditions. Hospitals, schools, and basic facilities are scarce, leaving communities vulnerable and disillusioned. The culture of chieftains and sardars has not delivered progress, instead reinforcing outdated structures that fail to meet modern needs. Development has been slow, and the absence of strong governance has left the province lagging far behind the rest of the country. The latest terrorist strike is not just a tragedy—it is a wake-up call. Security forces have proven their valor, but without political will, institutional reform, and investment in infrastructure, Balochistan will remain vulnerable. The government must rise to the challenge, strengthen civilian institutions, and deliver on promises of development. Only then can the sacrifices of the martyrs truly pave the way for a safer and more prosperous future for Balochistan.

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FIA signs MoU with Aspire Group to offer fee concessions

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Aspire Group of Colleges to provide special educational fee concessions for the children of FIA employees across the country. Under the agreement, 100 percent fee concession will be granted to the children of martyrs and deceased FIA employees, while 50 percent concession will be offered to the children of serving FIA personnel and 25 percent concession to the children of retired FIA employees. A senior FIA official told on Sunday that the MoU aims to facilitate access to quality education for the families of FIA personnel and reflects the organization's continued commitment to the welfare of its employees and their dependents. He said that the initiative is part of broader welfare measures being undertaken by FIA to support its workforce, particularly the families of those who have rendered valuable services to the country. —APP

Norwa, Lebanon delegates visits Mohenjo-Daro heritage site

LARKANA: A delegation of foreign tourists from Norway and Lebanon visited the ancient site of Mohenjo-daro near Dokri in Larkana on Sunday. The foreign delegation enjoyed thoroughly touring the ancient remains, the stupa, DK Area, Munir Area, Great Bath, and the museum. The Mohenjo-daro in-charge, Ahsan Abbasi, welcomed the foreign delegation. At Mohenjo-daro, the designated guide of Sindh Tourism, Irshad Solangi, briefed the delegation.

On this occasion, the foreign delegation from Norway and Lebanon told the APP that this was their first time visiting Mohenjo-daro. They said that coming here has been a great pleasure. They stated that the drainage system of Mohenjo-daro is excellent. —APP

Dhee Rani Program to conduct 3,040 marriages in Feb

LAHORE: Under the special directives of Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif, the flagship "Dhee Rani Program" is rapidly approaching a historic milestone, with preparations underway to conduct 5,000 collective marriages before the holy month of Ramadan. Punjab Minister for Social Welfare & Bait-ul-Mal Sohail Shaukat Butt on Sunday announced that 3,040 additional collective marriages will be solemnized between February 3 and February 16, making it one of the largest mass marriage initiatives in the province's history. He said that 1,960 marriages have already been successfully conducted during the first phase of the current fiscal year, while the second phase will commence on February 3. The minister emphasized that the program is inclusive, providing equal support to deserving daughters from all religions, including Muslim, Hindu, Christian, and other communities. —APP

Luncheon hosted by Faisalabad photo journalists association at district bar

DNA

FAISALABAD: The Faisalabad Photo Journalists Association organized a dignified and prestigious luncheon at the District Bar, District Katchery, under the leadership of Press Club President Muhammad Tahir and Senior Vice President Javed Mehmood. A large number of prominent personalities from the city, including senior police officers, lawyers, members of the business community, and journalists, attended the event.

Regional Police Officer (RPO) Faisalabad, Sohail Akhtar Sakhri, and City Traffic Officer (CTO) Nasir Javed participated as chief guests. Also present on the occasion were Members of the Punjab Bar Council Chaudhry Qaiser Nazir Sahi and Chaudhry Imtiaz Lala, President District Bar Mian Tariq Mailsi, Secretary Bar Chaudhry Kaleem Ullah Gul, Vice President Rana Rashid Manj, Joint Secretary Malik Sajid Shakeel, President Law-

CM Maryam inaugurates Danish school Mankera

Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif interacted with the female students, and mingled with them. A little girl answered innocently to her question, "What sound does 'Ain' make?" Another innocent student expressed her feelings, "Your dress is very nice, I see you daily on TV, today I saw you in person

DNA

LAHORE: Lights of knowledge illuminated in Bhakkar, as Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif inaugurated Danish School Mankera and launched School Meal Program at Government Primary School Qisanwala, Mankera. She directed the authorities concerned to upgrade 03 schools in Mankera including Government Girls Primary School Qisanwala, and Government Elementary Schools in Kare and Noor Pur Shah at the earliest. She directed them to upgrade Government Girls Primary School Qisanwala from Primary to Elementary, and Government Elementary Schools in Kare and Noor Pur Shah to High level. She distributed lunch boxes among female students of Government Primary School Qisanwala, and visited a classroom there. She expressed happiness over seeing desks made from 'Milk Pack' wrappers. Relevant authorities briefed her that desks made from recycled empty 'Milk Pack' cartons can be used for up to 40 years. They added that the recycled furniture is not damaged by rain or temperatures up to 100 degrees Celsius. Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif interacted with the female students, and mingled with them. A little girl answered innocently to her question, "What sound does 'Ain' make?" Another innocent student expressed her feelings, "Your dress is very nice, I see you daily on TV, today I saw you in person." Chief Minister Maryam



Nawaz Sharif advised the girls to drink milk, eat good food and become strong. Upon arriving at Danish School, Chief Minister Punjab held hands of two children wearing white turbans and brought them along for the inauguration. She also visited the computer lab and library of Danish School Mankera, and said, "Books should be read, as reading books

increases knowledge and honor." She asked children various questions, went to them one by one, and took pictures. She went to the hostel of Danish School Girls Campus and celebrated birthdays of 03 students from Balochistan: Nirmal Tahreem, Shakeela Noor, and Anosha Kanwal by cutting a birthday cake, and expressing good wishes for the students

by saying, "May you have many more." Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif sat with the students and had a lunch with them. She advised them to work hard and progress, as they can achieve through hard work whatever seems impossible otherwise. She urged upon them never to be afraid or worry, If they don't know something, learn and try to

find a way out of the challenging situation. She said, "It gives me a great joy to see daughters progressing in every field." She vowed that as a mother, she will do whatever she could do for her daughters all across Punjab. Education Minister Rana Sikandar Hayat briefed her on School Meal Program and Danish Schools. He said that by recycling over 2 lakh empty 'Milk Pack' cartons from School Meal Program, they are now making furniture, copies, and pencils. He added that 13,197 students are enrolled in 20 Danish Schools across the province. He highlighted that Danish School Mankera project, started in 2017, has been completed by Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif. It has been established on 250 acres, and currently 770 students are studying here. Rana Sikandar Hayat also apprised her that CM School Meal Program is running in 8,319 schools, including 4,309 boys' and 4,010 girls' schools, across 13 districts of Punjab. He said that under the Program, students are receiving healthy lunches. He underscored that after the launch of School Meal Program, students enrollment has increased by 28% with an addition of 24,740 students. He added that under the School Meal Program, 3 crore 37 lakh 'Milk Packs' and 1 crore 22 lakh biscuits have been distributed. He noted that the School Meal Program is running in schools in Bahawalnagar, Kot Addu, Bhakkar, Layyah, Mianwali, Muzaffargarh, Rahim Yar Khan, Rajanpur, Taunsa, Chiniot, Lodhran, and Vehari.

Bara Political Alliance full support for Tirah displaced families

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the Tirah affectees. Tribal elders stated that corruption and political interference in the distribution of Rs 4 billion earmarked for Tirah victims is unacceptable. The agenda of the national jirga was presented by former Chairman of the Bara Political Alliance, Haji Shireen Afridi. Speaking on the occasion, he said that jirgas were held twice with the Kharwari, after which the responsibility was handed over to the provincial government and the tribal elders of Tirah. However, he added, both jirga efforts ultimately failed.

Ashrafi emphasizes interfaith harmony for peace

LAHORE: Prime Minister's Coordinator for Religious Harmony and Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC) Chairman Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi has said that Pakistan was committed to promoting interfaith harmony, dialogue, peace and tolerance which are vital for peaceful coexistence and national unity. In a message issued here on Sunday on the occasion of World Interfaith Harmony Week, being observed from February 1 to 7, he said that interfaith harmony was vital for peaceful coexistence and mutual respect among different religions and communities. The PM's coordinator said Pakistan was a society enriched with religious, cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity, which should be protected through dialogue and understanding. He added that Islam, the Constitution of Pakistan and the country's laws guaranteed respect for the rights of all humanity, irrespective of religion or belief. He said that the Constitution ensured religious freedom and equal rights for all citizens without discrimination. Hafiz Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi said that on the occasion of World Interfaith Harmony Week, a renewed commitment was being made to fully implement the code of conduct outlined in the Constitution of Pakistan and the national narrative of Paigham-e-Pakistan. He said all efforts aimed at promoting intolerance, extremism and division in society would be defeated. He also expressed solidarity with the armed forces and security institutions in their efforts to eliminate extremism and terrorism, saying religious scholars and citizens would stand shoulder to shoulder with state institutions to ensure peace, stability and national unity.

Ashrafi said promoting interfaith harmony was a shared national responsibility and urged all segments of society to play their role in strengthening tolerance, mutual respect and peaceful coexistence in the country. —DNA

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GB continues rehabilitation in earthquake hit chipurson valley

GILGIT: The Government of Gilgit Baltistan continued relief and rehabilitation operations in Chipurson Valley of Upper Hunza following the earthquake that struck parts of the region on December 19. According to official reports, three villages in Chipurson valley were immediately declared calamity hit after the quake to ensure a swift response and timely provision of emergency assistance. The earthquake, measuring between 5.6 and 5.8 on the Richter scale, was felt across Hunza, Ghizer and adjoining districts. Chipurson Valley emerged as the worst affected area, where according to government's initial reports, about 150 houses, 150 cathedrals, six water channels and an under construction power project got damaged. Chief Minister's Spokesperson

Shabbir Mir said the government responded promptly by placing all relevant departments on high alert. "Despite harsh weather conditions and difficult terrain, the Gilgit - Baltistan government ensured immediate medical assistance, road clearance and uninterrupted relief operations in the affected areas," he said, adding that on the advice of Chief Minister Justice Retired Yar Mohammad, Minister for Home Sajid Baig, Minister for Forests Sharafuddin and Minister for Tourism visited the valley to assess the situation firsthand and meet affected residents. He said road connectivity in Chipurson Valley was restored within 48 hours, restoring access up to the last village. Shabbir Mir said the government was working closely with partner organizations to ensure sustained relief efforts. "Our focus extends beyond immediate assistance to a coordinated rehabilitation plan and ensuring the long term safety of affected communities," he added. On January 22, an army team visited Chipurson Valley and distributed relief items, including 3000 liters of kerosene oil, 15 tents, 100 sets of warm clothing and 100 ration packs. Each ration pack contained wheat flour, pulses, sugar, cooking oil, milk powder and tea. Likewise, relief items distributed by the Gilgit - Baltistan Disaster Management Authority (GDBD) include 250 winterized tents, 250 food packs, 650 blankets, 250 hygiene kits, 300 kerosene heaters, 100 shawls, 45 kitchen sets, 900 bottles of drinking water and 150 milk pack cartons. —DNA

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

FEBRUARY

Feb 04/Sri Lanka National Day
Feb 06/N. Zealand National Day
Feb 06/Uganda Army Day
Feb 11/Iran Revolution day
Feb 16/DPR Korea National Day
Feb 16/Lithuania National Day
Feb 18/Gambia National Day
Feb 19/Nepal Democracy Day
Feb 23/Uzbekistan National Day
Feb 23/Brunei National Day
Feb 23/Guyana National Day
Feb 23/Russia National Army Day
Feb 23/Tajikistan Armed Forces Day
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Turkish Airlines.....8494949



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Cantonment Board 9270151-3



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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480



MIRPUR: Namaz e Janaza of AJK President Sultan Mahmood Ch being offered. PM AJK, former PM Sardar Tanvir Ilyas and others offering Namaz e Janaza. – DNA

From cradle to classrooms Punjab's orphanages providing care to vulnerable kids

RAWALPINDI: The Punjab Social Welfare and Bait-ul-Maal Department is running three government children homes in Rawalpindi that provide shelter, care and real opportunities to orphaned, destitute and other vulnerable children. This silent service is, on one hand, a symbol of societal beauty and a magnificent example of serving humanity on the other hand. According to Deputy Director Social Welfare, Rukhsana Mazhar Awan, these facilities function as genuine caring centers where children are raised in a family-like atmosphere rather than an institutional setting. One of the homes, established in 2009, currently looks after twenty-eight boys between the ages of six and eighteen. The boys receive regular nutritious meals, secure accommodation, formal schooling coupled with religious education, sports and recreational activities and routine medical check-ups and treatment", she said maintaining that the emphasis remained on giving them a structured yet caring envi-

ronment that supports their physical health, emotional well-being and overall development. For the very youngest children there is a separate early-years home that cares for boys and girls from birth up to six years of age. All services here are completely free. "Abandoned, orphaned or otherwise vulnerable infants and infants are provided institutional care, nursery-level early education, balanced and nutritious food, full health and hygiene support, medical treatment whenever needed", Rukhsana explained. The atmosphere being provided to these youngest groups also includes occasional recreational outings and seasonal clothing. The focus is on early intervention so these children get a stable, healthy and developmentally rich start in life instead of facing the dangers of growing up without family protection. The third home serves girls and currently facilitates 42 residents. It offers shelter along with continuous education that begins at the preparatory level and con-

tinues right up to intermediate. The girls also receive religious and moral guidance, good meals, clothing, medical care and various recreational activities aimed at helping them grow into confident individuals. The Deputy Director said that the long term objective of the homes is to equip them with enough education and life skills to break free from poverty and build independent futures. Rukhsana Mazhar explained that these three homes together create an important safety net covering every stage of childhood, from infancy through adolescence. While the Social Welfare Department bears the main responsibility for running expenses, contributions from individuals, families and community groups provide valuable additional support. Rukhsana invited anyone who wishes to help, contribute whether through donations, sponsorship or other forms of assistance to contact the Social Welfare Department directly. Every contribution, she said, strengthens the effort to give vulnerable

children in Rawalpindi a genuine chance at a better and more secure life. APP learned that sufficient staff, furniture, utilities and rooms are available for these three homes. The teachers, guide and the supporting staff are committed and disciplined in their kids and assignments. During brief separate interactions with the heads and staffers, it was revealed that these shelter homes are being run by dedicated specialists. "We are doing what we are assigned for, this makes us proud in this world and afterwards", said a teacher at one of the homes. The homes are decorated with beautiful sceneries, curtains, and paintings giving true home sense. "Besides beautifying the environment, these drawings and writings give a message to the residents of these homes as well as reminder for us to remain committed", said another teacher. From small toys to compact lawns, all the three homes reflect the Punjab government's priority policies for the orphans and other vulnerable children.—APP

Over 50 criminals held

The development comes as a three-day Basant festival is set to kick off in Lahore from February 6, following the Punjab government's decision to lift a ban on the historic event after 18 years, with strict regulations

ISLAMABAD Police arrested 54 individuals and seized over 21,000 kites and chemical strings in January as part of a crackdown against hazardous kite-flying material, state-run reported on Sunday. Kite-flying is often associated with severe and sometimes fatal accidents. Kite-flying festival – Basant – was banned in 2007 in Punjab because of an increasing number of deaths and serious injuries caused by sharp strings, particularly to motorcyclists and pillion riders, as well as by celebratory gunfire. Quoting Islamabad police spokesperson, APP reported that police teams carried out raids across the capital territory during which they arrested 54 people in relation to kite-flying and trading, alongside recovering over 11,000

kites and more than 10,000 chemical strings. "Charkis and other related material were also recovered from the suspects," APP reported, adding that police have registered cases against the suspects. Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Qazi Ali Raza told media, "Kite-flying is not a harmless pastime but a deadly activity that has claimed innocent lives and caused serious injuries, particularly to motorcyclists, pedestrians and children." He noted that the chemical strings used in kites "pose a grave threat to human life and can result in permanent disability or death". SSP Raza urged parents to "educate their children about the dangers and legal consequences of kite-flying and play their role as responsible citizens," the report quoted him as saying. He further detailed that awareness efforts regarding the matter were underway as well. He stressed that the Islamabad police have a "zero tolerance policy against kite flying, kite stalling and the use of chemical string". The officer asserted that strict legal action would continue against those engaging in the practice. According to the report, citizens have been urged to report people violating the policy through the emergency helpline Pucar-15 or the nearest people station. The development comes as a three-day Basant festival is set to kick off in Lahore from February 6, following the Punjab government's decision to lift a ban on the historic event after 18 years, with strict regulations.—APP

Effective human capital management for SME growth stressed

He appreciated the initiative and stressed the need for closer collaboration between productivity organizations and the private sector to translate learning into practical outcomes

ISLAMABAD : Chief Executive Officer of the National Productivity Organization (NPO) Muhammad Alamgir Chaudhry on Sunday highlighted the critical role of effective human capital management in enhancing the competitiveness and productivity of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Speaking at the closing session of the four-day international workshop on "Human Capital Management in SMEs", he said that NPO remains committed to supporting SMEs through targeted capacity-building initiatives, policy advocacy, and continued collaboration with the Asian

Productivity Organization (APO), Japan. The workshop brought together policymakers, productivity practitioners, industry representatives, and international participants to deliberate on strategies for strengthening human capital practices in SMEs, said a news release. A vote of thanks on behalf of the participants was presented by Dr. Anthony Cinco Sales of the Philippines, who appreciated NPO Pakistan, APO Japan, the resource persons and the organizers for the well-structured programme and valuable learning opportunities. Member NPO Board of Directors Sahibzadi Maheen Khan

ICT Police post 68.6 safety score

ISLAMABAD: With a 68.6 percent public safety score and a 23 percent overall reduction in crime, Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police have reported a landmark improvement in law and order during 2025, as the force presented its annual performance report before the Justice Committee. A police spokesperson told APP on Sunday that under the leadership of Inspector General of Police Islamabad Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, ICT Police submitted a comprehensive review highlighting major gains in security, public facilitation and modern policing across the federal capital. According to the report, overall crime declined by 23 percent from January 1, 2024 to December 31, 2025, while crime-related calls received on the emergency helpline "Pucar-15" dropped by 32 percent, reflecting improved preventive policing and increased public confidence. The report stated that due to effective policing and round-the-clock patrolling in residential and commercial areas, business activity and routine life continued smoothly across Islamabad throughout the year. During 2025, Islamabad Police arrested 1,552 court absconders, 2,062 proclaimed offenders and 990 habitual criminals. In 1,594 cases, police arrested 1,395 accused and recovered stolen property worth Rs 536 million. In actions against illegal weapons, 2,375 suspects were arrested and 2,336 cases registered, with a large quantity of arms and ammunition seized. Similarly, in anti-narcotics operations, 1,889 suspects were arrested and significant quantities of hashish, heroin, ice, opium and liquor were recovered. The report highlighted that several high-profile cases involving terrorism, murder, kidnapping, dacoity and other serious crimes were successfully solved, with accused persons arrested and challans submitted before courts. On the infrastructure front, it was shared that 76 percent construction work of the Federal Prison Islamabad has been completed, and the jail is expected to become fully operational during 2026. The first Superintendent of Prisons has already been appointed. The report underscored the role of modern technology, including AI-based software, digital surveillance, CDR analysis, Hotel Eye, Travel Eye, tenant registration systems and special search operations. Automated checkpoints equipped with number plate and facial recognition cameras were also established, while police officers were provided with body-worn cameras and modern wireless systems.—APP

Rs 7b agriculture plan DG gives ginger cultivation subsidy allotment letters

ISLAMABAD: Director General Agriculture Research Punjab Dr Sajid ur Rehman distributed allotment letters among selected farmers for the provision of subsidies under the Ginger Cultivation Promotion Programme, launched as part of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif's Rs 7 billion Agriculture Transformation Plan for the Potohar region. The allotment letters were distributed during a ceremony held here, which was attended by Additional Director General Agriculture Research Dr Ubaid ur Rehman, Regional Manager/Director Project Management Unit Muhammad Irfan Mann, Assistant Regional Project Management Unit Ayesha Akhtar, Director Vegetable Research Institute Faisalabad Amir Latif, Director Centre of Excellence for Olive Research and Training Chakwal Dr Ramzan Ansar, besides a large number of farmers, said a press release here. Addressing the ceremony, Dr Sajid ur Rehman said that Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif had introduced a Rs 7 billion Agriculture Transformation Plan specifically for the Potohar region, to modernize agriculture and enhance farmers' income. He said that under this plan, a dedicated programme had been launched to promote ginger cultivation as a high-value cash crop. He said that under the Ginger Cultivation Promotion Programme, subsidies would be provided to promote ginger cultivation on 100 acres over a period of three years, adding that in the first phase, 10 selected farmers were being facilitated.—APP

Briefs

Motorcycle accidents drop by over 70 pc

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) has reported a significant reduction of over 70 percent in motorcycle-related accidents following a strict enforcement campaign against lane violations and non-compliance with helmet rules in the federal capital. An ITP official told APP on Sunday that during January 2025, a total of 17 fatal accidents were reported, while 14 other accidents resulted in injuries. Similarly, in December 2025, 10 fatal accidents and 14 injury-related accidents were recorded. He said that after the launch of a focused campaign against helmet violations and improper lane usage by motorcyclists, the number of accidents dropped sharply, with only five accidents reported in January 2026. Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Islamabad Hamzah Humayun said that the positive results clearly show that lane discipline and adherence to traffic laws can save precious human lives. He added that traffic police officers and personnel remain present on roads round the clock to protect citizens and ensure safer travel. The CTO Hamzah urged citizens, particularly motorcyclists, to strictly avoid lane violations, follow traffic rules and adopt responsible driving behavior. He emphasized that motorcyclists must stay in the left lane and maintain a safe speed at all times. He further said that Islamabad Traffic Police will continue enforcement measures to further reduce road accidents and improve traffic discipline across the city.—APP

Police conduct grand search and combing operation

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police conducted a grand search and combing operation in various areas of Shams Colony police station jurisdiction as part of ongoing efforts to curb crime and strengthen security in the federal capital. A police spokesperson told APP on Sunday that the operation was carried out under the supervision of SP Industrial Area Zone. Lady police personnel also participated in the operation, while all officers and officials were thoroughly briefed before the exercise. During the search operation, police teams checked 1,950 individuals, 1,450 households, and 388 shops, hostels and plazas. In addition, 361 motorcycles and 131 vehicles were also inspected. The spokesperson said that during the operation, 10 suspicious persons and four motorcycles were shifted to the police station for further verification and legal proceedings. He added that the purpose of the search and combing operation was to prevent crime and ensure a peaceful environment in the area. The spokesperson said that Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi has issued clear directions to conduct grand search operations across the district to eliminate criminal elements.—APP

DIG security holds orderly room

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police's Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Security Muhammad Ateeq Tahir held an orderly room in his office to ensure the timely and priority resolution of departmental and personal issues faced by police officers. A police official told APP on Sunday that officers from the Security Division participated in the orderly room, during which they presented their official and personal grievances directly to the DIG Security. The official said that DIG Security Muhammad Ateeq Tahir directed the concerned officers to conduct fresh inquiries into serious matters, while issuing instructions for the prompt resolution of other pending issues on a priority basis.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Organizers and Diplomats along with visitors taking interest in traditional things on different stalls during the Two-Day Pakistan Tourism Festival, at Sports Complex in Federal Capital.

IRS hosts expert webinar on regional peace prospects

Opening the discussion, Ambassador Jauhar Saleem, President of IRS, described the 20-point UN-mandated peace framework as a potential pathway forward amid limited alternatives. He noted that while the current ceasefire has yielded partial stabilization, the transition to its second phase is expected to face significant political and security obstacles

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) convened an expert webinar titled "Israel's War on Gaza and Imperatives for Regional Peace", to examine the evolving dynamics of the Gaza conflict, the 20-point US peace framework and the diplomatic challenges confronting regional and international stakeholders. Dr. Mahjoob Zweiiri, Visiting Professor in the Politics and International Relations Program at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, delivered the keynote address. Opening the discussion, Ambassador Jauhar Saleem, President of IRS, described the 20-point UN-mandated peace framework as a potential pathway forward amid limited alternatives. He

noted that while the current ceasefire has yielded partial stabilization, the transition to its second phase is expected to face significant political and security obstacles. Ambassador Saleem highlighted the absence of an explicit and credible roadmap toward Palestinian statehood within the framework, despite sustained diplomatic engagement by the United States and its partners. In his remarks, Dr. Zweiiri underscored the difficulty of assessing prospects for durable peace in Gaza in the context of ongoing ceasefire violations. He identified a range of structural and political constraints affecting post-ceasefire recovery, including restrictions on the operations of international and local humanitarian organizations and delays in implementing

agreed provisions of the peace framework. According to Dr. Zweiiri, these delays have complicated the transition from the first phase of the plan—focused primarily on hostage releases—to the second phase, which is intended to address longer-term stabilization and governance arrangements. The discussion also examined the role of regional actors in shaping diplomatic outcomes. Dr. Zweiiri noted that engagement by countries such as Türkiye and Pakistan could contribute to broader international participation in discussions on Gaza's future, particularly in relation to reconstruction and post-conflict governance. He observed that expanding the range of diplomatic stakeholders may help mitigate perceptions of concentrated influence

in decision-making processes concerning the Strip. Addressing humanitarian conditions, Dr. Zweiiri emphasized the importance of sustained aid flows as an integral component of security and stability. He referenced reports indicating that humanitarian access to Gaza has remained below agreed levels under the ceasefire arrangement confirmed in October 2025. Participants noted that improving humanitarian delivery mechanisms will be central to maintaining the ceasefire and supporting conditions for longer-term peace. The webinar concluded with a discussion on the implications of the second phase of the ceasefire for regional stability and the role of multilateral diplomacy in supporting a durable political settlement.

Pakistan Railways investing over Rs 31b in track upgrades

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways (PR) is investing over Rs 31 billion in six major development projects aimed at the upgrading and rehabilitation of the country's railway network. The move will improve safety standards, enhance operational efficiency and provide better, faster and more reliable services to passengers and freight operators nationwide. According to a document available with Wealth Pakistan, these projects are being executed under the Public Sector Development Program (PSDP). The work on track safety from Rohri to Khanpur section in Sukkur Division has been estimated at Rs 4.87 billion. Similarly, track safety project from Tando Adam to Rohri section in Sukkur Division will be carried out against an estimated cost of Rs 4.83 billion. Essential track safety works on Kreamari to Hyderabad section, 40 minutes on Khanewal-Shorkot-Faisalabad-Qila Sheikhupura-Shahdara section, 56 minutes on Rohri-Sibi section and 106 minutes on the Sher Shah-Kundian section.—DNA

essential track safety works on Khanewal to Shahdara section via Shorkot, Faisalabad and Qila Sheikhupura, covering both Multan and Lahore divisions, will cost Rs 6.3 billion. Essential track safety works on Sher Shah to Kundian section in Multan division is estimated to cost Rs 4.9 billion. And essential track safety work on the Rohri to Sibi section in Sukkur division will cost Rs 4.9 billion. The projects will not only make travel safer and more convenient but also reduce the travel time between major railway stations. As per the document, all these projects, on completion, will save 55 minutes of travel time on Tando Adam to Rohri section, 27 minutes on Rohri to Khanpur, 25 minutes on Kreamari-Hyderabad section, 40 minutes on Khanewal-Shorkot-Faisalabad-Qila Sheikhupura-Shahdara section, 56 minutes on Rohri-Sibi section and 106 minutes on the Sher Shah-Kundian section.—DNA

CDA rolls out regulated community market to back local businesses

ISLAMABAD: The Capital Development Authority (CDA) has rolled out a fully regulated Community Market in Islamabad to promote youth entrepreneurship and support local businesses, amid a growing trend of informal pop-up markets across the federal capital. The initiative aims to provide a structured, transparent, and civic-compliant platform for students and small entrepreneurs while ensuring municipal oversight and public-interest standards. The latest Community Market was organised on Sunday at Fatima Jinnah Park (F-9 Park), in front of the Gandhara Citizen Club, and featured over 20 stalls run primarily by students, young entrepreneurs, and local artisans.

The stalls showcased handmade, organic, and home-made products and attracted hundreds of visitors, reflecting strong public interest in community-based and locally focused marketplaces. In line with the government's vision of a digital and documented economy, the market is operating on a cashless payment system, with vendors facilitating digital transactions for customers. Among the stallholders was Mahnoor, a college student selling indoor plants, who said the regulated platform had helped her reach a wider audience and establish credibility. "As a student entrepreneur, it is difficult to find a proper place to sell without trust," she told APP. "Being part of a CDA-managed market gives confidence to both sellers and buyers."

CDA spokesperson said the Community Market is part of the authority's broader efforts to encourage community engagement while formalising small-scale entrepreneurship under a clear regulatory framework.

Mass-produced and imported items are strictly prohibited, and vendors are selected through a scrutiny process to ensure compliance with CDA rules. Speaking to APP, Director Municipal Administration (DMA) Islamabad Dr Syeda Anam Fatima said the initiative reflects CDA's commitment to creating safe, inclusive, and well-regulated

FPCCI hails PM's eco package for export-led growth

ISLAMABAD: Atif Ikram Sheikh, President of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), stated today that the business community wholeheartedly welcomes the Prime Minister's historic economic package. He described the announcement as a pivotal turning point in the "Maarka-e-Maishat" (Economic Battle), placing Pakistan firmly on the path toward export-led growth. Addressing a press conference at the FPCCI Capital Office, Mr. Sheikh emphasized the necessity of promoting a "District Economy." He declared, "Our resolve is to transform 'Made in Pakistan' into an exemplary global brand and turn the country into an export-led powerhouse." Policy Support & Cooperation: The FPCCI President clarified that the federation's philosophy is based on cooperation rather than opposition. "We acknowledge the constraints imposed by the IMF and the government's limitations, yet we strive for meaningful partnerships," he added. Energy Relief: The business community welcomed the Rs. 4.04 per unit reduction in electricity prices, expressing hope for further cuts in the coming days. Wheeling Mechanism: Mr. Sheikh noted that an active wheeling mechanism, a long-standing FPCCI demand, will provide industries access to cheaper energy, helping exporters meet global market requirements. Monetary Policy: He urged a further reduction in the policy rate, suggesting a gradual decrease to 7% to stimulate investment and alleviate poverty. The Blue Passport Initiative: The announcement of the Blue Passport facility for exporters was lauded as a significant step in boosting the prestige and morale of the business community. Despite the positive outlook, Atif Ikram Sheikh warned that the immediate recovery of Rs. 300 billion in Super Tax could "break the back" of the industry. He cautioned that this move would trigger a severe liquidity crisis and disrupt the business ecosystem, urging the government to find a more reasonable and balanced solution. To solve economic issues permanently, the FPCCI proposed appointing a District Economic Commissioner in every district, modeled after the Deputy Commissioner (DC) and DPO. This official would be responsible for.—DNA

ITP vans to visit multiple localities

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) has announced a week-long schedule of its Facilitation on Wheels service across different areas of the federal capital from February 2 to February 8, 2026, to provide essential services to citizens at accessible locations. An ITP official told APP on Sunday that the facilitation vans, including the Police Station on Wheels (PS on Wheel), will operate daily from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, offering services including missing documents reports, character certificates, duplicate driving licences, driving licence renewal and learner permits. The official said the initiative reflects the Islamabad Police's commitment to people-friendly policing, enabling citizens to access multiple services without visiting police offices.—APP

Abbasi highlights major railway reforms

HAVELIAN: Federal Minister for Railways Hanif Abbasi on Saturday highlighted wide-ranging reforms and development initiatives in Pakistan Railways, stating that improved services, infrastructure upgrades and digitalisation had significantly boosted public confidence and revenue. Talking to the media at Havelian Railway Station after inauguration of refurbished track of Hazara express train. The minister said that his visit had turned into a public gathering, reflecting public interest in railway development. He described Havelian Railway Station as a historic site and noted that he belonged to the Hazara region. Abbasi said Pakistan Railways had achieved several key targets, announcing that six train rakes had been allocated for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to facilitate passengers travelling from Peshawar to Karachi. He added that the Hazara Express had been upgraded with new and refurbished coaches, improving travel comfort. Highlighting reforms, he said 60 railway stations across the country had been digitised, enhancing efficiency and transparency. He further stated that a Rs 600 billion Karachi-Rohri railway track project was underway, while the proposed Rohri-Nokundi line would link the mineral-rich Chagai region and strengthen regional connectivity with Central Asian countries, including Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Referring to financial performance, the railways minister said that earnings from passenger and freight services reached record levels in December, with revenues touching Rs 10 billion in a single month.—APP

Greenlanders' fever dream over but nightmares continue

NIC ROBERTSON

ON Sunday, after two and a half weeks' reporting from Nuuk, Greenland, my team and I finally boarded a plane and said goodbye. Leaving is hard. Greenland has me in its thrall, in rapture of its raw beauty and seduced by its quiet Inuit culture. But it's a good thing to exit. Tonnes of journalists and equipment, clearing out, making space for Greenlanders to reflect on what just happened. As our producer, Ben, sagely observed, their fever dream has broken. Residents of this giant, icebound Arctic island could be forgiven for thinking they might awaken back to a simpler time, before the trauma of President Donald Trump's ratcheting up of demands to own Greenland just a few weeks ago. But they are not where they began and they know it. Instead, they are awakening to an uneasy new reality. Trump's capricious claims over their sovereignty are not over and his apparently flimsy grasp of basic facts about their homeland does not appear to have improved. White House tweets make that abundantly clear. Were it not for his declaration at Davos last week, forswearing a military invasion of Greenland, an image posted of the president trudging across a snow field toward a Greenland flag, hand in wing with a penguin, would be triggering a renewed fever for its residents. What I learned during my time in Greenland is that nature and its preservation are at the heart of Inuit culture. The apparent trolling is hard to fathom, much less take seriously. For a start, penguins – as everyone knows – live exclusively at the South Pole. Greenland is at the opposite end of the planet. But such incontrovertible truths seem to have become eclipsed by expansionist ambitions. Trump says he must own Greenland for the US' "national security," so he feels "psychologically" empowered to take it for his soon-to-be-built Golden Dome missile protective shield for the US. He might deny that he covets the minerals and rare earths buried below its ice sheets, but many are skeptical. What's more, both objectives are already within his grasp. As Denmark, of which Greenland is a semi-autonomous territory, has made repeatedly clear to Trump's diplomats, the 1951 defense agreement between these two sovereign nations grants sweeping rights for the US to base missiles and troops, as well as mine minerals and rare earths, to its heart's content. What I learned during my all-too-brief time in Greenland is that nature and

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its preservation are at the heart of Inuit culture. Locals told me they believed that Trump would have no regard for their most precious commodity, which is inextricably linked to their identity. Instead, the White House's messaging seems to indicate they are either planning to introduce an alien species to Greenland or simply do not understand what it is they covet. Greenlanders, on the other hand, know exactly what they fear and why. They do not trust Trump. The president's apparent about-face at Davos, rescinding threats of military action and announcing, after meeting NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte, that an "agreement" had been hatched, giving him everything he wanted, carries no water – or ice for that matter – in Greenland. For Greenlanders, Trump is an open book, each new chapter strewn with the same falsehoods and self-aggrandizement. They also saw what he did in Venezuela, a leader plucked from a country with air defenses and an army, of which Greenland has neither. Instead, it relies on Denmark and, by extension, NATO – and America, to defend it.

In the extremes of Greenland, uncertainty is an ever-present state of being. Flights are often canceled at the last minute.

The night before we left, the power abruptly went out across Nuuk, its 20,000 residents plunged into darkness. A few hours later, the internet also throttled back. Plenty of well-educated and rational Nuummiqs (as the capital's residents are known) fretted they were about to experience a Venezuela redux. Relief came just before daybreak and the slow, late morning sunrise. Power lines that had come down in the strong and unusual easterly winds were repaired. In the extremes of Greenland, uncertainty is an ever-present state of being. Flights are often canceled at the last minute. In fact, several were before our bumpy, wind-jerked aircraft took off. But Trump has injected a fresh layer of nervousness that Greenlanders see as entirely unnecessary.

Now he is back where he started, apparently reengaging in a dialogue that Denmark and Greenland's foreign ministers thought they had already concluded with Vice President J.D. Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio at the White House two weeks ago.

With details of the new post-Davos agreement as scarce as penguins at the North Pole, no Greenlander is confident Trump will not up the ante again – and many are convinced that the mercurial president may do exactly that sooner rather than later. But what Greenlanders feel most acutely is that Trump's at times relentless rhetoric has shown no regard to their beliefs and feelings. Never once, they say, has he even tried to assuage their misgivings in his bellicose speeches. As if riding blind on a seaside roller coaster, residents are now left with an uncomfortable feeling in the pit of their stomachs and resentment that was not visible a few weeks ago is bubbling up. On our way to Nuuk's airport, we drove past freshly mounted posters of Trump next to Jeffrey Epstein with the words "Yes to NATO" and something altogether less flattering about the US president. Trump has roiled the quiet calm that Greenlanders cherish as their birthright. It needn't have been this way.

Russia and the Gentle Weight of History

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



Russia's internal transformation carries consequences beyond its borders. A state organised around personalised authority and sustained confrontation is less inclined towards compromise. Foreign policy becomes an extension of domestic legitimacy, and external conflict reinforces internal control. For neighbouring regions, this has meant heightened insecurity and diminished predictability. For the wider international system, it complicates engagement.

Diplomacy with a government that equates dissent with betrayal and negotiation with weakness becomes inherently fragile

FOR much of the early post-Soviet period, Russia occupied an uncertain space between authoritarian tradition and democratic aspiration. The collapse of the Soviet Union had opened political life, loosened censorship, and allowed a degree of pluralism that was unprecedented in modern Russian history. Yet, more than three decades later, those openings have narrowed to the point where they are barely visible. Under President Vladimir Putin, Russia has moved steadily away from even the limited competition and debate that once existed, towards a system defined by personal rule, repression, and the systematic removal of political alternatives. This transformation did not occur overnight. It has been the product of gradual institutional erosion, selective crackdowns, and the steady expansion of executive power. Each phase was justified as a response to instability, terrorism, foreign pressure, or national decline. Together, they have reshaped the Russian state into one where authority flows from a small circle around the presidency, and where dissent is no longer treated as a legitimate feature of public life but as a threat to be neutralised. When Putin came to power in 2000, he inherited a country exhausted by economic crisis and political fragmentation. His early promise was order. Regional governors were brought to heel, powerful businessmen were reminded that wealth depended on political obedience, and federal institutions were strengthened. For many Russians, these measures were welcomed. The chaos of the 1990s had discredited the language of reform, and stability appeared more valuable than abstract freedoms. Yet the price of that stability soon became clear. Independent television channels were placed under state control. Political parties that failed to align themselves with the Kremlin found their access to elections restricted. Courts increasingly ruled in favour of the executive. Over time, what emerged was not the restoration of a strong state governed by law, but a political system in which the law served the interests of those in power. Elections continued, but their meaning changed. Outcomes became predictable, opposition candidates were excluded on technical grounds, and media coverage overwhelmingly favoured the incumbent leadership. Political competition survived largely as performance, not as a mechanism for accountability. This shift marked the transition from managed politics to enforced loyalty. The most visible sign of Russia's political descent has been the narrowing of space for independent voices. Journalists, activists, academics, and cultural figures who once operated within defined limits have found those limits erased. New legislation has steadily expanded the definition of "extremism," "foreign influence," and "discrediting the state." These elastic terms allow authorities to prosecute critics without needing to demonstrate genuine threats. Civil society organisations have been particularly vulnerable. Groups working on election monitoring, human rights, or historical memory have been labelled undesirable or forced to close. Their offices have been raided, accounts frozen, and staff harassed. What remains is a network of officially approved organisations that echo state narratives and avoid sensitive subjects. Ordinary citizens have also been drawn into this atmosphere. Public demonstrations are rare and swiftly broken up. Online expression is monitored. Employers, universities, and local administrations increasingly act as extensions of the security system, discouraging any behaviour that might attract unwanted attention. The result is not only political silence but social caution – a widespread habit of self-censorship that reaches into daily life. Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine marked a decisive stage in this political evolution. Conflict has always offered authoritarian systems an opportunity to consolidate power, and the Kremlin has used the war to entrench controls that might once have provoked broader resistance. New laws criminalised criticism of military operations. Independent media outlets were blocked or forced into exile. Thousands were detained for anti-war statements, some receiving lengthy prison sentences. Even the use of certain words became grounds for prosecution. In this environment, the line between political opposition and criminal behaviour effectively disappeared. The war also provided a powerful ideological tool. State media framed the conflict as a civilisational struggle, portraying Russia as besieged by hostile forces determined to weaken and humiliate it. This narrative served two purposes: it justified repression at home and diverted attention from domestic failures. Economic hardship, corruption, and demographic decline could be attributed to external enemies rather than internal policy. At the same time, the prolonged nature of the war has deepened the state's reliance on coercion. Mobilisation, surveillance, and expanded security powers have become normalised. Emergency measures have hardened into permanent features of governance.

A striking feature of contemporary Russia is the emptiness of its institutions. Parliament, once noisy and fragmented, now functions largely as a rubber stamp. Legislation is drafted within the executive and approved with minimal debate. The judiciary, formally independent, rarely challenges the state in politically sensitive cases. Governors are selected less for local legitimacy than for personal loyalty. This hollowing out has long-term consequences. Institutions that lack autonomy also lack credibility. They cannot mediate conflict, channel social demands, or provide lawful remedies. Instead, grievances accumulate beneath the surface, while formal politics becomes detached from social reality. Such systems often appear stable until they are not. Their rigidity limits the state's ability to adapt, to correct mistakes, or to incorporate new social forces. By concentrating authority at the top, they also concentrate responsibility. Success is claimed by the leadership; failure, when it comes, will be difficult to deflect.

It would be misleading to describe Russian society as uniformly terrorised or uniformly supportive. What exists instead is a complex mixture of accommodation, fatigue, indifference, and quiet unease. Many citizens have learned to navigate the system by keeping politics at a distance.

They focus on family, work, and private life, avoiding public statements. For others, state media's constant emphasis on external threat resonates, reinforcing feelings of national grievance and defensive pride. Yet beneath these layers lies a growing sense of stagnation. Economic opportunities are limited, especially outside major cities. Sanctions and isolation have narrowed horizons. Young people face restricted mobility and uncertain futures. The social con-

tract that once traded rising living standards for political passivity has weakened. What replaces it is less a shared vision than a set of constraints. Even cultural life reflects this duality. Theatres, exhibitions, and publishing houses continue to operate, but boundaries are tightly policed. Art may flourish in form, but its themes are increasingly cautious. History is reinterpreted to serve present needs, and alternative readings are marginalised.

At the centre of this system stands a single figure whose authority overshadows all others. Over time, Russia's political structure has been reshaped around the presidency. Decision-making is concentrated, succession is uncertain, and loyalty to the leader has become the primary criterion for advancement. Such systems possess a particular vulnerability. By weakening institutions, they also weaken mechanisms of renewal. Leadership becomes irreplaceable in rhetoric but irremovable in practice. Political life narrows to the maintenance of power rather than the management of society. The cultivation of traditional values, patriotic rituals, and selective historical memory plays an important role here. These narratives provide moral language for obedience and frame political loyalty as cultural authenticity. Yet they cannot resolve structural problems. They may postpone reckoning, but they cannot prevent it. Russia's internal transformation carries consequences beyond its borders. A state organised around personalised authority and sustained confrontation is less inclined towards compromise. Foreign policy becomes an extension of domestic legitimacy, and external conflict reinforces internal control. For neighbouring regions, this has meant heightened insecurity and diminished predictability. For the wider international system, it complicates engagement. Diplomacy with a government that equates dissent with betrayal and negotiation with weakness becomes inherently fragile.

At the same time, Russia's experience offers a broader lesson. The erosion of political freedoms rarely begins with dramatic rupture. It advances through incremental adjustments, justified as temporary or necessary. By the time repression becomes unmistakable, the institutions capable of resisting it have often already been neutralised.

Russia today stands as a case study in how a society can drift from imperfect openness to entrenched authoritarianism without a single decisive break. Each step along the way was presented as correction, defence, or consolidation. Together, they have produced a system where power is insulated from accountability, and where public life is organised around caution rather than participation. Whether this trajectory can be reversed remains an open question. History suggests that systems built on fear and loyalty rather than consent and law face inherent limits. Economic strain, generational change, and the unpredictable consequences of war all exert pressure. Yet pressure alone does not guarantee transformation. For now, Russia's political reality is defined less by the promise of reform than by the management of control. It is a condition shaped not only by the will of those at the top, but by the slow weakening of the structures that once offered society a voice. In that erosion lies the deeper story of Russia's descent not merely into a harsher state, but into a political order where the future is increasingly confined by the present.

Defeat, Disappointment and Proxy Terrorism

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



The challenge confronting Pakistan today is not conventional war, but a form of cowardly terrorism that deliberately avoids military confrontation and instead seeks to terrorise civilians. Labourers, passengers, and unarmed citizens have become preferred targets, revealing the moral emptiness of those who claim political purpose yet resort to indiscriminate violence

HISTORY reminds us that even hostility, when exercised between states, has traditionally been restrained by certain moral and strategic conventions. A worthy adversary confronts openly, declares intent, and accepts consequences. There is an austere dignity in such conflict, however regrettable it may be. In stark contrast stands the conduct of a cowardly enemy – one that avoids direct engagement, shuns accountability, and wages war through deception, proxies, and terror. It is this degraded and dangerous form of hostility that Pakistan is compelled to confront today. Following its unmistakable setback in May 2025, India appears to have abandoned any remaining commitment to responsible statecraft. Unable to absorb defeat or recalibrate its approach, it has instead reverted to indirect warfare, employing subversive tactics designed to destabilise Pakistan from within. Sponsorship of separatist violence in Balochistan and the facilitation of terrorist infiltration across Pakistan's western borders are not isolated incidents, but elements of a coherent strategy rooted in frustration and desperation. Such conduct does not reflect strength; it betrays strategic exhaustion. Pakistan's assertions in this regard are grounded in evidence, not rhetoric. Detailed intelligence, material links, and operational trails pointing to Indian involvement and facilitation have repeatedly been placed before the international community. The use of Afghan territory by terrorist elements targeting Pakistan is equally well-documented. These militants neither operate independently nor represent spontaneous local resistance. They function within a broader architecture of proxy warfare, nurtured, guided, and sustained by external handlers pursuing objectives alien to regional peace. While India occupies a central

position in this hostile design, it has not acted in isolation. Certain external actors that aligned themselves with India during the events of May 2025, and whose technological capabilities were displayed before a global audience, cannot dissociate themselves from responsibility. Yet that same episode also reaffirmed a deeper and more enduring reality. Under the resolute command of Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, the Pakistan Army demonstrated not only operational superiority but also strategic maturity. Hostile designs were decisively crushed, deterrence was restored, and the nation's defensive credibility was reinforced. The challenge confronting Pakistan today is not conventional war, but a form of cowardly terrorism that deliberately avoids military confrontation and instead seeks to terrorise civilians. Labourers, passengers, and unarmed citizens have become preferred targets, revealing the moral emptiness of those who claim political purpose yet resort to indiscriminate violence. Such tactics are not born of ideology, but of fear and failure. They are designed to sow panic, provoke reaction, and create an illusion of relevance where none exists. Against this threat, Pakistan's response has been firm, coordinated, and measured. The armed forces, law enforcement agencies, and intelligence services remain vigilant and proactive, while the people themselves have demonstrated remarkable resilience. The sacrifices rendered by soldiers and civilians alike stand as solemn testimony to a nation's refusal to be coerced. There is a collective understanding that compromise on national security is neither prudent nor permissible.

At the centre of this proxy architecture lies the so-called Balochistan Liberation Army. Claiming to act in the name of Baloch rights, it has in reality become an instrument of external manipulation. Misguided by distant handlers and driven by agendas detached

from the genuine aspirations of the Baloch people, this group has steadily degenerated into criminality. In the vast and sparsely populated terrain of Balochistan, its militants increasingly resemble bandits rather than insurgents, relying on ambushes, extortion, and attacks on soft targets to mask their strategic irrelevance. Recent security operations have exposed the hollowness of the group's planning and execution. Poor coordination, lack of popular support, and growing operational pressure have resulted in rapid attrition. Their ranks are thinning, their networks unravelling, and their leadership increasingly isolated. These outcomes reflect not only the incompetence of the terrorists but also the professional excellence of Pakistan's law enforcement agencies, who have once again demonstrated discipline, precision, and resolve in upholding the writ of the state.

The message for the handlers of such proxies is unambiguous. Continued investment in these entities is futile. Their consistent failure delivers no strategic gain, only exposure, embarrassment, and eventual collapse. Proxy warfare may generate temporary disruption, but it cannot alter realities shaped by geography, history, and national will. Balochistan's future lies not in externally fuelled violence, but in stability, development, and meaningful integration within a secure and sovereign Pakistan. In the final analysis, cowardly hostility has never shaped the destiny of nations. History records that those who abandon open engagement in favour of shadow wars ultimately exhaust themselves. Pakistan has faced such challenges before and has emerged stronger each time. Those who strike from behind may inflict wounds, but they cannot determine outcomes. That authority rests with a vigilant state, a professional military, and a resilient people, united in their resolve to defend their homeland and secure their future.

Briefs

US, France among other nations slam Balochistan...

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solidarity with Pakistan in the fight against terrorism. The embassy's post, accompanied by the flags of France and Pakistan, stated: "We strongly condemn the recent terrorist attacks across Balochistan. Our heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims and our profound sympathy to all those affected." The message concluded with a firm declaration of unity: "We stand in solidarity with the people of Pakistan against terrorism in all its forms." The statement comes in the wake of multiple security incidents in Balochistan, which have resulted in numerous casualties among both security forces and civilians. The attacks have highlighted the ongoing security challenges in the region. France's public expression of condolence and support underscores the diplomatic ties between the two nations and a shared international commitment to counter-terrorism. Such messages of solidarity from key international partners are often seen as significant gestures of support for Pakistan's security forces and its people during times of crisis.

CM Sarfraz Bugti expresses resolve...

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welfare of the martyrs' children was the government's responsibility. "We had intelligence reports that this kind of operation is being planned, and as a result of those, we had already started pre-operations a day before, in which around 40 terrorists were killed in Shaban and Panjpur," he detailed. The chief minister noted that the terrorists had planned to attack Quetta from Shaban, adding that the forces were "very vigilant". CM Bugti termed the Gwadar incident, where he said five women and three children were killed, as the "most painful". Noting that a narrative of independence had been created, he said terrorists were using the Baloch on India's instructions.

Pakistan to play T20...

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play the T20 World Cup match against India on 15 February have come to light. The move was intended to show solidarity with Bangladesh, government sources told Geo News. Multiple factors influenced the decision, with the ICC's perceived biased stance towards Bangladesh playing a central role, they said, adding that the Pakistani team was instructed not to take the field against India on February 15 as "a form of protest". The sources said that ICC chief Jay Shah's partial decisions had effectively turned the International Cricket Council into an extension of the Indian cricket board. They further said that these biased decisions have undermined the principles of fairness and equality, accusing the ICC of applying different standards to different countries on its platform.

Pakistan clean...

FROM PAGE 01
Set to chase a daunting 208-run target, Australia's batting unit faltered against a Nawaz-led Pakistan bowling attack and could bow out in 16.5 overs. Experienced all-rounder Marcus Stoinis remained the top-scorer for the visitors with a 22-ball 23, followed by Cameron Green, who made a cautious 22 off 24 deliveries. Besides them, only wicket-keeper batter Josh Philippe (14) could amass double figures. Nawaz spearheaded Pakistan's bowling charge with sensational bowling figures of 5/18 in his four overs. He was supported by ace pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi, who bagged two wickets, while Abrahan Ahmed and Naseem Shah chipped in with one apiece.

Pakistan announces squad for ACC Women's Asia Cup

Pakistan 'A' are placed in Group A alongside India 'A', UAE and Nepal, while the Group B comprises of Bangladesh 'A', Sri Lanka 'A', Malaysia and hosts Thailand. Top two sides from each group will play semi-finals after playing three games each

DNA

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Sunday announced the Pakistan Women's 'A' squad for the upcoming ACC Women's Asia Cup Rising Stars 2026. The 20-over tournament was scheduled to take place from 13 to 22 February in Bangkok, Thailand. Pakistan 'A' are placed in Group A alongside India 'A', UAE and Nepal, while the Group B comprises of Bangladesh 'A', Sri Lanka 'A', Malaysia and hosts Thailand. Top two sides from each group will play semi-finals after playing three games each.

Off-spinning all-rounder Hani was set to lead the 15-member Pakistan 'A' squad in the tournament and will be aided by the experience of her fellow capped players including pacer Waheeda Akhtar and batter Shawaal Zulfiqar. Among oth-

er players, Pakistan Women's U19 captain Eman Naseer and batter Komal Khan have also received call-ups to Pakistan Women's 'A' after demonstrating quality skills during the recent 3-2 T20 series win over Bangladesh Women's U19. Gull Rukh, Hafsa Khalid, Huraina Sajjad are the other batters in the squad, while Yusra Amir is set to take the wicket-keeping duties. Left-arm spinners Anosha Nasir and Momina Riasat form a four-pronged spin attack with Hani and all-rounder Noreen Yaqoob. Meanwhile, experienced Waheeda Behram, Neha Sharmin Nadeem and Syeda Masooma Jafri. In the eight-team tournament, UAE, Nepal, Malaysia and Thailand will field their national women's teams, while the other four teams are participating with 'A' teams. A total of 30 players were called up to Hanif Mohammad High Performance Centre for a week-long prob-

ables camp from 25 January after which the 15-member squad has been shortlisted. The Thailand-bound squad will now take part in a pre-tournament camp at the same venue before departing on 10 February.

Pakistan Women's 'A' squad:

Batters: Eman Naseer (Islamabad), Gull Rukh (Dera Ghazi Khan), Hafsa Khalid (Karachi), Huraina Sajjad (Karachi), Shawaal Zulfiqar (Lahore)

Wicket-keeper: Yusra Amir (Karachi), Komal Khan (Lahore)

All-rounders: Noreen Yaqoob (Lahore) and Umm-e-Hani (Faisalabad)

Spinners: Anosha Nasir (Karachi), Momina Riasat (Abbottabad)

Pacers: Lubna Behram (Hunza), Neha Sharmin Nadeem (Karachi), Syeda Masooma Jafri (Karachi), Waheeda Akhtar (Lahore)

Non-travelling reserves: Zunash Abdul Sattar (Lahore), Maham Anees (Islam-

bad), Amber Kainat (Lahore) and Ayesha Bilal (Lahore)

Player support Personnel:

Muhammad Masroor (head coach), Shoaib Khan (batting coach), Naeem Tayyab (bowling coach), Jaweria Rauf (fielding coach), Taimoor Mehmood (strength & conditioning coach), Surakhsha Shaker (physiotherapist), Eman Tufail Arbab (performance analyst) and Aisha Jalil (team manager)

Schedule of Pakistan 'A' matches: (all matches at Terdthai Cricket Ground)

Group A

13 February – Pakistan 'A' v Nepal – 9.30am local time

15 February – Pakistan 'A' v India 'A' – 2pm local time

17 February – Pakistan 'A' v UAE – 2pm local time

20 February – Semi final 1 and 2 – 9am and 2pm local time

22 February – Final – 2pm local time

Naqvi, Bugti visit injured police jawans

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You are our lions, and the nation is with you." The injured police personnel said that after recovery they would once again fight against this menace. "Our spirits are high and our resolve is firm. We will eliminate the terrorists of Fitna-e-Hindustan. For the eradication of this menace, our lives and even the lives of our children are at the disposal of the nation."

Iran in discussions' with US...

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one of the world's most important shipping lanes and a key route for energy supplies. Around a fifth of the world's traded oil passes through the waterway, which is about 33km (21 miles) wide at its narrowest point between Iran and Oman. Iran has in the past threatened to close the strait if it were attacked. The US has warned Iran against any "unsafe and unprofessional behaviour" near its forces in the area. As part of its build up of forces, the US has sent its aircraft carrier the USS Abraham Lincoln to the region and late last week US Central Command said it was operating in the Arabian Sea. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi responded by saying: "The US military is now attempting to dictate how our Powerful Armed Forces should conduct target practice in their own turf." On Saturday, two explosions in Iran heightened anxiety in the country. Local authorities said a blast that killed one and hurt 14 at a building in the southern port city of Bandar Abbas was caused by a gas leak. Tasnim denied social media reports that a Revolutionary Guards Corps navy commander had been targeted in the blast.

Pakistan, others condemn...

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collective efforts to consolidate calm and restore stability. They highlighted this as occurring during a critical period when regional and international parties are advancing the second phase of President Donald Trump's Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict (often referred to as his peace plan), alongside the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2803 (adopted in November 2025, which endorses the plan, authorizes a transitional Board of Peace, and supports stabilization measures including humanitarian access and reconstruction in Gaza). The statement describes the violations as a direct threat to the political process and an obstacle to creating suitable conditions for transitioning Gaza to a more stable phase in terms of security and humanitarian needs.

Trump says India will buy oil...

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India pledged to slash Russian crude oil purchases after Washington also hiked tariffs related to that activity, and India is on track to lower its Russian oil imports by several hundred thousand barrels per day in the coming months, according to the sources, who declined to be identified. Trump imposed 25 per cent tariffs on countries buying Venezuelan oil, including India, in March 2025, and his administration ramped up a campaign against Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, whom US forces captured on January 3. Since then, Washington has begun directing the Caracas government and plans to control Venezuela's oil industry indefinitely. The US effort to supply Venezuelan crude to India comes as Washington seeks to reduce the oil revenue that is funding Russia in its war in Ukraine. Last week, Indian Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said India is diversifying its crude sources as its Russian oil imports fall. Two of the Reuters sources said India is preparing to cut Russian oil imports to below one million barrels per day soon.

Deportation raids drive Minneapolis immigrant family into hiding

MINNEAPOLIS: For the two months that federal agents have been conducting immigration raids in Minneapolis, Ana, Carlos and their son Luis have locked themselves in at home, feeling trapped behind their own deadbolt. The curtains in this Mexican family's home stay closed all day, and the door is braced with a metal bar to keep it from being forced open. For more than a decade they've lived in this Midwestern city, where two US citizens were shot and killed this month by federal immigration agents, and US President Donald Trump's second term has turned their American dream into a nightmare.

"It's inhuman to live like this, a prisoner in your own home," Ana told AFP using a pseudonym, as do her husband and son. The 47-year-old mother has four children. Luis stays shut in with her because he was born in Mexico. The other three are native-born Americans, but she's worried sick every time they leave the house.

"I'm always afraid that even though they're citizens, they won't be re-

spected and that they could be taken away just because of the color of their skin," she said, trembling. The children know to text before they come home, or else the door won't open when they knock. At 15, Luis longs to come and go as his brothers and sister do and dreams of walking to the fast-food spot "right down the street – when things get better." "Right now it's literally so close, but so far." Once his online classes are over, Luis zones out playing a first-person shooter game called "Half Life," often for five hours a day.

"It's the only thing that makes me forget what's going on," he murmured. His father Carlos seethes at their current ordeal. He works installing granite countertops, and has paid nearly \$11,000 in legal fees for his family's visa applications, but the process has dragged on for nearly three years.

He and Ana both have work permits. But the armed, masked agents the Trump administration has deployed into this city don't

care about that document, which no longer protects against arrest or deportation. "They give you a work permit, but it doesn't allow you to stay in this country legally. How is that possible?" Carlos asked. "When we realized Trump had removed the protection (of the work permit) against deportation, we felt as if he swindled us," the 43-year-old added. "I don't think we deserve this. We haven't done anything wrong. We are not criminals." There are widespread fears of mistreatment amid the militarized raids favored by the two federal agencies carrying out Trump's hardline policies, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP). In major Democratic strongholds of Minneapolis, Los Angeles and Chicago, teams of masked agents have stepped up street sweeps, targeting working people at bus stops and hardware stores. Carlos said things were different during Trump's first term, and he didn't feel the need to lock himself in because operations were more targeted. – APP

Venezuelans see signs of a new dawn

CARACAS: Venezuela's announcement of amnesty for political prisoners and the closure of a notorious detention center has bolstered hopes that a quarter century of state repression is coming to an end. Less than a month after the United States ousted leader Nicolas Maduro on January 3, his former vice president Delcy Rodriguez has gone further than expected by critics toward restoring the rule of law, as sought by Washington. "We are free!" the relatives of political prisoners camped outside Rodeo 1 prison near Caracas chanted on Friday after the announcement of an amnesty for all political prisoners detained since 1999, when Maduro's firebrand socialist mentor Hugo Chavez came to power. Zoraida Gonzalez, 64, was among those rejoicing. "I felt that I was free and that the whole country was free!" she told AFP. The last few days have yielded signs that the fear that permeated Venezuelan society over the past two decades is starting to dissipate. On Tuesday, opposition activist Delia Solorzano re-emerged from hiding after 17 months. "We believe Venezuela is in a new phase, and I think the entire country feels that," the 54-year-old former lawmaker told AFP. In other scenes unthinkable just a month ago, a student engaged Rodriguez in an argument on the street over the slow pace of prisoner releases. Student leader Miguelangel Suarez upbraided Rodriguez over "what families are going through outside detention centers" since the government on January 8 announced plans for large-scale prisoner releases, but only freed inmates at a trickle. Venezuelans meanwhile were also treated on Wednesday to the unusual spectacle of opposition leader Maria Corina Machado bashing Rodriguez live on pro-government TV after a meeting in Washington with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio. – Agencies

Italy ski resorts grapple with crowds, climate pressure

The tensions made global headlines last year when more than 250 buses carrying some 12-13,000 people arrived in one day, after a TikTok influencer, Rita Di Crescenzo, urged fellow Neapolitans to visit ROCCARASO: The buses from Naples arrive in a steady stream, unloading thousands of people in brightly-coloured ski outfits into the small town nestled in the mountains of central Italy. Every weekend during winter, Roccaraso's streets are filled with day-trippers, its small slopes packed with Neapolitans seeking some snow fun and a little fresh air. "We don't ski, but we have fun with sleds. Sometimes I even try with a plastic bag under my bottom!" laughed Anna Lippolis, a 58-year-old hairdresser in a retro pink ski jacket and silver earrings. She took the 30-euro (\$36) return bus from Naples on a recent Sunday to "get out of the house, to unwind a bit" after a long week. Far from Italy's high-end sites where the Winter Olympics take place this month, many Italians experience winter sports in more modest resorts like Roccaraso. But the visitors have sparked tensions with locals, reflecting the difficulties of mountain resorts in managing surging numbers at a time of declining snowfall. The only ski slope accessible by foot from Roccaraso, situated at an altitude of 1,200 metres (3,900 feet), has been closed for some time, the run now used by children.

But pedestrians can take the chair lift up the mountain to enjoy the view, before walking, sledding or taking the lift down. "It's my son's first time seeing snow," said Raimundo Di Bello, 68, in the half-hour queue for the lift. "It's just lovely to be in the mountains." A 10-minute drive away is a real ski resort, Alto Sangro, boasting more than 100 kilometres (60 miles) of slopes going up to 2,100 metres, which draw 500,000 people a year. There, many skiers also complain about day trippers, noting that many seem more interested in sunbathing and drinking spritz on the slopes, where loud music pumps out from nearby speakers. "People who don't ski come and ruin the environment, nature and the concept of sport here," said Kikka Misso Gentile, a 41-year-old from Naples who has a holiday home in nearby Rivilsondi. The tensions made global headlines last year when more than 250 buses carrying some 12-13,000 people arrived in one day, after a TikTok influencer, Rita Di Crescenzo, urged fellow Neapolitans to visit. Since then, authorities have imposed limits on the number of buses arriving, with a cap of 50 on a recent Sunday. Wardens have been deployed to manage the crowds. Nicola Pitucci, a 46-year-old electrician with a house in Roccaraso, said he has seen "many more people" in recent years, while the snow is unpredictable. "Everyone has the right to have fun in the snow," but "limiting the number is right because the town can't accommodate 50,000 people. It has no facilities, no infrastructure", he said. – Agencies

Bangladesh pins all hopes on election boost

The economy has improved since the chaotic aftermath of Hasina's ouster, but there are wider issues in the country of 170 million people

DHAKA: Textile worker Sabina Khatun is in limbo after losing her job during sweeping factory closures, caught up like millions in Bangladesh in the fallout from a 2024 uprising that toppled years of autocratic rule. In the 18 months since the collapse of Sheikh Hasina's government, Bangladesh has endured political turmoil but also biting economic pain – with many hoping for a rebound under new leadership after elections on February 12. "I've gone to many factories looking for work," said Khatun, 30, who lost her job last year in garment hub Narayanganj. "There are no openings." Bangladesh, the world's second-largest producer of garments, has seen 240 factories shut since the August 2024 uprising, many of them textile industries. That has dealt a blow to a major sector that forms 80 percent of Bangladesh's export economy. Some of the factories were owned by Hasina's cronies, who have since fled. Many workers like Khatun have been laid off, with the closures rippling through the wider labour market. In August, Bangladesh struck a trade deal with the United States – a key market for ready-made garment exports – scaling back

workers have all disappeared," said Iqbal Hossain, a trade union leader. **'Law and order'** – The economy has improved since the chaotic aftermath of Hasina's ouster, but there are wider issues in the country of 170 million people. Salehuddin Ahmed, who holds the finance portfolio in the interim government, said the economy had shifted from the "intensive care unit to the high dependency unit". Bangladesh's economy is expected to grow 4.7 percent this year, up from 3.7 percent in 2025, according to the International Monetary Fund. Fahmida Khatun, the head of the Dhaka-based Centre for Policy Dialogue, said foreign reserves have risen and the banking sector is showing signs of repair. "But unemployment is rising, merchandise exports have declined, imports of heavy machinery and raw materials remain weak, and private-sector credit has hit a historic low," she told AFP. "The gradual deterioration of law and order has emerged as the biggest threat." In August, Bangladesh struck a trade deal with the United States – a key market for ready-made garment exports – scaling back

President Donald Trump's threatened tariffs to 20 percent. But US orders "remained static", said Mohiuddin Rubel, former head of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, noting that some new factories had opened. They, however, have had little impact on the labour market, as the unemployment rate remains high. Merchandise exports still fell for a fifth consecutive month in December 2025, and while inflation slightly eased, it continues to erode what people can afford. "We don't buy fish or meat anymore," said unemployed textile worker Khatun, who continues her search for a job. "Everyone tells me to come back after the election." Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, head of the Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies, said the interim government had done little to help the bruised textile sector. "Some of these were big factories employing thousands of workers," he said. "In some cases, the government sold land and assets to clear workers' dues – but there was no initiative to restart viable factories." Unemployment is at 4.63 percent, according to the latest government figures released in May, up from 3.95 percent recorded during the same period the previous year.

'No quick fix' – Once juggling multiple odd jobs, Helal Uddin now ekes out a living running a food cart. "It's hard to pay the house rent with the meagre amount I earn now," the 33-year-old told AFP, gloomy about the "sharp rise" in the price of rice he serves. "The economy is not moving," Uddin said. "It's stuck. We are all waiting for the election." Hasina, 78, was once praised for overseeing Bangladesh's rapid economic rise, with growth topping seven percent annually and per capita GDP more than quadrupling since 2000. But she also presided over an autocratic government that crushed dissent, and now faces court cases alleging the looting of national wealth. She is a convicted fugitive in hiding in India, sentenced to death in absentia for crimes against humanity. Economist Fahmida Khatun warned that the new administration will face many challenges. "People hope things will improve after the election, but many of the problems are structural," she said. "There is no quick fix." – APP

Briefs

KSA announces launch of national privatization strategy

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia has begun implementing its National Privatization Strategy following approval by the Cabinet, Saudi Minister of Finance Mohammed Al-Jadaan said on Thursday. The minister noted that the privatization strategy seeks to strengthen the private sector's role in sustainable development, enable the government to focus on its legislative, supervisory, and regulatory roles, and enhance fiscal sustainability, in line with the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030. During the implementation process, the kingdom targets signing more than 220 public-private partnership contracts and increasing private-sector capital investments to more than 64 billion U.S. dollars by 2030.—APP

Turkiye bus accident kills eight, injures 26: governor

ISTANBUL: A passenger bus rolled off a road in southern Turkey's Antalya province on Sunday, killing eight people, a senior official said. Images on state broadcaster TRT showed the vehicle lying on its side on an embankment on a highway slip road in Dosemealti, a district to the northwest of Antalya city center. Provincial Gov. Hulusi Sahin said 26 people were injured, some of them critically. The DHA news agency reported that some passengers were thrown from the bus, which had traveled overnight from Tekirdag in Turkey's northwest. Antalya, a popular tourist destination on the Mediterranean, has been hit by heavy rain in recent days. "The ground was wet and there was also fog in the area. It's not a place to speed, but it seems the bus was speeding," Sahin told TRT.—APP

FBR collects Rs7,176b in 7 months

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has collected Rs7,176 billion during the first seven months of the current fiscal year (FY2026), registering a growth of 10.57 percent compared to Rs6,490 billion collected in the corresponding period of last year, reflecting an improving revenue trajectory amid ongoing economic recovery. The board revenue collection in January 2026 records robust growth of 16% month on month surpassing six-month average growth of 10 to 11% reflecting a clear encouraging path for the remaining months of FY-2026, said a news release here on Saturday.—APP

Sajjad Hussain appointed chairman ICCI standing committee on Livestock

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Renowned businessman and Chief Executive Officer/Director of Goldmines Organic Farm House, Sajjad Hussain, has been appointed as Chairman of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) Standing Committee on Meat and Livestock, in recognition of his valuable contributions and commitment to the Chamber's legacy of impactful progress in business and economic development.

As Chairman, Sajjad Hussain has been authorized to constitute a dynamic team of ten members to effectively pursue the committee's objectives and advance the development of the meat and livestock sector.

Business community leaders and ICCI members have extended heartfelt congratulations to Sajjad Hussain on his appointment to this prestigious position. They expressed strong confidence that, under his



leadership, the Standing Committee on Meat and Livestock will play a proactive role in addressing sec-

toral challenges, promoting modern practices, and enhancing value addition and export potential.

Congratulating him, leaders of the business community stated that they are eagerly looking forward to his

remarkable contributions toward strengthening ICCI, supporting stakeholders of the meat and livestock industry, and safeguarding the broader economic interests of the country.

Rape trial puts Norway's royal family in unwelcome glare of public

DNA

OSLO: When Marius Borg Høy stands up in room 250 at Oslo district court on Tuesday, at the start of Norway's biggest trial in years, he will have no moral support from his closest relatives. His mother Crown Princess Mette-Marit will not be there, nor will the man she married when her son was four - the heir to the Norwegian throne, Crown Prince Haakon.

For the next seven weeks there will be no pictures of the blond 29-year-old either inside the court or outside - the court has banned them - but the world's press is here in numbers and the palace is keeping well away. Høy is accused of 38 charges, including the rape of four women, assaulting and threatening a girlfriend and damaging her flat, as well as drugs charges and driving offences. If found guilty he could face more than 10 years in jail.

Rune Hellestad/Getty Images Two women, Princess Ingrid Alexandra in a white dress and Princess

Mette-Marit in a yellow dress, appear with four men - including King Harald on the left and Marius Borg Høy to the left of his sister Ingrid Alexandra. The palace stresses that Marius Borg Høy (here in 2022) is not a public figure and only appears with the royal family on special occasions.

The palace stresses Høy is not part of the royal family and that he is not a public figure. But he is considered a close member of the family, by his stepfather the crown prince who sees him

as a son, and by Norway's much loved King Harald V, 88, who he has known for much of his life as his grandfather. "It's a very dangerous moment, because the royal family should be role models," says Ulf Andre Andersen, who broke the story for celebrity-focused magazine *Se og Hør* (See and Hear) in early August 2024 when police were called to a woman's flat in Frogner on the west side of Oslo after reports of a violent incident. Høy has admitted some of the lesser offences, and after his arrest admitted physical abuse and destroying

objects. The indictment alleges he tore down a chandelier, threw a knife at the wall and shattered a mirror, calling the woman words such as whore. The four rape charges date from 2018, at his parents' official residence on the Skaugum estate outside Oslo, to November 2024, after his initial arrest. One of the four, dating back to 2023, involves intercourse while the woman was asleep. The other three also involve sexual assault while the women were incapacitated, which also counts as rape in Norway.



Egypt, EU hold talks on regional uplifts, de-escalation efforts

CAIRO: Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Badr Abdellaty discussed regional developments, efforts to de-escalate tensions, and ways to enhance bilateral cooperation during a phone call with Kaja Kallas, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. In a statement issued on Friday, the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that Abdellaty stressed the importance of coordinated regional and international efforts to ensure the implementation of the requirements of the second phase of the plan put forward by US President Donald Trump, as well as continued support for the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza as a temporary transitional body tasked with managing the daily affairs of residents in the Gaza Strip. The Egyptian foreign minister underscored the need for the swift deployment of an international stabilization force to monitor the ceasefire, facilitate the flow of humanitarian aid, and oversee the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. He noted that such measures would pave the way for early recovery and reconstruction based on the needs and priorities of the Palestinian people in Gaza. Regarding developments in Sudan, Abdellaty briefed the EU official on Egypt's ongoing efforts within the framework of the Quartet, emphasizing the urgency of reaching a humanitarian truce as a step toward a comprehensive ceasefire and the launch of an inclusive, Sudanese-owned political process. He also highlighted the priority of establishing safe humanitarian corridors and ensuring unimpeded access for aid to the Sudanese people, reaffirming Egypt's firm position in support of Sudan's sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity, and the preservation of its national institutions. Abdellaty further called for intensified efforts to de-escalate tensions across the region and prevent further instability, stressing the importance of creating an environment conducive to diplomatic solutions and political settlements that enhance regional security and stability. He underscored the need to create the conditions necessary for resuming dialogue between the United States and Iran on the Iranian nuclear issue, with a view to reaching a comprehensive settlement that takes into account the interests of all parties. The two sides also discussed ways to strengthen the comprehensive strategic partnership between Egypt and the European Union, particularly in the wake of the first Egyptian-European summit, which was held in Brussels last October.—DNA

Global shifts: Lessons for Pakistan

SADAF NOOREEN AWAN



secures a reliable partner to diversify its supply chains and reduce overreliance on traditional markets. Together, the two partners demonstrate how economic and strategic cooperation can shape the future of global engagement. The agreement eliminates or reduces tariffs on nearly all traded goods between India and Europe and establishes frameworks for cooperation in services, regulatory alignment, investment, and mobility. Trade between India and the EU already totalled approximately \$136 billion in the previous year, with Indian exports around \$76 billion and imports about \$61 billion. This creates vast opportunities for India to expand its exports, deepen industrial production, and generate millions of new jobs in manufacturing, services, and technology-driven sectors. Lower tariffs on automobiles, engineering goods, textiles, and other industries make European markets more accessible, encouraging investment and innovation while stimulating domestic employment. The deal also encourages India to strengthen its presence in high-tech sectors, green energy, and digital services, integrating its economy into broader global value chains. This development carries significant implications for South Asia. As India strengthens its

economic and strategic position, Pakistan faces both challenges and opportunities. Increased Indian access to European markets may intensify competition in sectors such as textiles, apparel, and low-cost manufacturing, areas where Pakistan has traditionally held an advantage. To remain competitive, Pakistan must focus on enhancing productivity, improving quality standards, and diversifying its exports. Reliance on historical trade patterns alone will not suffice in a world where preferential market access, technology, and investment shape economic influence. Strategically, the changing global environment underscores that national power is no longer defined solely by military capability. Pakistan remains the only nuclear-armed country in the Islamic world and has demonstrated resilience and deterrence despite being smaller in size than India. However, modern influence is determined as much by economic strength, institutional credibility, and diplomatic reach as by military assets. Pakistan must therefore pivot decisively toward trade expansion, financial reform, industrial modernization, and regional connectivity. China can play a pivotal role in this transformation. As Pakistan's closest strategic partner, China

provides opportunities for infrastructure development, technology transfer, and market access through joint initiatives and industrial projects. Special economic zones, technology parks, and industrial corridors can drive export-oriented growth, job creation, and technology development. A deeper partnership with China, combined with outreach to Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa, can strengthen Pakistan's economic resilience and reduce dependency on any single market.

At the same time, Pakistan's defense and strategic partnerships, particularly with Saudi Arabia, reinforce its relevance in regional security. While India continues to pursue strong ties with Israel and other strategic partners, Pakistan's engagement in the Gulf and broader Islamic world provides balance and strengthens its position in regional diplomacy. The lesson is clear: nations that cultivate multiple, flexible relationships are better equipped to navigate an increasingly complex and multipolar global order. Global power dynamics are also shifting due to changing trade and policy strategies. The United States, through aggressive trade policies and tariff threats in recent years, has created

uncertainty that encouraged Europe and India to seek alternatives, accelerating economic alignment between rising powers. This demonstrates how nations are adapting to changing global circumstances, emphasizing economic self-reliance, strategic partnerships, and long-term cooperation over dependence on any single power. For Pakistan, this highlights the importance of remaining agile and proactive in identifying and seizing economic and diplomatic opportunities. For Pakistan, the broader lesson is the centrality of economic and diplomatic strength to national security. Trade, finance, infrastructure, and bilateral relations must be prioritized alongside defense readiness. Leadership under the current government has emphasized stabilizing the economy, improving governance, attracting foreign investment, and strengthening international partnerships. These steps, if consistently pursued, can transform Pakistan into a more competitive and influential regional actor.

Investing in technology, education, digital infrastructure, and skill development is also essential. Pakistan must equip its workforce to participate in global value chains, fostering innovation and increasing productivity. Engaging in constructive regional initiatives, including trade corridors, connectivity projects, and cross-border collaboration, can enhance regional stability and generate shared prosperity. The India-EU trade deal also illustrates the importance of adaptability. Countries that respond to changing global dynamics by diversifying their trade, strengthening institutions, and pursuing strategic partnerships position themselves to benefit from new economic opportunities. Pakistan can learn from this approach by combining domestic reforms with proactive diplomacy and regional cooperation. To conclude, Pakistan stands at a historic crossroads, a nation blessed with immense potential, strategic significance, and a young, talented population. The world is watching, and while our biggest rival moves ahead on the global stage, we cannot close our eyes or fall behind. It is time to act decisively, to think timely, and to harness the energy and intellect of our youth, equipping them with education, research skills, and innovative thinking that can drive our nation forward. Strengthening our institutions must be a top priority transparent, accountable, and efficient systems will not only build public trust but also project a positive image of Pakistan to the world, attracting investment, cooperation, and international respect. We must rise above political uncertainty and internal divisions, focusing instead on

China, UK agree on developing long-term strategic partnership

BEIJING: China's President Xi Jinping and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer have agreed on the need to develop a long-term, stable and comprehensive strategic partnership between their countries, during talks in Beijing. Xi said that amid growing global uncertainty, China and the UK - both permanent members of the UN Security Council and major economies - should strengthen dialogue and cooperation to help maintain global peace and stability, boost economic growth and improve living standards. He called for mutual respect and for differences to be managed constructively, urging both sides to turn the potential for cooperation into tangible outcomes that benefit both nations and the wider world. The Chinese leader also reaffirmed Beijing's commitment to peaceful development, saying China had never initiated a war or occupied foreign territory. Starmer said he wanted to build a more developed relationship with China to support the UK economy, signaling a reset after years of strained ties. He described China as a vital global player and said the relationship should allow for cooperation alongside meaningful dialogue on areas of disagreement.—APP

SCCI president congratulates Sialkot exporters on top award

SIALKOT: President Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) Syed Ahtesham Mazhar has congratulated Khawaja Masood Akhtar (SI), HI of Forward Sports (Pvt) Ltd and Qaiser Shabbir of QSA Surgical on receiving the prestigious Top Exporter Award from Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. In congratulatory message, the SCCI president said the achievement was a matter of pride for Sialkot's export industry. He praised both companies for their outstanding performance and consistent contribution to strengthening Pakistan's export sector. Syed Ahtesham Mazhar said that Forward Sports and QSA Surgical had played a vital role in promoting Pakistan's name in international markets through high-quality products and professional excellence. He added that the recognition by the prime minister highlighted the significant contribution of Sialkot's exporters to the national economy.

He expressed hope that the success would encourage other exporters to strive for excellence and reaffirmed SCCI's commitment to supporting exporters and promoting trade and industrial development in the country.—APP

unity, constructive dialogue, and a shared vision for progress. Safety, stability, and good governance are essential to unlock Pakistan's economic potential, while nurturing a culture of merit, discipline, and innovation ensures that our talent can compete globally. Every citizen has a role to play: to support our institutions, contribute positively to society, and act with patriotism and responsibility. By embracing positivity, discipline, and national pride, Pakistan can transform challenges into opportunities, building a future where our country is seen not only as strategically important but as a hub of growth, knowledge, and resilience. Our holy land deserves our love, dedication, and vision. By investing in our people, protecting our institutions, empowering our youth, and strengthening our governance, Pakistan can emerge as a shining example of progress, stability, and global respect. The eyes of the world are on us, and the time to act is now. With unity, focus, and unwavering commitment, Pakistan can rise to its true potential as a prosperous, safe, and respected nation whose influence and achievements inspire pride at home and admiration abroad.

Briefs

Iran considers EU armies as 'terrorists'

DNA

TEHRAN: Iran considers as "terrorist groups" the armies of EU countries that listed the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) on the bloc's list of terrorist organisations, Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said on Sunday. The EU marked a symbolic shift in its approach to Iran's leadership on Thursday by designating the Revolutionary Guards as a terrorist organisation, following what turned out to be one of the country's deadliest crackdowns of protests since its establishment in 1979.

"By trying to hit the Revolutionary Guards ... the Europeans actually shot themselves in the foot and once again made a decision against the interests of their people by blindly obeying the Americans," Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf told his fellow MPs, all wearing Revolutionary Guards uniforms in support of the elite force.

"According to Article 7 of the law on countermeasures against the designation of the Revolutionary Guards as a terrorist organisation, the armies of European countries are considered terrorist groups."

Qalibaf added that the national security parliamentary commission would deliberate on the expulsion of EU countries' military attaches and follow up on the issue with the foreign ministry. Set up after Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution to protect the ruling system, the IRGC have great sway in the country, controlling swathes of the economy and armed forces.

'UN official called Imran 'London society lion'

DNA

KARACHI: Declassified emails in the latest release of Epstein files have shed light on a 2013 diplomatic effort to leverage the influence of PTI founder Imran Khan, years before he became prime minister of Pakistan. The description appears in a June 2013 email from Nasra Hassan, a former UN official, to Terje Rod-Larsen, a Norwegian diplomat and then president of the International Peace Institute. Hassan described Khan as a "London society lion" while discussing how Western-backed health initiatives could gain influence in Paki.

The correspondence is among documents released by the US Department of Justice on Friday as part of its investigation into Jeffrey Epstein's financial and professional network. At the time, Khan was an opposition politician and former international cricket star, widely known in Western capitals for his social connections rather than for holding public office. Hassan advised that those connections made him a "more effective interlocutor" than Pakistan's newly appointed prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, for sensitive diplomacy related to polio eradication.



ISLAMABAD: Sardar Yasir Ilyas Khan Prime Minister Coordinator on Tourism along with ambassadors and high commissioners visit various stalls on the occasion of two-day Pakistan Tourism Festival that concluded on Sunday. — DNA

Indian opposition calls Epstein mention of Modi 'national shame'

DNA

NEW DELHI: Freshly released files tied to convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein have sparked attention after an email mentioning Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi surfaced in the latest batch published by the US Department of Justice, drawing a sharp response from New Delhi. The Jerusalem Post reported on Saturday that one of the emails, attributed to Epstein, refers to Modi's 2017 state visit to Israel — the first ever by an Indian prime minister. The message claims Modi acted on Epstein's advice during the trip, a suggestion Indian authorities have firmly rejected.

India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the only verifiable fact in the email is Modi's official visit to Israel, calling the rest of the claims unfounded and misleading. MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal dismissed the remarks as the musings of a convicted criminal, saying there was no evidence of any meaningful contact or advisory role involving Modi and Epstein. Despite the denial, opposition parties have cited the reference to press the government for an explanation. Meanwhile, local media reported that the main opposition party, the Indian National Congress, strongly criticised Prime Minister Modi, calling any alleged link with

Epstein a matter of deep national shame. Congress, in a recent statement, said Epstein wrote in an email that Modi took his advice before visiting Israel, claiming Modi "danced and sang" there for the benefit of the US president. The party said Modi visited Israel from July 4 to 6, 2017, and that Epstein's email was written three days after the trip. It added that Modi had met then US President Donald Trump in June 2017, before the Israel visit, claiming this showed a long-standing and deep connection between Modi and Epstein. The opposition party said the issue concerns national dignity and international credibility and that Modi must answer questions about what advice he took from Epstein and the meaning of the claims made in the email. Epstein died by suicide in 2019 in a Manhattan jail while awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges. He was jailed in 2008 for soliciting paid sex from a minor. A fresh cache of files released on Friday related to the investigation into the late convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein contains documents that refer to numerous high-profile figures. President Donald Trump, Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick and British billionaire Richard Branson are among some of the influential financiers who were released by the US Department of Justice.

Afghans struggle despite new homes

NEWS DESK

BAMIYAN: Afghanistan: Sitting in his modest home beneath snow-dusted hills in Afghanistan's Bamiyan province, Nimatullah Rahesh expressed relief to have found somewhere to "live peacefully" after months of uncertainty. Rahesh is one of millions of Afghans pushed out of Iran and Pakistan, but despite being given a brand new home in his native country, he and many of his recently returned compatriots are lacking even basic services. "We no longer have the end-of-month stress about the rent," he said after getting his house, which was financed by the UN refugee agency on land provided by the Taliban authorities. Originally from a

poor and mountainous district of Bamiyan, Rahesh worked for five years in construction in Iran, where his wife Marzia was a seamstress. "The Iranians forced us to leave" in 2024 by "refusing to admit our son to school and asking us to pay an impossible sum to extend our documents," he said.

More than five million Afghans have returned home since September 2023, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as neighboring Iran and Pakistan stepped up deportations.

The Rahesh family is among 30 to be given a 50-square-meter (540-square-foot) home in Bamiyan, with each household in the nascent community participating in the construction and being paid by UNHCR for their work.

Donald Trump warns Canada against deal with China

Final treaty in the world that restricted nuclear weapon deployment will be over soon

ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE: US President Donald Trump on Saturday said the United States would respond in a significant way if Canada proceeds with the trade agreement that it negotiated with China. "If they do a deal with China, yeah, we'll do something very substantial," Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One. "We don't want China to take over Canada. And if they make the deal that he's looking to make, China will take over Canada."

Trump last week said he would impose a 100 percent tariffs on Canada if it follows through on a trade deal with China. Meanwhile, the final treaty in the world that restricted nuclear weapon deployment will be over.

New START, the last nuclear treaty between Washington and Moscow after decades of agreements dating to the Cold War, is set to expire, and with it restrictions on the two top nuclear powers.

The expiration comes as President Donald Trump, vowing "America First," smashes through international agreements that limit the United States, although in the case of New START, the issue may more be inertia than ideology.



Israel says Rafah crossing opened for limited passage

RAFAH, Palestinian Territories: Israel said it reopened the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt on Sunday, but only in a limited capacity, allowing passage solely for Palestinian residents of the territory. "In accordance with the ceasefire agreement and a directive of the political echelon, the Rafah Crossing was opened today for the limited passage of residents only," COGAT, the Israeli defense ministry body coordinating Palestinian civilian affairs said.

"As part of this, an initial pilot phase began today, conducted in coordination with the European Union Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM), Egypt, and all relevant stakeholders."

The reopening comes amid ongoing violence in the Palestinian territory, with Gaza's civil defense agency reporting dozens killed in Israeli attacks on Saturday, while the Israeli military said it was retaliating against ceasefire violations. The Rafah crossing is a vital gateway for both civilians and aid, but has remained closed since Israeli forces seized control of it in May 2024 during the war with Hamas, aside from a brief and limited reopening in early 2025. Israel had previously said it would not reopen the crossing until the remains of Ran Gvili — the last Israeli hostage held in Gaza — were returned. — APP

Four dead in road accident

DNA

LODHRAN: A child was among four dead while another 28 were injured when a bus carrying wedding guests overturned after colliding with a truck in the Mandhali Mor area of Punjab's Lodhran district on Sunday. According to a statement issued by Rescue 1122 Lodhran, a "high-speed coaster carrying members of a wedding procession overturned while crossing in front of an overloaded truck, killing four people on the spot". It added that the deceased included two men, one woman and a child. Another 28 were injured, out of which 27 sustained "severe" injuries and were rushed to the Lodhran District Hospital.

Slovakia PM security adviser steps down

Robert Fico announced he had accepted Miroslav Lajčák's departure in a video message on Saturday, describing the adviser as "an incredible source of experience in diplomacy and foreign policy"

NEWS DESK

LONDON: The national security adviser to Slovakia's prime minister has resigned after documents released by the US showed he exchanged messages about girls and diplomacy with the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Robert Fico announced he had accepted Miroslav Lajčák's departure in a video message on Saturday, describing the adviser as "an incredible source of experience in diplomacy and foreign policy". The resignation comes a day after three million files relating to the influential financier were released by the US Department of Justice.

While the files do not show any wrong doing on the part of those featured, including Lajčák, they have raised renewed questions for those who associated with Epstein. In a text exchange from October 2018 — when Lajčák was serving as Slovakia's foreign minister — Lajčák and Epstein could be seen lightheartedly discussing women and a forthcoming meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. After Epstein sent an image, which cannot be seen in the record, Lajčák replies: "Why don't you invite me for these games? I would take the 'MI girl'." "Who wouldn't," Epstein texts back. "You can have them both, I am not possessive. And their sisters."

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