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Pakistan values relations with UK, says Ayaz Sadiq

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Political parties united on the Kashmir issue

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**Japan provides grant for uplift projects: Envoy**

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To root-out terrorism Govt launches coordinated drive: Tarar

Attaullah Tarar said building a credible counter-narrative against violent extremism was primarily the responsibility of religious scholars, adding that the government had also established a Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) Cell in the Information Ministry

DNA



Imran Khan shifted to Pims on his own request

Law minister tells Senate PTI founder's procedure was successful, health stable, no complications reported

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar on Tuesday informed the Senate that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Founder was a convicted prisoner in corruption cases and was being provided all medical and legal facilities strictly in accordance with the law and prison rules. Responding to a point raised by Leader of the Opposition, the minister said that the Constitution guaranteed rights to every individual, but the enforcement of those rights was regulated through legal procedures. He said the former prime minister and PTI Founder had been convicted after a full-fledged open trial lasting over a year in a

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ISLAMABAD: Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev arrived in Pakistan on a two-day official visit as his plane landed at Nur Khan Airbase on Tuesday. President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Ishaq Dar received the visiting dignitary. — DNA

Call to spur process of privatization

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar chaired a key meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Privatization (CCoP), where the committee advanced the government's ongoing privatization agenda by reviewing processes for several state-owned entities.mofa.gov.pk The CCoP endorsed the Privatization Commission's decision to launch a second cycle of privatization for the House Building Finance Company Limited (HBFC), aiming to attract fresh investment and enhance operational efficiency in the housing finance sector. youtube.com In a significant move to modernize infrastructure management,

Continued on Page 06

New friendships

Pakistan, Libya vow to strengthen bilateral ties, promote peace

High-level delegation from Libya calls on Premier Shehbaz Sharif at the Prime Minister House

Kazakhstan president arrives in Pakistan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to fostering friendly relations with Libya and emphasised the importance of continued engagement and dialogue. The development came as a high-level delegation from Libya called on PM Shehbaz Sharif at the Prime Minister's House. The delegation included Libyan Prime Minister Dr Osama Saad Hamad, Libyan Arab Armed Forces Commander-in-Chief Field Marshal Khalifa Abu-al-Qasim Haftar and Deputy Commander-in-Chief Lieutenant General Saddam Khalifa Haftar. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Ishaq Dar and Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir were also present during the meeting, the PM Office Media Wing said in a press release. During the discussions, both sides exchanged views on matters of mutual interest and underscored the

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Briefs

Over 73,000 passengers offloaded in 2025

FIAZ CHAUDHRY

ISLAMABAD: In the wake of tightened screening measures at airports and growing reports of passengers being offloaded, the Ministry of Interior has revealed that more than 73,000 passengers were offloaded during 2025. "A total of 35,270 passengers were offloaded in 2023, 39,214 in 2024 and 73,358 in 2025," read the Ministry of Interior's reply to a question in the Senate, adding that 147,842 passengers were offloaded during the three-year period. The ministry's submission comes against the backdrop of thousands of Pakistanis being deported from various countries for begging, while tens of thousands were also offloaded at airports over suspected illegal travel attempts, a National Assembly committee was informed in December 2025.

'Board of Peace' will ask Hamas to disarm

DNA

TEL AVIV: Israel's far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said on Monday that Hamas would be given a "two-month ultimatum" to disarm by US President Donald Trump's "Board of Peace", Anadolu reported, citing Israeli media. "The Board of Peace will issue a two-month ultimatum to Hamas to disarm," Smotrich said in comments carried by the local newspaper Makor Rishon. He added that Israel would not end its war on the Gaza Strip "before Hamas is destroyed". "There will be no Hamas in Gaza, neither militarily, nor civilly, nor in government.

Cementing brotherly bonds President to confer award on Uzbekistan, Kazak presidents

The Nishan-e-Pakistan is Pakistan's most prestigious civilian honour. It is awarded to individuals who have rendered services of highest distinction to the national interest of Pakistan and has often been conferred on visiting Heads of State as a mark of respect and friendship, reflecting the strength of bilateral relations



ANSAR BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari will confer the Nishan-e-Pakistan, the highest civilian award of Pakistan, on the visiting Presidents of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan during their upcoming official visits to Pakistan. The Nishan-e-Pakistan is Pakistan's most prestigious civilian honour. It is awarded to individuals who have ren-

dered services of highest distinction to the national interest of Pakistan and has often been conferred on visiting Heads of State as a mark of respect and friendship, reflecting the strength of bilateral relations. Investiture ceremonies will be held at the Aiwan-e-Sadr where the President of Pakistan will formally confer the decorations on the two visiting dignitaries. The state banquets will also be hosted in honour of the Presidents of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The events will be attended by members of the federal cabinet, parliament, and diplomatic corps in addition to other dignitaries. Pakistan enjoys excellent relations with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Especially with Uzbekistan, Pakistan has diversified its relations in all fields. The direct flights between the two countries have given further impetus to trade and economic activities besides boosting people-to-people relations.

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has publicly and categorically disowned individuals and social media accounts involved in trolling and abusive campaigns against the security forces, following the recent terrorist attacks in Balochistan. Talking to The News, PTI Information Secretary Sheikh Waqas Akram said the party had no confusion on the issue and had clearly disowned all those who use social media to target the martyrs of security forces, especially in the context of terrorism-related incidents.

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Pakistan invited to upcoming United States-Iran talks

The priority of the talks is to avoid any conflict and de-escalate tensions between the two sides, a regional official told Reuters, adding that some regional powers were also invited

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has been invited to participate in the Iran-US talks aimed at de-escalation of tensions between Tehran and Washington, the Foreign Office (FO) confirmed on Tuesday. "Pakistan has received the invitation for the upcoming talks between Iran and the United States," FO Spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said while responding to a query. "Pakistan's participation is seen as crucial to defusing tensions, as Islamabad has been quietly working to facilitate the talks," a diplomatic source told Dawn. A diplomatic source added that Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar is expected to participate in the meeting. The meeting is likely to take place in Turkey on Friday, an Arab official told AFP on condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter. US outlet Axios cited two unnamed sources and a US official as saying Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi was expected to meet with US envoy Steve Witkoff in Istanbul to discuss a possible deal on the nuclear issue. The priority of the talks is to avoid any conflict and de-escalate tensions between the two sides,

Iran president says talks with US to proceed

Trump hopes for "something out" but warns of "bad things" if no deal is reached

NEWS DESK

TEHRAN: Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian confirmed on Tuesday that he had ordered the start of nuclear talks with the United States, after his counterpart Donald Trump threatened "bad things" if no deal was reached. "In light of requests from friendly governments in the region to respond to the proposal by the President of the United States for negotiations.... I have instructed my Minister of Foreign Affairs, provided that a suitable environment exists – one free from threats and unreasonable expectations – to pursue fair and equitable negotiations," Pezeshkian said in a post on X. The talks will be held "within the framework of

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Call for unity, firm action to address unrest, militancy

ISLAMABAD: Lawmakers on Tuesday stressed the need for national unity, firm action against militancy and a comprehensive strategy to address the underlying causes of unrest as the National Assembly debated the prevailing law and order situation in the country, with particular focus on Balochistan. The discussion took place following a motion moved by Minister of State for Interior and Narcotics Control Muhammad Talaal Badar, during which members from across the political spectrum highlighted security, political and social aspects of the issue. Participating in the debate, MNA Aliya Kamran called for national unity to counter what she described as external attempts to destabilise Pakistan, linking the country's security and development to the protection of its sovereignty. Referring to recent regional developments, she said that after a setback in the so-called "Operation Sandoor", India was seeking to foment unrest inside Pakistan. She stressed that such challenges could only be confronted through collective resolve and rejection of hostile narratives, adding that the security forces remained the frontline defence against foreign conspiracies. MNA Aliya Hamza Malik condemned terrorism in all its forms and called for a deeper examination of the drivers of militancy. —APP

Children's Hospital ICU to be functional within 24 hours

LAHORE: Provincial Health Minister Khawaja Salman Rafique on Tuesday announced that the newly established Intensive Care Unit (ICU), equipped with state-of-the-art medical facilities, at Children's Hospital Lahore will be fully operational within the next 24 hours. The decision was made during a visit to Children's Hospital Lahore, where Provincial Secretary for Specialized Healthcare and Medical Education Azmat Mahmood was also present. Vice Chancellor University of Child Health Sciences Professor Dr Masood Sadiq, CEO Punjab Health Initiative Management Company Dr. Ali Razaq, Additional Secretary Ameera Babar, Professor Dr Junaid Rasheed and Medical Director Children's Hospital Professor Dr Tipu Sultan were among the officials who accompanied the minister. During the visit, the minister inspected the newly developed ICU, reviewed medical facilities being provided to critically ill children and discussed the progress of Children's Hospital-2 being planned in the Nawaz Sharif Medical District. He examined modern medical equipment installed in the ICU, including advanced monitoring systems and ventilators, and assessed the performance of the nursing staff. The minister also met with doctors and medical personnel and issued directives to further improve paediatric treatment services. Speaking on the occasion, Khawaja Salman Rafique said that Children's Hospital-2 would be constructed on modern lines and would offer world-class medical facilities to children under one roof. He stated that the Punjab government is continuously expanding healthcare services for children across the province. —APP

Japan provides Rs 23.9m grant for KP, Punjab uplift projects

Ambassador Akamatsu highlighted that the GGP Program focuses on face-to-face assistance through partnerships with local NGOs to respond directly to community needs

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Government of Japan, under its Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGP) Program, has decided to provide grant assistance of USD 85,429 (equivalent PKR 23.9 million) to two local NGOs for development projects in District Chakwal, Punjab, and District Mansehra, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The grant contracts were signed between AKAMATSU Shuichi, Ambassador of Japan to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and representatives of the two NGOs at the Embassy of Japan in Islamabad. The two NGOs that will implement the projects are Bin Qutab Foundation and Saibaan Development Organization. Bin Qutab Foundation will receive USD 55,230 (equivalent PKR 15.5 million) for the construction of a Maternal and Child Healthcare Center at Begum Noor Memorial Hospital in the rural side of District Chakwal. The new center, installed with essential medical equipment, will provide 24-hour safe delivery services, emergency obstetric care, and neonatal services under one roof and providing subsidized service to needy. The project is expected to benefit more than 10,000 patients annually and will also promote family planning awareness, contributing significantly to improved



maternal and child health. Saibaan Development Organization will receive USD 30,199 (equivalent to PKR 8.4 million) for the improvement of a link road in Village Makrilla, District Mansehra, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The project includes pavement of the road and construction of protection walls, which will enhance mobility and safety for local residents. The project is

expected to benefit more than 2,400 direct beneficiaries, as well as thousands of indirect beneficiaries in nearby areas, by improving access to healthcare, education, and markets.

At the signing ceremony, AKAMATSU Shuichi emphasized that Japan has worked closely with Pakistan for decades to address basic

human needs, including health, education, and infrastructure development. Ambassador Akamatsu highlighted that the GGP Program focuses on face-to-face assistance through partnerships with local NGOs to respond directly to community needs. Ambassador Akamatsu further noted that basic services and infrastructure form the foundation of sustainable development and human security, reflecting Japan's own development experience. As an enduring friend of Pakistan, the Government of Japan will continue to support for capable local NGOs through grant assistance, with the aim of improving the daily lives and well-being of people at the grassroots level throughout the country.

NAB sets record with Rs 6.213t recovery in 2025: Report

ISLAMABAD: The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) recovered Rs 6,213 billion in 2025, taking total recoveries over the past three years to Rs 11,524 billion – equivalent to \$41 billion. The bureau released its annual performance report for 2025, describing the year as one of unprecedented financial success, institutional revitalization, and accelerated technological advancement. Deputy Chairman NAB Sohail Nasir, Prosecutor General Intesham Qadir Shah, and Director General Amjad Majeed Ulakha briefed media representatives on the bureau's achievements, crediting the exceptional performance to the leadership of Chairman NAB Lt. Gen. (R) Nazir Ahmed. Under the leadership of the incumbent Chairman Lt. Gen. (R) Nazir Ahmed, NAB achieved a record-breaking recovery of Rs. 6,213 trillion, the highest annual figure since the Bureau's inception in 1999. Building upon this milestone, NAB's total recoveries—both direct and indirect—have now reached a cumulative total of Rs. 11,524 trillion (equivalent to \$41 billion USD) in last three years, with 2025 alone accounting for more than half of this amount. Notably, this performance is thirteen times higher than the total recoveries recorded over the preceding 23 years. —APP

Shahdara dam project to boost Islamabad's water supply: CDA

ISLAMABAD: The Capital Development Authority (CDA) is advancing the Shahdara Dam project, a key initiative to enhance Islamabad's water storage capacity. Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa chaired a meeting to review the project's progress, with WAPDA having completed the feasibility study. A meeting regarding the Shahdara Dam project was held under the chairmanship of Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa. The meeting was attended by CDA Board Member Admin Talat Mahmood, Member Planning and Design Dr. Khalid Hafiz, Director General Islamabad Water, Deputy Commissioner CDA and senior officers of Islamabad Water. Briefing Chairman CDA on water management projects, the relevant officers informed that WAPDA has completed the feasibility study process for the Shahdara Dam project and the complete feasibility report for this project has been shared with CDA. During the briefing, it was said that the feasibility report has prepared initial estimates for land acquisition for the dam, water conveyance, water treatment plant, and other aspects. It was briefed that the Shahdara Dam will have the capacity to store water over an area of 25 acres. Similarly, this project will have the capacity to provide 10 million gallons of water per day to the citizens of Islamabad. The briefing further said that work on the detailed design will commence immediately upon completion of the feasibility report for the Shahdara Dam project. It was also briefed that the PC-1 for this project will be submitted for approval soon after its preparation. Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa directed that a formal survey be conducted by SUPARCO prior to the acquisition of land for the dam. He said that all matters related to land acquisition should be resolved transparently and in accordance with legal requirements. He further said that the feasibility report and detailed design of this project should be presented to the committee established for resolving the water issues of the twin cities for approval. Furthermore, the Dotara Dam project was also discussed in the meeting. During the briefing, it was informed that work on the feasibility report for the Dotara Dam project is ongoing. Chairman CDA said that these projects will play a significant role in meeting the water needs of the Federal Capital, Islamabad. He added that ensuring uninterrupted water supply in the Federal Capital Islamabad is among our top priorities. —DNA



ISLAMABAD: Canadian High Commissioner Tarik Ali Khan called on Federal Minister for Communications Abdul Aleem Khan.

Sindh govt committed to empowering Pwds

KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah reaffirmed his government's commitment to improving the quality of life of persons with disabilities, stating that empowerment through skills development, education, and employment remains a top priority of the Sindh government. He said this while addressing the Graduation Ceremony 2024-25 of Persons with Disabilities organised by NOWPDP at their Centres in Korangi on Tuesday. It was attended by Secretary DEPD Tauha Farooqui, NOWPDP President Amin Hashwani, CEO Omair Ahmed, GM Fatima Jamil, and others. The Chief Minister said the event was organised under the Hunarmand Programme, a partnership between the Department of Empowerment of

Persons with Disabilities (DEPD), Government of Sindh, and NOWPDP. The programme is financially supported by DEPD and aims to enable persons with disabilities to live independent and dignified lives. The Chief Minister said that with the support of his government, more than 65,000 persons with disabilities have directly benefited over the past five years, while joint initiatives with NOWPDP have brought positive change to the lives of over 325,000 individuals across the province. "Our objective is to bring real improvement in the lives of persons with disabilities and empower them to play a positive role in society," CM Murad Ali Shah said. Shah announced that the Pakistan Peoples Party government is establishing 10

Centres of Excellence across all divisions of Sindh, adding that under the Hunarmand Programme, over 4,200 persons with disabilities have completed skills training, while more than 1,700 individuals have been employed in 22 different industries. Highlighting gender inclusion, the Chief Minister noted that one out of every three graduates of the Hunarmand Programme is a woman with disability, emphasising that skills development and employment initiatives are being designed with a strong focus on gender inclusion. Murad Ali Shah further shared that over 500 special children are currently enrolled in five special education schools in Sindh, creating a strong linkage from education to skills development and ultimately to employment. —APP

Government of Pakistan Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences, Islamabad.

Tender Notice No. 07/2025-2026/PIMS



Bids are invited through E-PADS (PPRA) for the procurement of Equipments required in project titled "Procurement of Equipment for Up-gradation of Radiology Department PIMS Islamabad", under mentioned Tender Categories from reputed firms having vast experience in the relevant fields, registered with Income Tax & Sales Tax Department, who are on Active Taxpayers List (Sales Tax) of the Federal Board of Revenue:-

Sr. #	Description	Bids opening date & Time
1	Tender for the purchase of Ultrasound Machines.	21 - 02 - 2026 at 11:30AM
2	Tender for the purchase of Fluoroscopy.	-do-
3	Tender for the purchase of Mobile Digital X-Ray.	-do-
4	Tender for the purchase of Floor Mounted Digital X-Ray.	-do-
5	Tender for the purchase of Automated Breast Ultrasound.	-do-
6	Tender for the purchase of DEXA Scan.	-do-
7	Tender for the purchase of Vacuum Assisted Biopsy System.	-do-
Documents required for obtaining tender receipt:-		Tender request on firm's letter head pad along with copies of FBR Income Tax & Sales Tax Registration Certificate and proof of 100% Active Taxpayer List Sales Tax. (Each page duly signed & stamp).
Tender issue venue.		Purchase Department, PIMS.
Tender Fee (Non-refundable).		Rs. 2,000/- per tender obtain from Accounts Branch PIMS in person after fetching from purchase department PIMS.
Last date for issuance of Tender Schedule(s).		20-02-2026 at 12:00 Noon.
Tender submission and opening place with date & time		• Soft SBDs are available at E-PADS on PPRA website and vendor will proceed through E-PADS and upload their offers/ bids with requisite enclosures accordingly. • The vendor shall drop the Original CDR, copy of the tender receipt, and the Original affidavit/consent in the tender box at the Purchase Department, PIMS, G-8/3, Islamabad, by 11:00 AM on 21-02-2026. • Bids submitted through E-PADS will be entertained. Online submitted bids will be opened at 11:30AM on the same day in the Purchase Committee Meeting at PIMS. • Manual bids shall not be accepted.
CDR Value:-		As mentioned in tender schedule i.e. Standard Bidding Documents (SBDs).

Note:-

- > The firms will adopt Single Stage Two-Envelope Procedure as provided in the Public Procurement Rules 2004, vide clause # 36(b).
- > In case of any unforeseen reasons, public holiday, unrest or force majeure on the bid submission / opening date the bid shall be opened on the next working day at the same place and time.
- > PIMS reserves the right to accept or reject all bids or proposals at any time prior to the acceptance of a bid in accordance with rule 33 of PPRA 2004.
- > "Grievances, if any, shall be entertained only if submitted through the E-PADS system."
- > Tender is also available at PPRA website www.ppra.org.pk and PIMS Website www.pims.gov.pk.

Law moot strengthens legal education, professional standards

ISLAMABAD: The Research Society of International Law (RSIL), in collaboration with the Pakistan Bar Council's Directorate of Legal Education (PBC-DLE), convened a National Conference titled "The Future of Legal Education and Practice in Pakistan: Innovation, Excellence, and Impact" here on Tuesday. The conference brought together over 200 participants from across Pakistan's legal community, including representatives from judicial academies, former judges, bar councils, senior and junior lawyers, legal academics, law students, reform specialists, and legal technology innovators. The conference focused on three key areas: improving law school training, strengthening continuing professional development for lawyers and judges, and addressing contemporary challenges such as legal ethics, court decorum, workplace harassment, and the integration of technology into legal practice. Mr Pir Masood Chishhti (Advocate Supreme Court; Vice Chairman, Pakistan Bar Council) re-

flected on the evolution of legal education in Pakistan. He noted that earlier two-year English LLB programs produced competent lawyers despite limited resources, while later expansion to three- and five-year programs, rapid privatisation, and affiliated law colleges led to declining standards. He highlighted recent reforms, including restrictions on new law colleges and the shift to a four-year LLB, aimed at improving affordability and quality. He emphasized the need for stronger curricula, professional training, legal ethics, fee regulation, and effective mentorship of young lawyers. The opening plenary brought together senior judges, Bar Council members, and practicing lawyers to discuss institutional collaboration for raising professional standards. The panel included Mr Naveed Ahmed Soomro (District & Sessions Judge; Senior Faculty Member, Sindh Judicial Academy), Mr Amir Saeed Rawn (ASC; Member, Pakistan Bar Council), Mr Asad Rahim Khan (ASC; Partner, Ash-

PID(I)6372/25

Project Director

Ph. 051-9260490



Briefs

ITP issues traffic advisory

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) on Tuesday issued a traffic advisory, announcing temporary diversions on major roads of the federal capital during the evening hours. An ITP official told APP that traffic diversions will be implemented from 5:00 pm to 6:00 pm on Islamabad Expressway, Muree Road and Club Road, due to which traffic pressure is expected to increase on Islamabad Expressway and Faisal Avenue. He said commuters travelling from Islamabad to Rawalpindi are advised to use Rawal Road (Rawalpindi), Ninth Avenue, Fakir Epi Road and Srinagar Highway. Similarly, motorists travelling from Islamabad to Rawalpindi should use Zero Point, Srinagar Highway and Ninth Avenue to avoid congestion. The official said that people travelling to and from Muree and Bari Imam (Bari Kahu) are advised to use Korang Road, Bani Gala, Park Road and Lehri Road. He added that commuters travelling from Serena and Bari Kahu towards Rawalpindi should use Park Road and Khanna. The official said that traffic police officers will remain deployed on roads to facilitate citizens and ensure smooth traffic flow during the diversion period.—APP

President's spokesperson condoles death of APP director's son

ISLAMABAD: The President of Pakistan's spokesperson, Murtaza Solangi on Tuesday expressed deep sorrow and grief over the passing of Muaz Abdullah, son of senior journalist and Director Urdu News Service of Associated Press of Pakistan (APP), Abdul Jabbar Zakaria. In a condolence message issued by the Media Wing of the President's House, the spokesperson extended heartfelt sympathies to Abdul Jabbar Zakaria and his family on the tragic loss. Murtaza Solangi prayed for the elevation of the departed soul's ranks in Jannah and for patience and strength for the bereaved family to bear this irreparable loss.—APP

Government reforms to lift exports

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The government's recent economic measures are expected to support export growth after months of distress signals from the textile and allied industries, business leader and former president of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce, Shahid Rashid Butt, said on Tuesday. In a statement, Butt said Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif announced a package of reforms after repeated warnings from exporters about high energy costs, weak demand, and tight financing. He said parts of the business community had welcomed the steps and were providing limited but timely relief to the textile and selected industrial sectors that are important to Pakistan's export earnings.

Shahid Rasheed Butt said the package included a Rs 4.04 per-unit reduction in industrial electricity tariffs, lowering costs for export-oriented units. He added that the export reference rate had been cut by 300 basis points, lowering borrowing costs for firms already struggling with high working capital costs. According to him, electricity wheeling charges had also been rationalised to below Rs 9 per unit, giving industries greater flexibility in sourcing power. He said changes to the Export Facilitation Scheme had removed disadvantages faced by upstream manufacturers, creating a more level playing field within the textile value chain. Linking the measures to longer-term goals, Butt said value-added textile exports could rise from about \$ 18 billion to \$ 30 billion over the next five years if policies remained consistent. He said the industry was targeting annual export growth of around 10 percent.—APP

Pak, Uzbekistan agree to fast-track trade, investment

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Jam Kamal Khan, Federal Minister for Commerce, held a detailed meeting in Islamabad with Laziz Kudratov, Minister of Investment, Industry and Trade of the Republic of Uzbekistan, to review progress in bilateral economic cooperation and agree on practical steps to accelerate trade, investment, connectivity and sectoral partnerships. Welcoming the Uzbek delegation, the Federal Minister noted that Pakistan-Uzbekistan engagement has intensified significantly over the past two years through frequent high-level contacts and institutional follow-up, and stressed that the priority now is to "materialize" opportunities by closing gaps in logistics, business linkages and implementation, said a release issued here on Tuesday. He also pointed to the importance of keeping trade and investment coordination streamlined, while reaffirming Pakistan's full support for Uzbekistan across trade development initiatives. The Uzbek Minister, thanking Pakistan for the hospitality and arrangements for the delegation's visit, said both sides were preparing for an important upcoming high-level visit from Uzbekistan which, he expressed confidence, would mark another milestone in bilateral partnership. He highlighted improving trade indicators, sharing that bilateral trade had increased by around 10 percent last year, with Uzbekistan's imports from Pakistan rising by about 12 percent, while Uzbek exports to Pakistan grew by around 8 percent. He underlined the need to balance and scale trade, setting

an ambitious target of \$2 billion in bilateral trade through deeper industrial cooperation and new sectoral collaboration. A major focus of the meeting was progress on trade facilitation and market access. The Uzbek side appreciated the constructive negotiations on the preferential trade framework, including expansion of the product coverage list from 34 to 92 items, and indicated interest in broadening cooperation into services and investment-led arrangements over time. The Federal Minister, in turn, welcomed the forward movement on trade arrangements and emphasized that sustained implementation—supported by business-to-business engagement—would be essential for turning frameworks into increased shipments, contracts and joint ventures. Investment and industrial cooperation featured prominently, with Uzbekistan noting that 228 Pakistani companies are currently operating in Uzbekistan and that 80 new companies were registered there in the last year alone. Both sides discussed expanding partnerships in priority sectors including food security, mining, textiles, leather, and pharmaceuticals, alongside value-added manufacturing and specialized industrial cooperation. The Uzbek Minister said Uzbek companies are keen to explore investment and projects in Pakistan as well, including in food security and meat production, rice cultivation opportunities, and mining. The two sides also reviewed the positive momentum in people-to-people and business connectivity, welcoming the resumption and scaling up of direct air links. Uzbekistan reported that flights have been restarted and expanded to multi-

ple weekly frequencies from Islamabad and Lahore, with additional services planned from Karachi, aiming to reach six flights per week between the two countries—an increase expected to strengthen commercial travel, tourism and trade engagement. On regional connectivity and logistics, both sides discussed challenges stemming from disruption of traditional routes, particularly due to border and transit constraints in the neighborhood. In this context, the meeting explored alternative corridors and the role of National Logistics Corporation in routing cargo through the northern corridor and via Kashgar as a logistics and warehousing hub. The Uzbek side shared that Pakistani logistics operators have begun shifting cargo through the northern route regularly, though with higher costs and longer delivery times. Both Ministers agreed that improving predictability and reducing friction on alternative corridors is now critical for trade continuity. A key outcome of the discussion was the proposal to pursue a multi-country "green corridor" arrangement involving Pakistan, China and Central Asian partners to facilitate smoother movement of goods, supported by clear legal and operational mechanisms. The Uzbek side urged coordinated engagement with Chinese authorities to address bottlenecks, and welcomed the idea of leveraging warehousing capacity in Kashgar, including logistics facilities offered for use to support onward movement of cargo. Both sides agreed that diversified routes are essential to strengthen resilience in regional trade. The meeting devoted significant attention to mining and minerals cooperation,

where the Federal Minister underscored Pakistan's need for modern exploration capacity, technical surveying, drilling services and technology-driven mining development. Uzbekistan briefed Pakistan on its deep expertise—built over decades—in exploration, laboratories and both open-pit and shaft mining, and shared that a specialized overseas geology and mining services company has been established to provide services outside Uzbekistan. The Uzbek delegation indicated readiness to work with Pakistani partners on exploration services, knowledge transfer, and joint projects, while also engaging with Pakistan's geological institutions. The conversation further expanded to agriculture and value-added exports, including collaboration on live-stock and red-meat value chains, rice varieties and cultivation models, and processed foods such as dehydrated fruits, juices and concentrates. The Ministers discussed the importance of compliance, standards, and investment-backed models to enable Pakistan to scale exportable surpluses and tap larger markets in the region. Concluding the meeting, both Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to deepen Pakistan-Uzbekistan economic ties through accelerated implementation, sustained institutional coordination, and expanded B2B engagement. They agreed to maintain close follow-up across trade facilitation, connectivity, mining cooperation and food security initiatives, with the shared objective of translating strong political goodwill into measurable trade and investment outcomes.



ISLAMABAD: An elder vendor selling traditional clay pots at Golra area to earn daily wages for the livelihood of his family.

China-Pakistan agri-ties deepened as multiple MoUs inked

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A delegation of Chinese agricultural experts and industry leaders recently concluded a visit to the University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF), with the signing of several Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs). It paved the way for enhanced technological collaboration and market integration between the two nations, according to China Economic Net (CEN). The visit, hosted by the Confucius Institute at UAF (CI-UAF), brought together a comprehensive cross-section of China's agricultural innovation sector. The delegation comprised 12 senior executives from leading Chinese agribusinesses, alongside prominent professor from Northwest A&F University (NWAFU) and representatives of the Silk-Road Biohealth Agricultural Industry Alliance. Visiting entities showcased expertise spanning the entire agricultural value chain, including the sesame and chilli industries, smart hen breeding technology, fruit tree cultivation and processing, advanced agricultural machinery, rapeseed im-

provement and vegetable seed breeding. The delegation held substantive talks with Prof. Dr. Zulfiqar Ali, Vice Chancellor of UAF, and Dr. Saddam Hussain, Local Dean of CI-UAF. Discussions focused on strengthening bilateral cooperation and, crucially, on accelerating the translation of academic research into practical, market-driven solutions to meet Pakistan's specific agricultural development needs. Facilitated by CI-UAF, the core of the visit involved targeted B2B matchmaking sessions. Chinese delegates engaged in face-to-face meetings with over ten major Pakistani companies from sectors such as poultry, fruit processing, fertilizer and precision agriculture. These interactions have yielded concrete outcomes, culminating in the signing of multiple cooperation agreements and frameworks, CEN's report added. The newly signed MOUs cover a broad spectrum of collaboration areas, including technology transfer, joint skills development programmes and resource sharing, marking a significant step from dialogue to actionable partnerships. Outside the boardroom, the delegation toured the UAF exhibition center and key laboratories to gain a firsthand insight into local research capabilities and potential integration points for Chinese technologies.

HEC announces national skill competency test

The Test will be computer based to be conducted simultaneously across Pakistan on April 4-5, 2026. Eligible candidates may contact focal person of their respective university for timely completion of their registration

ISLAMABAD, February 2, 2026 - The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan has notified the commencement of the National Skill Competency Test for IT graduates, a landmark initiative designed to align academic outcomes with the rapidly evolving demands of the global technology sector. Developed pursuant to Prime Minister's directives and in close collaboration with the Ministry of Information Technology & Telecommunication (MoITT), the Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB), and the Pakistan Software Houses Association (P@SHA), this standardized assessment aims to enhance the employability and market readiness of the nation's burgeoning IT workforce. For students currently enrolled in their 7th and 8th semesters of computing programs - including Computer Science, Software Engineering, Artificial Intelligence, Data Science and related fields - the test offers a transformative opportunity.

Participation is entirely free of charge and provides high-achieving students with a joint certificate from HEC, PSEB, and the

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Highway Police arrest 244 suspects

RAWALPINDI: The Punjab Highway Police Rawalpindi Region arrested 244 suspects, including proclaimed offenders, and registered 117 cases during January 2026 as part of its ongoing crackdown on crime. According to a spokesperson for the Punjab Highway Police on Tuesday, 10 Category A and 67 Category B proclaimed offenders were among those arrested. The cases were registered against the accused across the region under various provisions of the Pakistan Penal Code, the Arms Ordinance, the Control of Narcotic Substances Act and other relevant laws, the spokesperson said. Citing the monthly performance report, he said the highway police also issued challans for 32,345 traffic violations during the period, reflecting continued enforcement efforts to improve road safety.—APP

32 police officers punished over jail escapes

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Interior Muhammad Talal Badar on Tuesday informed the Senate that 19 prisoners escaped from police custody over the past four years, of whom 15 have since been rearrested. Responding to various questions during Question Hour, he said disciplinary action was taken against 32 police officers for negligence and violations of standard operating procedures (SOPs). The minister said that four escaped prisoners were still at large, adding that efforts were under way to apprehend them. He said departmental action had been initiated against 32 police officials found responsible for lapses in custody management, with major punishments awarded to 17 officers. He said that 13 criminal cases had also been registered against police personnel whose negligence contributed to the escapes. The minister explained that investigations revealed failures in following SOPs related to the production of accused persons before courts and their transfer from one place to another, which led to the incidents. "Wherever negligence was established, strict action was taken without discrimination," he added. APP

ANF arrests five, seizes 22.7 kg of narcotics

RAWALPINDI: The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) arrested five suspects and seized 22.7 kilograms of drugs worth more than Rs 190,000 in a series of operations across the country, an ANF spokesman said on Tuesday. In an operation, ANF officials recovered 12 kg of hashish from a vehicle near the Fatah Jang Interchange and arrested the driver. Another suspect was detained near Chak 196 in Faisalabad with 7.2 kg of hashish, while a third was arrested in Johar Colony, Faisalabad, with 1.6 kg of the drug. In Sialkot, ANF officials seized 1 kg of crystal meth (ice) concealed inside an electric heater at a courier office on Diska Road and arrested the accused. Separately, 400 grams of ice and 500 grams of hashish were recovered from a cement-laden truck near GT Road in Burhan, Attock district. Cases have been registered under the Control of Narcotic Substances Act, 1972, and further investigations are underway," the spokesman said. The operations are part of the force's ongoing nationwide campaign to curb drug trafficking and narcotics abuse.—APP

Rubio and American diplomacy

DALIA AL-AQIDI

FOR much of the past decade, American foreign policy has felt confused, cautious and often reactive. Allies were unsure where the US stood. Adversaries tested limits. Too often, decisions seemed driven by short-term political pressures rather than a clear long-term strategy, creating a vacuum in global leadership. In that space, rivals like China, Russia and Iran moved more aggressively to expand their influence, while partners in Europe and the Middle East began questioning whether Washington was still willing and able to lead. In this context, a strong argument can be made that Marco Rubio is emerging as one of the most effective secretaries of state in modern American history. Not because of dramatic gestures or media attention but because he has brought back something essential to US diplomacy: strategic seriousness. Rubio understands a basic truth that many policymakers lost sight of: foreign policy is not about being liked. It is about power, security and responsibility. The purpose of American diplomacy is not to seek applause but to defend national interests, stand with allies and stop threats before they turn into conflicts. The world Rubio faces is more dangerous than at any time since the end of the Cold War. China is expanding its economic and military reach across Asia, Africa and Latin America. Russia continues to challenge the global order through aggression and coercion. Iran fuels instability across the Middle East through proxy militias and ideological warfare. At the same time, international institutions are weaker, global trust is lower and conflicts spread faster than before. It is about honesty. Rubio understands that diplomacy built on false assumptions leads to failed policies. The Florida politician, who has spent more than half his life in public service, does not rely on wishful thinking to confront global challenges. His approach is grounded in realism: that power cannot be ignored, threats must be faced directly and lasting peace is built through strength and clear-eyed judgment, not comforting illusions.

One of Rubio's most notable qualities is clarity. He speaks about authoritarian regimes without hiding behind vague diplomatic language. He calls out Beijing's strategic ambitions, not as competition but as a long-term challenge to democratic systems. He treats Tehran not as a misunderstood actor but as a revolutionary regime that uses violence, ideology and intimidation to expand its influence. He recognizes that Moscow is not simply reacting to Western policy but actively seeking to weaken the rules-based international order. This clarity is not about confrontation for its own sake. It is about honesty. Rubio understands that diplomacy built on false assumptions leads to failed policies. You cannot negotiate effectively if you refuse to admit what you are negotiating against. At the same time, the American official has shown that strength does not mean recklessness. He does not seek endless wars or military escalation. Instead, he focuses on prevention: making clear that aggression will be costly, while keep-

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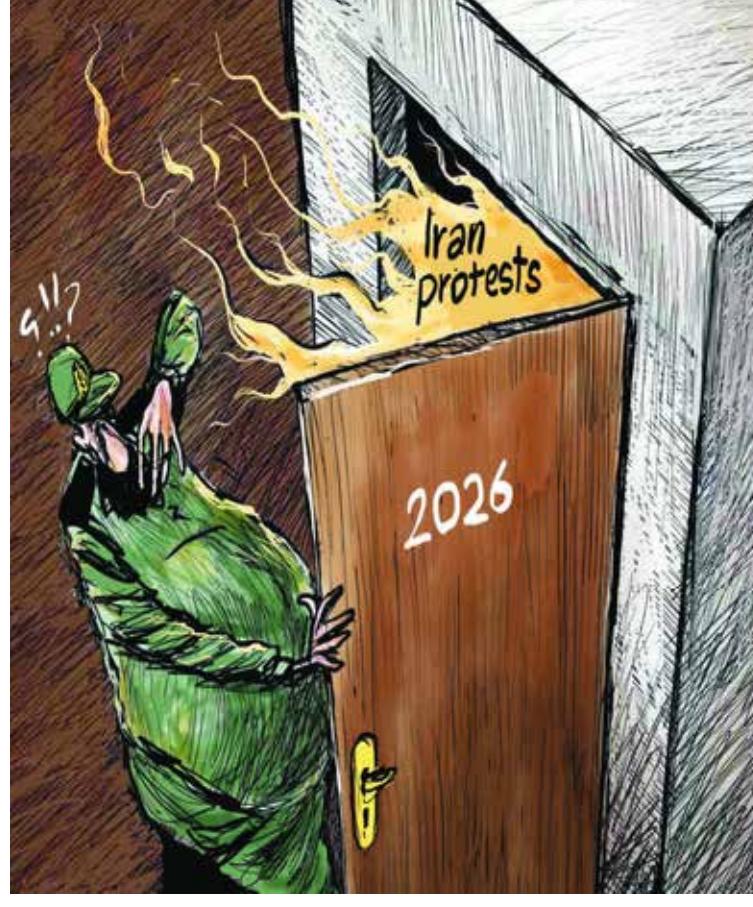
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ing diplomatic channels open for serious negotiation. This balance, firmness without chaos, is one of the most difficult skills in foreign policy and one of the most valuable. Rubio also restores moral clarity to American diplomacy. For years, the US hesitated to speak firmly about its values. Human rights were applied unevenly and democracy often sounded more like a talking point than a real commitment. Rubio brings the focus back to a simple belief: that freedom, the rule of law and human dignity are not special privileges for the West but fundamental rights people everywhere want and deserve. This matters deeply for international audiences. When the US speaks with moral uncertainty, authoritarian regimes fill the vacuum with their own narratives. When America is clear about what it stands for, it gives courage to reformers, dissidents, journalists and civil society actors across the world. Rubio's support for democratic allies is not symbolic. He understands that alliances are not acts of charity; they are strategic assets. He treats partners in Europe, Asia and the Middle East as force multipliers that strengthen global stability. Whether in supporting NATO, strengthening ties with Indo-Pacific democracies or reinforcing partnerships in the Middle East, he has made it clear that the US does not lead alone, but it must still lead. To understand Rubio's place in history, it helps to compare him with some of the most respected Republican secretaries of state. George Shultz, who served under Ronald Reagan, believed that effective diplomacy must be built on strength. In the Cold War, he pushed back firmly against the Soviet Union while still maintaining open lines of communication. His calm and consistent leadership helped shift the world from constant tension toward meaningful arms control and stability. He treats partners in Europe, Asia and the Middle East as force multipliers that strengthen global stability James Baker, under President George H.W. Bush, managed the end of the Cold War with rare skill. He built international coalitions, maintained alliances and navigated the collapse of the Soviet system without triumphalism or chaos. His diplomacy was pragmatic, disciplined and effective. Henry Kissinger, though controversial, changed global diplomacy by accepting how power really works. He believed that ideals mean little without a clear strategy and that American interests must stay at the center of foreign policy choices. What Rubio shares with these figures is not their personality or era but their seriousness. Like them, he treats foreign policy as a discipline, not a performance. However, Rubio's main weakness, according to critics, is that his strong moral view of global politics can limit the flexibility of diplomacy. In many parts of the world, especially in the Middle East, Africa and parts of Asia, Washington must often work with imperfect partners to prevent larger crises. Rubio's preference for firm language, sanctions and public pressure, while powerful tools, can at times narrow diplomatic options and harden positions. Critics argue that an overreliance on pressure risks pushing hostile regimes closer to rivals like China and Russia and closing channels that could be useful for de-escalation. In simple terms, Rubio is excellent at drawing clear lines but real diplomacy often takes place in the gray areas, where patience, compromise and discreet engagement are also necessary. The international community does not need a perfect America but it does need a clear and steady one. When US policy is uncertain, global instability grows. When it is grounded, consistent and guided by principles, nations can plan ahead, work together and manage conflicts with greater confidence.

The Quiet Crisis behind the Gaza War

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



The result is a West Bank increasingly fragmented into disconnected enclaves.

Palestinian towns are encircled by checkpoints, fences and settler-only roads. Land once used for agriculture is reclassified for security purposes or settlement growth. Permits are required to build, dig wells, or even repair homes, while unauthorised settler construction often proceeds with retroactive approval. This uneven application of law reinforces a system in which two populations live under different legal regimes on the same land. The human cost is mounting. Palestinian fatalities in the West Bank have reached levels not seen in years

WILE the world's cameras remain trained on the devastation in Gaza, a slower, less visible crisis has been unfolding across the occupied West Bank. Away from the headlines, tensions have risen sharply, violence has intensified and the political ground has shifted in ways that may prove just as consequential for the future of Palestine and Israel. Roadblocks multiply, armed raids have become routine, settler activity is expanding and Palestinian communities face growing insecurity. The war in Gaza may dominate international diplomacy, but the West Bank is quietly being reshaped. Recent statements from President Donald Trump rejecting any formal annexation of the West Bank have offered a measure of diplomatic reassurance. They echo unusually blunt warnings from Washington's Gulf partners, including the United Arab Emirates, which has reminded Israel that official annexation would cross a "red line." These messages, at least on paper, suggest that the prospect of Israel declaring sovereignty over West Bank territory still carries political costs. Yet focusing solely on formal annexation risks missing the more important reality: the steady advance of de facto annexation, pursued through facts on the ground rather than declarations from parliament. For years, Israeli settlement expansion has altered the geography of the West Bank. What is different now is the pace and the political environment. Since the outbreak of the Gaza war, settler activity has accelerated, new outposts have appeared and long-stalled plans for construction have moved forward with renewed urgency. Palestinian villages report a sharp rise in settler violence, often accompanied by restrictions on movement that leave communities isolated from farmland, markets and medical care. The Israeli military presence, already pervasive, has deepened, with near-daily raids into urban centres such as Jenin, Nablus and Tulkarem. These developments are not occurring in a vacuum. Israeli politics has shifted decisively to the right, empowering figures who openly oppose the creation of a Palestinian state and advocate permanent Israeli control over the West Bank. Within this political climate, de facto annexation is not a hidden project; it is a stated ambition. By expanding settlements, legalising outposts, rerouting roads and extending Israeli administrative authority over large swathes of territory, successive governments have worked to entrench a one-state reality, even as the language of a two-state solution lingers in diplomatic communiqués. The result is a West Bank increasingly fragmented into disconnected enclaves. Palestinian towns are encircled by checkpoints, fences and settler-only

roads. Land once used for agriculture is reclassified for security purposes or settlement growth. Permits are required to build, dig wells, or even repair homes, while unauthorised settler construction often proceeds with retroactive approval. This uneven application of law reinforces a system in which two populations live under different legal regimes on the same land. The human cost is mounting. Palestinian fatalities in the West Bank have reached levels not seen in years. Armed confrontations between Israeli forces and Palestinian groups have intensified, particularly in refugee camps that have become centres of resistance. Civilian life has been deeply disrupted: universities face repeated closures, commerce is stifled by movement restrictions and unemployment continues to rise. For many young Palestinians, the political horizon appears barren, offering neither a credible peace process nor the prospect of genuine self-rule.

Against this backdrop, Washington's rejection of formal annexation, though diplomatically significant, offers little immediate relief. The distinction between formal and de facto annexation may carry legal weight, but on the ground it is increasingly blurred. When land is steadily absorbed into the settlement enterprise, when Palestinian presence is constrained and when Israeli civil institutions extend their reach into occupied territory, sovereignty is exercised in practice if not in name. The warnings from Gulf states underline a broader regional concern. Since the signing of the Abraham Accords, countries such as the UAE have invested political capital in engagement with Israel, often presenting normalisation as a pathway to stability and moderation. Formal annexation would place those governments in an untenable position, forcing them to choose between strategic partnerships and domestic public opinion that remains deeply sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. Their "red line" reflects not only diplomatic principle but political necessity. Yet the credibility of these warnings depends on whether they are matched by sustained pressure. Thus far, regional diplomacy has struggled to keep the West Bank high on the agenda. Gaza's catastrophe understandably commands attention, absorbing the energies of mediators and humanitarian agencies alike. But this focus has also created space for quieter shifts elsewhere. In Washington, political divisions and electoral calculations have narrowed the room for assertive engagement. The result is a policy environment in which strong words coexist with limited leverage. Europe, too, has issued repeated statements of concern while largely failing to alter Israeli calculations. The language of international law is invoked, but consequences are

rarely attached. Meanwhile, Palestinian leadership in the West Bank remains weak and divided, its authority eroded by years of stalled negotiations, internal rifts and public disillusionment. This vacuum has allowed local armed groups to gain influence, further militarising the landscape and complicating any future diplomatic effort. The danger is that the West Bank is drifting toward a point of irreversibility. Every new settlement neighbourhood, every bypass road and every legal change that integrates territory into Israel's administrative system makes the partition of land more difficult to imagine. The map is being redrawn not by conference tables but by bulldozers and security orders. Over time, this process erodes not only the physical basis of a Palestinian state but the political logic underpinning decades of diplomacy. For Pakistan and much of the Muslim world, the West Bank's deterioration resonates deeply. The Palestinian question has long been central to public consciousness, framed not only as a territorial dispute but as a test of international justice. As Gaza bleeds, the slow tightening of control over the West Bank risks being overshadowed, yet it may prove equally decisive. A future in which Palestinians are permanently confined to fragmented enclaves under external authority would entrench a system of unequal rights that few could credibly defend.

There is still space, however limited, for a different course. International actors who oppose formal annexation must confront de facto annexation with equal seriousness. This means moving beyond

ritual statements to policies that impose tangible costs on actions that undermine the possibility of a negotiated settlement. It also means revitalising diplomatic engagement with the Palestinian leadership and addressing the governance crisis that has weakened its standing. Equally important is the need to restore the West Bank to the centre of international concern. Humanitarian access, protection of civilians and accountability for violence—whether by settlers or security forces—cannot remain peripheral issues. The longer the current trajectory continues unchecked, the more likely it is that the West Bank will become not merely another front of instability, but the graveyard of any remaining hope for a just and lasting peace. History suggests that conflicts ignored rarely resolve themselves. They harden, deepen and eventually erupt in forms that command attention at far greater cost. The world's gaze may be fixed on Gaza today, but the future of Palestine is being quietly contested in the hills and valleys of the West Bank. Whether through indifference or intent, a new reality is taking shape. The question is whether the international community will recognise it in time to change its course.

No Permanent Friends

POSITIVE thinking and optimism are among the noblest ways to approach life, for they inspire resilience and hope. Yet optimism, when detached from ground realities, can become a dangerous illusion. Nations, like individuals, suffer when emotions replace judgment and wishful thinking substitutes for strategy. In this context, certain memories frequently return to my mind—memories shaped not merely by personal observation but by Pakistan's long and often painful engagement with global power politics. When the renowned American intellectual and analyst Noam Chomsky visited Pakistan, he was asked a question that has troubled this country since its earliest years: how should Pakistan understand its relationship with the United States? Chomsky responded with disarming honesty. America, he said, has always pursued its own interests, irrespective of who sits in the White House. Where its interests lie, it cooperates generously; where they do not, it withdraws without hesitation. To support his argument, he recalled several historical examples and, with a touch of sarcasm, remarked that the much-promised "Enterprise" fleet sent to "help" Pakistan had yet to arrive. Smiling, he added that Pakistanis are an emotional nation; say a few affectionate words to them and they become elated, a vulnerability that has led to repeated betrayals. I was present on that occasion and was struck by the frankness with which an American described American policy. It was unsettling because it rang true. We are, indeed, a deeply emotional people. If a foreign leader laughs with our rulers or speaks to them in an unusually warm tone, we are quick to imagine a relationship of kinship, as though he were a close relative rather than the head of a powerful state guided by hard interests. Sentiment often clouds our judgment, and we mistake courtesy for commitment. History, faith, and experience all counsel caution.

abandonment was a grave mistake—an admission that confirmed what Pakistan had long experienced: partnerships are often transactional, not enduring.

Contemporary American politics further illustrates this pattern. The current US President is known for rapid shifts in tone and policy. Statements made during the day are frequently contradicted by actions taken at night. Policies toward China, Iran, and other countries oscillate according to immediate calculations. Not long ago, he appeared visibly displeased with the Indian Prime Minister; yet when strategic interests aligned, displeasure melted into public warmth. In international affairs, affection is rarely personal; it is dictated by advantage.

The events of May 2025 stand as a sobering reminder. At that critical juncture, divine help was with us and our military leadership remained vigilant. By the grace of Almighty Allah, Pakistan emerged successful. Had circumstances been otherwise, it is unlikely that today's diplomatic posture toward Pakistan would be what it is. International respect follows strength and preparedness, not expectations or appeals.

The lesson is unmistakable. Pakistan must place Pakistan first. Relations between states inevitably fluctuate, shaped by interests rather than emotions. There is nothing immoral in this; it is the essence of global politics. What matters is that Pakistan safeguard its dignity, sovereignty, and integrity while engaging others on equal terms. Above all, Pakistan should avoid the urge to put all its eggs in one basket. Overdependence on any single power has repeatedly constrained our options and weakened our negotiating position. A diversified foreign policy, rooted in realism and national consensus, is not a luxury but a necessity. Nations are ultimately remembered not for their hopes or sentiments, but for the decisions they make—and those decisions determine the path of their future.

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



This behaviour echoed an earlier episode, candidly acknowledged years later by former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. She admitted that after the Soviet Union withdrew its forces from Afghanistan, the United States simply walked away, abandoning the region and Pakistan alike. Having used Pakistan as a frontline ally, Washington disengaged without... History, faith, and experience all counsel caution.

Briefs

Government launches coordinated drive: Tarar

FROM PAGE 01
Attullah Tarar said building a credible counter-narrative against violent extremism was primarily the responsibility of religious scholars, adding that the government had also established a CVE Cell in the Information Ministry. He said a third-party audit mechanism had been put in place to assess the reach and impact of the narratives produced by the CVE Cell, particularly through digital platforms. The minister informed the House that a fully functional digital communication department was disseminating the counter-extremism narrative nationwide. Referring to recent political engagement, he said the visit of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chief minister to the Prime Minister was a positive development and would help improve coordination between the federal government and KP, especially on law and order and counter-terrorism.

Imran Khan shifted to Pims on his own request

FROM PAGE 01
NAB corruption case and was currently serving his sentence as a confined prisoner, not an undertrial. He told the House that the former premier had also been convicted in another reference involving the undervaluation of a jewellery set, where assets worth millions of rupees were shown at a much lower price, causing loss to the national exchequer. The minister said that recently the former prime minister was shifted to Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) for eye treatment. He said PIMS was Islamabad's leading public-sector tertiary hospital and that a medical board had examined the patient, administered the required injection and noted positive progress.

Pakistan invited to upcoming United...

FROM PAGE 01
a regional official told Reuters, adding that some regional powers were also invited. The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said some of the countries invited to the talks at the foreign ministers' level included Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The person said the format of the meetings remained unclear, but that the "main meeting" would be on Friday and that it was important to start dialogue between the parties to avoid further escalation. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian confirmed on Tuesday that he has instructed FM Araghchi to pursue "fair and equitable negotiations" provided that an environment "free from threats and unreasonable expectations". The talks will be held "within the framework of our national interests", he said in a series of posts on X. Trump has maintained he is hopeful that Washington will "work something out" with Iran, but also warned on Monday that "bad things would happen" if no deal is reached.

Iran president says talks...

FROM PAGE 01
our national interests", he said. Washington dispatched an aircraft carrier group to the Middle East following anti-government protests in Iran that peaked last month. US President Trump has said he remains hopeful that Washington will "work something out" with Iran, but warned on Monday that "bad things would happen" if no deal is reached. Tehran has insisted it wants diplomacy while vowing an unbridled response to any aggression. It has repeatedly stressed that talks should remain focused solely on the nuclear issue, rejecting negotiations over its missile programme or defence capabilities.

Army wins 4th national fitness challenge championship title

Teams from the Pakistan Army, Police, WAPDA, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, Balochistan, and Islamabad participated in the championship

OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Army clinched the 4th National Fitness Challenge Championship title for Men and Women, finishing on top with an impressive haul of 16 gold and 10 silver medals organized by the Pakistan Bodybuilding and Fitness Federation (PBBF). President of the Pakistan Bodybuilding and Fitness Federation, Tariq Pervez, was the chief guest at the concluding ceremony of the two-day event held at Qayum Stadium, Peshawar. The championship was conducted in accordance with the rules and regulations of the International Fitness and Bodybuilding Federation (IFBB). Olympian Sadaf Siddiqui and Havaldar Maqbool Ahmad led the Pakistan Army's dominant performance, collectively winning five gold medals in the Masters category and playing a pivotal role in securing the team's overall victory. In the Senior category, Roniq Ali claimed two gold medals, In Masters category Inamullah won two gold medals while Khadija Waheed and Ibrar Mohiuddin secured six gold medals in the Junior and Team Fit categories, respectively.

Teams from the Pakistan Army, Police, WAPDA, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, Balochistan, and Islamabad participated in the championship. The Police team finished as runners-up



with two gold, three silver, and three bronze medals, while Punjab secured third position with one gold and one bronze medal. Speaking on the occasion, PBBF President Tariq Pervez said that the 73rd

National Mr Pakistan, Junior Mr Pakistan, Classic Bodybuilding, Masters Pakistan Contest, along with the National Junior and Senior Bodybuilding Championship 2026, will be held on Wednesday (today)

in Peshawar. He added that teams from the Pakistan Army, Police, WAPDA, HEC, Railways, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, Balochistan, and Islamabad will showcase their talent in the national mega event.

Winning not enough for Thailand's most popular party

BANGKOK: Thousands of young orange-clad supporters cheered the rallies of Thailand's most popular political party ahead of elections this weekend, but few expect it to take power. While the People's Party is far ahead in the polls, promising to tackle corruption and reform Thailand's strict royal insult laws, even some of the party's lawmakers have their doubts. "They will not let us become the government or come into power easily," 31-year-old firebrand Rukchanok Srinork told AFP. "It is not a surprise that they will do everything to block us." Dubbed "Ice Storm" by Thai media, Rukchanok is an inspirational figure for many young Thai voters who want to see change. The People's Party is the latest incarnation of the organisation that won the last election, in 2023, pledging to relax lese-majeste laws, push back military influence and break up powerful business monopolies. It struck a coalition deal with second-placed Pheu

Thai - the grouping of ex-prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, now in prison - only for military-appointed senators to reject its leader, Pita Limjaroenrat, as prime minister. The constitutional court later banned Pita from politics for 10 years for campaigning to change the lese-majeste legislation, known as Section 112, and dissolved the party. Refounded and renamed, the People's Party was around 11 percent ahead of its nearest rival, the ruling Bhumjaithai, in the last survey by respected pollster NIDA before a pre-election cut-off. Half of 18- to 35-year-olds support the party, it found. The party has half a million TikTok followers, its bright and playful daily content far outpacing Bhumjaithai's 38,000. "I feel bored with the old style of politics," said Napat Sinakas, a 23-year-old software developer and second-time voter. "I wish new politicians who've never had the chance to run the country have the chance to." But elite and conservative

forces retain their grip on the Thai establishment, and most analysts doubt the People's Party will manage to form a government, even if it emerges with the most seats. The party's victory in May 2023 - when it was known as Move Forward - came on a record turnout of 75 percent. Its dissolution sparked months of youth-led demonstrations in Bangkok, with protesters hurling unprecedented public criticisms of the monarchy and demanding transparency and reform. Protest leaders were later convicted under Section 112. Analysts expect incumbent Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul's Bhumjaithai to come second this time and form a coalition with probable third-placed Pheu Thai. Many young voters say that would dishearten them. "I would probably be angry... not angry at the party, but angry at the rules or the people who caused it - those who might have made secret deals behind the scenes," said Patcharee Phadungsusira, 26. - APP

Italian biathlete Passler suspended

DNA

ROME: Italian biathlete Rebecca Passler has failed a doping test and was on Monday provisionally suspended from competing at the Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics. The 24-year-old's sample showed the presence of letrozole, a drug used to treat breast cancer, the Italian anti-doping agency (NADO Italia) said in a statement. It was detected in an out-of-competition test which fell outside the official Games testing window. Passler currently stands 33rd in the overall World Cup standings.

The niece of Johann

Passler, an Olympic bronze medallist at the 1988 Calgary Games, she would have been competing in her hometown of Anterselva at the Milan-Cortina Games. The Winter Olympics opening ceremony takes place on Friday.

Trump says Mexico will 'cease' sending oil to Cuba

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said Monday that Mexico would stop sending oil to Cuba, which is already struggling after supplies from its traditional provider Venezuela dried up following the fall of Nicolas Maduro. "It's a failed nation. Mexico is going to cease sending them oil," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office when asked about Cuba. For years, until Maduro's ouster, the Cuban economy spluttered along on cheap supplies of Venezuelan oil. The end of Mexican supplies, too, would significantly deepen what is already Cuba's most serious economic crisis since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union. There was no immediate response from Mexico to Trump's comments. The US president has approved punitive tariffs against countries supplying oil to Cuba. The decree effectively forced Cuba's partners to choose between trade with the world's largest economy or with an impoverished island of 11 million people. Mexico has been reluctant to cut supplies, with President Claudia Sheinbaum warning of a "far-reaching humanitarian crisis directly affecting hospitals, food supplies, and other basic services for the Cuban people."

But the United States is Mexico's largest trade partner, and tariffs could damage the already slow-growing economy. While reiterating her "everlasting solidarity" with the Cuban people, Sheinbaum added, "We don't want to put our country at risk in terms of tariffs." She also said that during a phone conversation Thursday with Trump, the two leaders "never discussed" the issue of oil with Cuba. In his Oval Office remarks, Trump again said his administration was in talks with Cuba's leaders. "I think we are pretty close, but we are dealing with the Cuban leaders right now," he said, without elaborating. A senior Cuban diplomat on Monday said there were contacts between the two countries, but no formal talks. - Agencies

Switch 2 sales boost Nintendo results but chip shortage looms

TOKYO: The runaway success of the Switch 2 console drove up Nintendo's net profit by more than 50 percent in the nine months to December, the Japanese video game giant said Tuesday. But a global memory chip shortage, created by frenzied demand for artificial intelligence hardware, could push up manufacturing costs. The Switch 2 became the world's fastest-selling games console after launching to a fast frenzy last summer. It is the successor to the original Switch, which soared in popularity during the pandemic when games such as "Animal Crossing" struck a chord during long lockdowns. Both are hybrid devices that can be connected to a TV or used on-the-go. In April-December, net profit jumped 51.3 percent year-on-year to \$358.9 billion yen (\$2.3 billion), and revenue nearly doubled on-year to 1.9 trillion yen, Nintendo said. But the firm kept its annual unit sales target for the Switch 2 steady at 19 million, and also held its full-year net profit forecast of 350 billion yen. "Nintendo Switch 2 got off to a good start following its launch on June 5 and unit sales continued to grow through the holiday season," the company said.

Nearly 17.4 million Switch 2 devices were sold in the nine-month period, it added. "Maintaining momentum is certainly a big focus for Nintendo," Krysta Yang of the Nintendo-focused Kit and Krysta Podcast told AFP. A lack of heavy-hitting first-party new games for the Switch 2 in coming months risks hindering growth, although third-party titles such as "Resident Evil Requiem" should help fill the gap, she said. Nintendo said Tuesday it planned to release "Mario Tennis Fever" this month and "Pokemon Pokopia" in March. While the firm is diversifying into hit movies and theme parks, consoles remain core of its business. - APP

At UN, Pakistan emphasized need for social solidarity

UNITED NATIONS: Pakistan has highly praised 'Darulaceze', a comprehensive social care institution in Istanbul, Turkey, saying that since 1895, it has demonstrated that long-term care systems are strongest when they unite state responsibility with philanthropy, volunteerism and community ownership. "Darulaceze stands as a powerful testament to how compassion, when anchored in social solidarity and public trust, can be transformed into a lasting mission," Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, permanent representative of Pakistan to the United Nations, told a side-event on the sidelines of the 64th Session of the UN Commission for Social Development.

The event was jointly organized by Turkey, Pakistan, Qatar, and Azerbaijan. It was titled - "Building an Inclusive Long-Term Care System Sustained by Social Solidarity: Turkey's 130-Year-Old Home of Compassion 'Darulaceze' - an Example of Good Practice."

In his remarks, Ambassador Asim Ahmad said that Darulaceze's principles resonate deeply with Pakistan's own social and moral traditions, where solidarity-based care is embedded both in public policy and societal practice.

Highlighting Pakistan's government-led initiatives, the Pakistani envoy referred to the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) as a cornerstone of the country's social protection framework.

He said that financed through the federal budget, BISP provides targeted cash transfers to millions of low-income households—primarily women-headed families—serving as a vital instrument for poverty alleviation, income security, and social inclusion.

"BISP reflects a clear policy choice: that protecting the most vulnerable is a responsibility of the State and a matter of dignity and rights," he stated. Ambassador Asim Ahmad also drew attention to the long-standing role of Pakistani 'Baitul-Mal' in supporting the elderly, women, persons with disabilities, orphans, and individuals without family care. He said that services rendered by it including residential care homes, medical assistance, rehabilitation, and vocational training, are sustained through a blended model, which combines government funding, zakat, charitable endowments, and voluntary contributions.

He also drew attention to Pakistan's globally recognized tradition of organized philanthropy and volunteerism, citing the Edhi Foundation as a universal symbol of humanitarian service. He said that operating shelters, ambulance services, old-age homes, and emergency response net works largely through public donations and volunteers, the Foundation exemplifies society-driven care.

Ambassador Asim Ahmad also noted the growing role of charitable trusts, faith-based organizations, and private-sector corporate social responsibility initiatives in supporting long-term care and community-based social services across Pakistan. He called for greater international support to elevate solidarity-based care models from good practice to global policy, urging the United Nations and international financial institutions to invest in their documentation, financing, and scaling as integral pillars of inclusive social development.

APNS decries DAWN ad ban

lic exchequer hence should not be used as tool to impact editorial policy of newspapers. The Executive Committee unanimously expressed its solidarity with Dawn Media Group in the hour of financial strangulation.

The APNS Executive Committee expressed its concern on consistent indifference of the Federal Govt. to implement the decision of the Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif, announced three years ago to increase the Govt. advertisement rates of newspapers. The delay has not only caused severe financial crunch to newspaper industry but also shows that the instructions of the Prime Minister are not being honored.

The members of the Executive Committee observed that PID Islamabad has not paid major portion of dues of member publications released after the new advertising policy of 2020. They requested the PID to expedite the payment of outstanding dues and allocate a fair share in the quantum of advertise-

ments for the print media. They also demanded that the regional PID offices be empowered to suggest media of their regions and authorized the clients to select the media of their choice.

The Sindh based members appraised the Executive Committee that the share in quantum of advertisements released by Sindh Govt. has been considerably reduced. Further, the payments of non-budgeted advertisements and outstanding liabilities has not been made. The members unanimously decided that the office bearers should meet the Provincial Minister for Information and apprise him the problems faced by Sindh based publications.

The Executive Committee approve the applications for provisional accreditation of M/s. Balance Publicity (Pvt.) Ltd., Lahore and M/s. Red Ocean Communications and PR (Pvt.) Ltd., Lahore.

The Executive Committee also ap-

proved the restructuring of M/s. Solution 1, Karachi. The meeting was attended by the following: Senator Sarmad Ali, President, Mr. Shahab Zuberi, Vice President, Mr. Muhammad Athar Kazi, Secretary General, Mr. Mohsin Bilal, Joint Secretary, Mr. Mohsin Seyed (Aftab), Mr. Bilal Farooqui (Aghaz), Mr. Najamuddin Sheikh (Deyanat), Mr. Muhammad Younas Mehr (Halchal), Kazi Asad Abid (Ibrat), Syed Akbar Tahir (Jasarat), Mr. Faisal Shahzad (Jiddat) Mr. Javed Mehr Shamsi (Kaleem), Mr. Aamir Malik (Mashriq Quetta), Ms. Zahida Abbasi (Nau Sijj), Mr. Salman Qureshi (Naya Rukh), Mr. S.M. Munir Jilani (Paigham), Mr. Mubashir Mir (Pakistan), Mr. Ebraheem Faisal (Pakistan Observer), Mr. Humayun Gulzar (Sayyadat), Mr. Irfan Athar (Tijarat), Mr. Waseem Ahmed (Awam), Mr. Ansar Mahmood Bhatti (Centre Line), Ms. Fauzia Shaheen (Dastak) and Mr. Bilal Mahmood (Nawa-i-Waqat) attended the meeting on Zoom.

Mr. Mumtaz Ali Phulpoto (Awami Parchar) attended the meeting as special observer.

Call to spur process of privatization

FROM PAGE 01
the committee recommended including the outsourcing of Islamabad International Airport through the Privatization Commission. This step aligns with broader efforts to shift airport operations toward competitive, private-sector-led models following high investor interest and the recent shift from government-to-government modalities to open bidding.dawn.com Senator Ishaq Dar stressed the importance of ensuring fair market valuations in all privatization efforts, taking into account both current assets and future business potential. He reiterated that privatization initiatives are designed to stimulate private-sector investment, improve adaptability to market changes, and contribute to overall economic reforms. The meeting was attended by Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, Minister for Power Awas Leghari, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Haroon Akhtar, SAPM Tariq Bajwa, Secretary Cabinet, Secretary Privatization, Secretary Law Division, Secretary Industries, and other senior officials.

PTI disowns social media trolling...

FROM PAGE 01
He said the PTI's stance against terrorism was firm and unambiguous, and that attacks on security institutions were unacceptable under any circumstances. Akram said the matter had also been discussed at the level of the party's political committee, where it was conveyed that anyone attempting to link the PTI with narratives undermining the fight against terrorism or attacking the martyrs and the security forces should be clearly and publicly disowned. He maintained that the party's position on terrorism and national security was settled and left no room for ambiguity. Akram said that it is Imran Khan's policy that the army belongs to him and is critically important for Pakistan and its very existence.

Pakistan, Libya vow to...

FROM PAGE 01
importance of strengthening bilateral relations. The meeting reflected the shared desire to enhance cooperation in areas of common concern and to promote peace, stability, and development at the regional and international levels. The Libyan leadership appreciated Pakistan's role and expressed interest in expanding collaboration between the two countries. The meeting concluded with an understanding to maintain close contact and explore avenues for future cooperation. A day earlier, Libyan military chief called on CDF Field Marshal Asim Munir at General Headquarters (GHQ), said the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) in a statement. According to the military's media wing, during the meeting, both sides exchanged views on matters of mutual interest, with particular focus on security dynamics in respective regions and professional cooperation. The discussion underscored the importance of continued engagement and collaboration between the armed forces of Pakistan and Libya, the ISPR said.

Kazakhstan president...

FROM PAGE 01
cabinet ministers and other high-ranking officials. During his first state visit to Pakistan, President Tokayev will meet his Pakistani counterpart, as well as hold talks with PM Shehbaz, and address the Pakistan-Kazakhstan Business Forum. Both sides will also sign a number of memoranda of understanding (MoUs) and cooperation agreements between the two countries in diverse sectors. "The visit will provide the two sides an important and timely opportunity to undertake a comprehensive review of bilateral relations, discuss new avenues for broadening cooperation, particularly in trade, logistics, regional connectivity, people-to-people contacts, and explore collaboration at regional and international forums," the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said a day ago.

Briefs

PSX gains 1,842 to close at 186,900 points

ISLAMABAD: The benchmark KSE-100 Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) on Tuesday witnessed a bullish trend, gaining 1,842.91 points, a positive change of 1.00 percent, to close at 186,900.74 points compared to 185,057.83 points on the previous trading day, according to PSX data.

During the session, the ready market recorded a trading volume of 848,559 million shares with a traded value of Rs 50.025 billion, against 740,092 million shares valuing Rs 42,204 billion in the previous session. Market capitalization increased to Rs 21,149 trillion from Rs 20,969 trillion a day earlier.

Out of 486 active companies in the ready market, 294 advanced, 145 declined, while 47 remained unchanged.

K-Electric Limited topped the volume chart with 99,508 million shares, followed by First National Equities with 91,350 million shares and K-Electric with 86,293 million shares.

The top gainers included Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited, which rose by Rs 110.17 to close at Rs 27,139.81, and Blessed Textile Limited, which gained Rs 61.34 to settle at Rs 674.77. On the losing side, PIA Holding Company Limited declined by Rs 304.49 to close at Rs 19,494.51, while Sazgar Engineering Works Limited fell by Rs 40.88 to close at Rs 2,302.05. In the futures market, turnover stood at 179,774 million shares with a traded value of Rs 12,640 billion, compared to 114,500 million shares worth Rs 9,205 billion in the previous session.

Out of 328 futures-market companies, 254 recorded gains, while 72 declined with two remaining unchanged.—APP

Rupee gains 01 paisa against US Dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Tuesday appreciated by 01 paisa against the US Dollar in interbank trading and closed at Rs 279.75 compared to the previous day's closing at Rs 279.76. According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs 280.60 and Rs 282.30, respectively. The price of the Euro decreased by Rs 1.10 to close at Rs 330.55 from the previous day's close of Rs 331.65, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese Yen remained unchanged and closed at Rs 1.80, whereas the exchange rate of the British Pound witnessed an increase of Rs 0.35 and closed at Rs 383.16 compared to the previous day's Rs 382.81.

The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal went up by 01 paisa each to close at Rs 76.17 and Rs 74.59, respectively.—APP

Gold prices surge by Rs24,000 per tola

ISLAMABAD: Gold prices increased sharply in the local market on Tuesday, as the price of 24-karat gold per tola surged by Rs 24,000 to settle at Rs 514,362, while the price of 10 grams of 24-karat gold went up by Rs 20,576 to Rs 440,982, according to the All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association. Likewise, the price of 10 grams of 22-karat gold increased by Rs 18,862 to Rs 404,248, whereas silver prices also registered an increase, with 24-karat silver per tola going up by Rs 741 to stand at Rs 9,146 and 10 grams of silver increasing by Rs 636 to Rs 7,841. In the international market, gold prices went up \$240 to \$4,916 per ounce, while silver increased by \$7.41 to \$86.71 per ounce, the association reported.—APP

PM's relief package to strengthen export base: Tahir

DNA



ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) has highly appreciated Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif for rolling out a comprehensive relief package for industries and exporters, describing it as a timely and positive step towards reviving economic activity, restoring investor confidence and strengthening Pakistan's export base. Addressing a well-attended press conference, ICCI President Sardar Tahir Mehmood said that the Prime Minister announced the relief measures, for which the press conference was convened primarily to express gratitude and acknowledgement. He also lauded the Prime Minister and Chairman Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) for reviewing and restructuring the Islamabad immovable property valuation table in line with the outcomes of extensive discussions held between ICCI leadership and FBR authorities at the FBR headquarters. He stated that this rationalization would help restore market confidence and encourage genuine investment in the real estate sector. The ICCI President highlighted that the relief package includes a Rs. 4.04 per unit reduction in electricity tariffs, lowering of industrial wheeling charges to below Rs. 9, reduction in the Ex-

port Refinance Scheme (ERS) rate from 7.5 percent to 4.5 percent, and the issuance of blue passports to leading exporters for two years. He termed these measures a clear reflection of the Prime Minister's commitment to promoting trade, investment and exports, and reiterated ICCI's full support for the government's economic vision. He reaffirmed the Chamber's resolve to continue acting as a bridge between the government and the private sector for ensur-

ing economic stability and national prosperity. Sardar Tahir Mehmood pointed out that excessive taxation and high interest rates are making Pakistan a difficult place to do business, and urged the government to rationalize these factors on an urgent basis. The ICCI President further stressed that bringing KIBOR to single digits is essential to reduce the cost of doing business and stimulate long-term investment. He reiterated ICCI's strong de-

mand to declare the real estate sector as an industry, noting that it not only fulfills housing needs but also supports dozens of allied industries. He also proposed the organization of a National Real Estate Conference with participation from all key stakeholders to identify sectoral challenges and facilitate effective policymaking. Speaking on the occasion, Chairman ICCI Founder Group Sheikh Tariq Sadiq welcomed the Prime Minister's relief package but emphasized the need for further measures to enhance industrial competitiveness and sustain economic growth.

Senior Vice President Tahir Ayub, Vice President Irfan Chaudhry, former Presidents Zubair Ahmed Malik, Mohammad Ejaz Abbasi, Executive Members Ishaq Sial, Zulqurnain Abbasi, Sanaullah Khan, Ms. Fatima Azim, Malik Mohsin Khalid, Imran Minhas, Raja Naveed Satti, and a large number of business community members were also present at the press conference.

China to play constructive role 'in our way' on N. Korea

SEOUL: China will continue to play a constructive role "in our way" for peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, Beijing's top envoy has said, hoping that the parties involved will take "effective" steps to help resolve the security issues lying at the core of the stalemate. Chinese Ambassador to South Korea Dai Bing made the remarks in an interview with Yonhap News Agency on Monday, as Seoul is pushing to restore inter-Korean ties and help revive the stalled talks between the North and the United States. Pyongyang has so far rejected the olive branch. "Since the launch of the Lee Jae Myung government, South Korea has actively engaged in efforts to ease tensions on the Korean Peninsula and seek contact and dialogue. The Chinese government highly appreciates these efforts," Dai said through an interpreter. China has maintained a stable and consistent policy and position on the Korean Peninsula issues. We will continue to play a constructive role in our way and maintain communication with South Korea," he said. Dai did not elaborate on what he meant by "our way," but his remarks follow last month's summit talks between President Lee Jae Myung and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing. Seoul has repeatedly called for Beijing—North Korea's traditional ally and key economic benefactor—to play an active role in helping bring Pyongyang back to the negotiating table. The nuclear diplomacy between North Korea and the United States collapsed without a deal in Hanoi in 2019. Following his talks with Xi, Lee said in a press availability in Shanghai that he had requested Xi to act as a mediator on North Korea issues and that Xi advised him to "have patience." Lee has also floated the idea of discussing arms control with Pyongyang, saying that prioritizing the denuclearization goal would not help make progress with the North given its growing nuclear and missile capabilities. "The root of the Korean Peninsula issue lies in security," Dai said. "We hope that the relevant parties will focus on the security side and take effective measures accordingly," he said, apparently suggesting that certain security guarantees should be offered to draw the North into talks. Regarding China's steel structures in the overlapping waters of the Yellow Sea, Dai pointed out that "baseless rumors" about the issue have been spread to stir disagreements between Seoul and Beijing, dismissing suspicion that the structures are for military purposes. "Some individuals have spread baseless rumors or exaggerated the facts, with the aim of amplifying differences between China and South Korea," Dai said. "We reaffirm that the so-called maritime structures are a Chinese deep-sea aquaculture facility for salmon farming, not a military installation," he said. Tensions flared up after China built two buoys and a fixed tower between 2018 and 2024 in the Yellow Sea area where their exclusive economic zones (EEZs) overlap. China claimed the two buoys were fish farms and the third fixed structure was a management facility. However, skeptics in Seoul have raised concerns that the structures may be Beijing's "gray zone" tactic to pave the way for military use and territorial expansion. "We recognize that there are overlapping claims between China and South Korea regarding maritime rights and interests that have resulted in certain differences in the fisheries sector," Dai said.—APP

Indonesia becomes first Asian country to ban elephant rides

JAKARTA: Indonesia has banned elephant rides, becoming the first Asian nation to outlaw the popular tourist activity on animal welfare grounds. Indonesia, home to the critically endangered Sumatran elephant and the endangered Bornean elephant, first announced the nationwide ban in December, with authorities gradually monitoring compliance since the start of this year. The move followed widespread calls to ban elephant rides, with many Indonesians now using social media to alert authorities on sites still offering such activities especially in Bali, the country's most popular holiday island. All of Bali's conservation sites, including Bali Zoo and Mason Elephant Park & Lodge, have officially banned elephant rides by the end of January, according to the Bali Natural Resources Conservation Agency.

"Based on our most recent monitoring, all five of the conservation sites in Bali have complied and are no longer offering elephant rides for visitors," Ratna Hendratmoko, who heads the agency, told Arab News on Tuesday. Elephant rides were

a popular tourist attraction in Bali, which last year welcomed nearly 7 million foreign visitors. "There was demand from visitors, tourists, who are enthusiastic and attracted to elephant rides, even if it's just for 10 to 15 minutes. "But maybe for them, it's an opportunity to show off on social media, showing that they're doing something that they think it's cool, something that not many others can do," Hendratmoko said. "I'm thankful to online friends who have been raising their concerns and reminding us to continue our monitoring. We are giving our best to do our job," Indonesian authorities are urging conservation sites to prioritize animal welfare, offer educational activities for visitors and shift to "innovative and non-exploitative" attractions, such as wildlife observation without direct physical contact. In November, an investigation by the rights group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, showed that elephants in Bali are routinely chained and beaten with sharp bullhooks to force them to obey for tourist rides.—APP

WHO appeals for \$1b for world's worst health crises

"This is why today we are appealing to the better sense of countries, and of people, and asking them to invest in a healthier, safer world

GENEVA: The World Health Organization on Tuesday appealed for \$1 billion to tackle health crises this year across the world's 36 most severe emergencies, including in Gaza, Sudan, Haiti and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The UN health agency estimated 239 million people would need urgent humanitarian assistance this year and the money would keep essential health services going. WHO health emergencies chief Chikwe Ihekweazu told reporters in Geneva: "A quarter of a billion people are living through humanitarian crises that strip away the most basic protections: safety, shelter and access to health care."

"In these settings, health needs are surging, whether due to injuries, disease outbreaks, malnutrition or untreated chronic diseases," he warned. Yet access to care is shrinking." The agency's emergency request was significantly lower than in recent years, given the global funding crunch for aid operations. Washington, traditionally the UN health agency's biggest donor, has slashed foreign aid spending under President Donald Trump, who on his first day back in office in January 2021 handed the WHO his country's one-year withdrawal notice. Last year, WHO had appealed for \$1.5 billion but Ihekweazu said that only \$900 million was ultimately made available. Unfortunately, he said, the agency had been "recognizing ... that the appetite for resource mobilization is much smaller than it was in previous years."

"That's one of the reasons that we've calibrated our ask a little bit more toward what is available realistically, understanding the situation around the world, the constraints that many countries have," he said.

The WHO said in 2026 it was "hyper-prioritising the highest-impact services and scaling back lower-impact activities to maximize lives saved."

Last year, global funding cuts forced 6,700 health facilities across 22 humanitarian settings to either close or reduce services, "cutting 53 million people off from health care," Ihekweazu said. "Families living on the edge face impossible decisions, such as whether to buy food or medicine," he added, stressing that "people should never have to make these choices." "This is why today we are appealing to the better sense of countries, and of people, and asking them to invest in a healthier, safer world.—DNA

Pakistan, China sign LoI to train 50,000 Youth under TVET coop

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and China signed a Letter of Intent (LoI) to strengthen cooperation in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and youth skill development, launching a major initiative to train more than 50,000 young people and develop 2,000 master trainers over the next five years. The LoI was signed at the Prime Minister's Office between China Pakistan TVET Cooperation, the Prime Minister's Youth Programme (PMYP), Government of Pakistan, and TANG Chinese Education & Technology (Pvt) Ltd., Pakistan, according to an official statement which added that the initiative aimed to enhance employability, promote digital transformation in education, and foster long-term collaboration in skills development aligned with emerging global market needs. Gwadar Pro reported on Tuesday. Under the initiative, large-scale capacity-building efforts will be undertaken, including the training of approximately 2,000 master trainers and cascading skills development for over 50,000 youth during a five-year period. The program will focus on emerging sectors such as digital technologies, e-commerce, fintech, artificial intelligence, media, tourism and entrepreneurship. The signing ceremony was witnessed by Chairman Prime Minister's Youth Programme Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan and attended by senior representatives from both sides, including Li Jinsong, President and Founder of TANG Chinese Education & Technology Ltd., and Xanib Abdul Rehman, Section Officer at the Prime Minister's Youth Programme, along with their respective delegations. As per the statement, the agreement reflects a shared commitment to empowering Pakistani youth through modern, demand-driven vocational and digital skills. The collaboration also envisions the development of advanced training standards, joint certification mechanisms and institutional linkages between Pakistan and China to improve the quality and relevance of technical education. The cooperation further aims to establish multiple smart digital training centers, promote international exposure through digital skills competitions and create pathways for productive employment in Pakistan and abroad. Special emphasis will be placed on innovation, entrepreneurship and small and medium-sized enterprises development to support sustainable economic growth.—DNA



Spain to ban social media for children under 16

DUBAI: Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez announced on Tuesday that his country will seek to ban children aged under 16 from using social media platforms.

Speaking at the World Government Summit in Dubai, Sanchez outlined a six-point plan he said would help restore the "promised land" it once was.

"Our children are exposed to a space they were never meant to navigate alone," he said.

"A space of addiction, abuse, pornography, manipulation, violence. We will no longer accept that, and we will protect them from the digital Wild West."

The announcement follows a similar ban by Australia last year. French lawmakers also passed a bill last week that would ban those aged under 15 from accessing social platforms. The UK has also announced it is considering new controls.

To enforce the ban, the Spanish government will reportedly seek to order platforms to put in place stringent age verification methods. It also plans to introduce a new bill next week to hold social media executives accountable for illegal and hateful content. Sanchez added that Spain had joined five other European countries that he labelled the "Coalition of the Digitally Willing" to coordinate and enforce cross-border regulation.—APP

Germany, Singapore vow to rules-based global cooperation

SINGAPORE, Feb 2 (QNA/APP): Germany and Singapore have reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening a rules-based international partnership in the areas of security and trade, amid growing uncertainty and shifts in the global order. Speaking on Monday during a meeting with his Singaporean counterpart Vivian Balakrishnan, German Foreign Minister Joachim Wiedel said the world is witnessing profound geopolitical changes, noting that international cooperation and multilateral institutions are increasingly being called into question. Wiedel added that both Germany and Singapore are well aware that their freedom, security and prosperity depend on a stable international order governed by reliable rules.

For his part, Balakrishnan said he believes there remains a critical mass of countries committed to a rules-based world order.

Multilateralism, the UN charter, free and fair trade, economic integration, and global supply chains.

He called on Germany and the European Union to expand cooperation with Singapore and the wider Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region, raising the prospect of a future free trade agreement between the EU and ASEAN countries.—APP

Briefs

Malaysian court acquits French man

ALOR SETAR: A French national facing a possible death penalty in Malaysia on eight drug-related charges was acquitted Tuesday, freeing him after nearly two and a half years in detention. The High Court in the northern city of Alor Setar ruled that prosecutors failed to prove that Tom Felix, 34, had control, custody or possession of the drugs in the case. "The accused is, therefore, released and acquitted," Alor Setar High Court judge Ewani Farisyah Mohammad said.

Felix, in court wearing a white shirt and trousers, his hands cuffed, looked visibly pleased as the judge delivered the decision. The former Veolia executive appeared to have lost a considerable amount of weight since his arrest, his parents said. Jean Lui and Sylvie Felix were seen embracing after the ruling.

Felix and his Malaysian business partner were detained in 2023 after police discovered 1.86 kilograms of cannabis in the common area of a home they shared. Authorities later said Felix was also found in possession of 11.7 grams of the drug. - Agencies

NA
unanimously
adopts
Kashmir
resolution

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly on Tuesday unanimously adopted a resolution reaffirming that Jammu and Kashmir remains an unresolved international dispute and stressing that the Kashmiri people continue to be denied their inalienable right to self-determination in accordance with United Nations Security Council resolutions. The resolution, was read out by Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Kashmir Rana Muhammad Qasim Noon. The House expressed unwavering solidarity with the people of IOKJ and strongly condemned what it described as ongoing Indian atrocities and grave human rights violations in the occupied territory. It voiced serious concern over a report of United Nations Special Mandate Holders released in November 2025.

Trump urges 'no changes' to bill to end shutdown

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump urged the House of Representatives on Monday to swiftly adopt a spending bill and end the three-day government shutdown. "I hope all Republicans and Democrats will join me in supporting this Bill, and send it to my desk WITHOUT DELAY," Trump said in a post on Truth Social. The shutdown followed a breakdown in negotiations because of Democratic anger over the killing of two protesters in Minneapolis by federal immigration agents, which derailed talks over new money for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Late Friday, the Senate passed a package clearing five outstanding funding bills to cover most federal agencies through September, along with a two-week stopgap measure to keep DHS operating while lawmakers negotiate immigration enforcement policy. Several conservative Republicans have voiced their disdain for the deal, however, and have threatened to vote against the Senate-backed package on Tuesday. In his Truth Social post, Trump said "there can be NO CHANGES at this time" to the legislation and called for its immediate passage. "We will work together in good faith to address the issues that have been raised, but we cannot have another long, pointless, and destructive Shutdown that will hurt our Country so badly," the Republican president said in a reference to a record 43-day stoppage last summer. - Agencies

Paper mulberry trees cut on PMO orders, CDA tells IHC

"Harmful paper mulberry trees removed, environment-friendly species planted," says authority

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Amid prevailing concerns over a tree-cutting drive in the federal capital, the Capital Development Authority (CDA) on Tuesday told the Islamabad High Court (IHC) that paper mulberry trees in Islamabad were being chopped down on the directives of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). Submitting its response in a case related to the cutting of trees in Islamabad, the CDA said that changes to the master plan fall under the authority of the federal government and that the plan has been amended several times with official approval.

"Under the planning parameters, the CDA is bound to ensure an 8% green area," the authority said, adding that greenery in the federal capital exceeds the required standard. The CDA's tree-cutting drive in the capital has sparked widespread debate in recent days, and has also become a point of contention within the ruling coalition, as several political parties and civil society groups have expressed concern over the removal of trees. The Islamabad district administration had, in January, said the campaign was specific-

ly targeting paper mulberry trees, maintaining that the species was responsible for serious health problems in the city. The CDA, in over a year, has also removed nearly 30,000 paper mulberry trees, including 8,700 allergy-causing trees in the city to mitigate the intensity of pollen allergy. Last month, the IHC suspended the CDA's tree-cutting drive and sought a clause-wise reply and a detailed report from all parties. Addressing issue, Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry has said that only allergy-causing paper mulberry trees were removed and that 60,000 new trees would be planted by end of March, in addition to more than 40,000 mature trees already planted. Meanwhile, in its response to the IHC, the CDA maintained that paper mulberry trees were removed because they cause pollen allergies. "Scientific research has established that paper mulberry triggers asthma and other allergic reactions," the authority said. "Harmful paper mulberry trees have been cut and environment-friendly trees have been planted," the CDA said, while stressing that the paper mulberry species does not help prevent pollution and instead contributes to the deterioration of the air quality index (AQI).

Finance Minister assures support on NFC releases

The Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue listened to the issues raised by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa delegation and reaffirmed the Federal Government's commitment to cooperative federalism and constructive engagement with the provinces

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb held a meeting with Mr. Muzaamil Aslam, Advisor to the Chief Minister for Finance, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, at the Finance Division today. Senior officials from the Finance Division and the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa also attended. The discussion focused on a range of fiscal and development matters, including the timely release of funds under key development heads for merged districts, outstanding requirements linked to rehabilitation and support for temporarily displaced persons, and the broader framework of provincial entitlements and allocations, including those related to the National Finance Commission.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa team highlighted the operational and development imperatives in the merged districts and underscored the importance of predictable and timely releases to sustain ongoing schemes and meet pressing needs on the ground. They also drew at-



tention to pending obligations in respect of displaced families and other related commitments that require streamlined coordination and resolution.

The Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue listened to the issues raised by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa delegation and

reaffirmed the Federal Government's commitment to cooperative federalism and constructive engagement with the provinces. He assured the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa team of the Finance Division's support in pursuing and facilitating their rightful claims for allocations under the NFC and other relevant

heads discussed during the meeting, in accordance with applicable rules, agreed frameworks, and due process.

The Federal Minister noted that effective coordination and timely reconciliation of accounts, where required, remain essential for smooth and transparent releases, and emphasized that the Federal Government remains mindful of the unique development and security-related challenges faced by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly in the merged districts. The meeting also reviewed ongoing work and consultations on NFC-related matters, including the need to sustain momentum on technical discussions and sub-group engagements to advance consensus on key issues.

Both sides agreed to continue close coordination through relevant forums and technical channels to address outstanding matters on priority and to ensure that fiscal arrangements and releases support development objectives, service delivery, and stability. The meeting concluded in a positive spirit, with a shared understanding to maintain regular engagement and to work jointly toward timely resolution of issues in the national interest.

Speaker Ayaz Sadiq, UK high commissioner discuss bilateral ties

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq on Tuesday met British High Commissioner Jane Marriott at the Parliament House, where the two sides discussed bilateral relations as well as key parliamentary and regional issues. During the meeting, the speaker said Pakistan attached great importance to its historic and friendly relations with the United Kingdom.

He underscored the importance of strengthening parliamentary and people-to-people contacts between the two countries, saying closer engagement would help promote greater harmony between the two nations. Ayaz Sadiq said the opposition was an integral component of the National Assembly and that he maintained cordial relations with all opposition members. He noted that all standing committees of the National Assembly were fully functional and appreciated the United Kingdom's support in strengthening Pakistan's parliamentary committee system.

Highlighting security challenges, the speaker said Pakistan had suffered from terrorism for decades and remained determined to effectively counter it. He also described climate change as a global challenge and welcomed British cooperation in helping Pakistan address climate-related risks. Ayaz Sadiq said specialised parliamentary bodies, including the Parliamentary Committee on Gender Mainstreaming and the Women's Parliamentary Caucus, were playing an active role in promoting women's rights and welfare. He added that a Parliamentary Caucus on Child Rights had also been established to safeguard and advance the rights and wellbeing of children. Marriott appreciated the speaker's inclusive approach of working with all members of the National Assembly without discrimination and reaffirmed the United Kingdom's interest in continued cooperation with Pakistan at both parliamentary and public levels.

Indian opposition blasts Modi-led BJP govt over US trade deal announcement

Congress demands full disclosure and parliamentary briefing, questions impact on farmers and industry

DNA

NEW DELHI: The Indian National Congress has come down hard on the Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government following US President Donald Trump's announcement of a trade deal with India, urging New Delhi to disclose full details of the agreement to parliament and the nation. "Just like the ceasefire, the announcement of the trade deal was also made by US President Trump. It has been stated that the trade deal is being done 'on Modi's request', the Congress said in a post on X, formerly Twitter, on Tuesday.

The remarks came a day after Trump announced a "trade deal" with India that slashes US tariffs on Indian goods to 18% from 25% in exchange for New Delhi lowering trade barriers, stopping its purchases of Russian oil and buying oil instead from the US and potentially Venezuela.

"India appears ready to completely open its market to America," the Congress said on the deal – announced by Trump and said to be done at Modi's request, warning that

such terms "will impact Indian industry, traders and farmers". The party raised concerns over language in Trump's announcement, pointing to the potential opening of India's agriculture sector to American goods, and asked what safeguards had been put in place to protect Indian farmers' interests. "There is talk of opening the agriculture sector for America in the statement as well. What exactly is the deal? How have the security and interests of our farmers been ensured?" the statement said.

The party also challenged claims that the agreement would require India to stop buying Russian oil. "It has also been said that the Modi government will not buy oil from Russia, but will buy from America and Venezuela instead. Has the Modi government agreed to this condition?" the party asked.

It also further questioned the commitment to import more American goods, while seemingly undermining the "Make in India" initiative, and demanded a clear explanation of how this aligns with domestic industrial policy. "India has the right to know the details of this trade deal," the Congress statement said.

"The Modi government must take Parliament and the entire country into confidence and share all the details."

Political leadership, armed forces united against terrorism

Responding to a query, he explained that India has been involved in funding and training terrorists, highlighting the external support that fuels destabilizing activities in the region

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister's Advisor on Political Affairs Senator Rana Sanaullah on Tuesday reaffirmed the government's firm commitment to eliminating terrorism and said from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) to Balochistan the state and armed forces remain fully united to safeguard the land and the Constitution. Sanaullah, speaking to a local news channel warned that enemies from Afghanistan and India will find no safe haven in Balochistan and KP.

He said Pakistan is taking the international community on board, raising awareness about hidden tactics of adversaries, and exposing their actions to the world.

He praised the meeting between PM Shehbaz Sharif and KP CM Sohail Afridi as positive and fruitful, highlighting the unity of all political leadership and their collective stance with the armed forces against terror-

ism, stressing that this united front ensures the protection of the nation and its people. They discussed key issues concerning the country, including maintaining peace and rooting out terrorism, prioritizing national security over politics, he added.

Responding to a query, he explained that India has been involved in funding and training terrorists, highlighting the external support that fuels destabilizing activities in the region. He warned that no one will be allowed to destabilize Pakistan, stating that this treatment will continue and the armed forces will deal with them firmly until they fully accept Pakistan's constitution.

He further said that regarding Afghanistan, Pakistan is in contact with friendly countries and is engaging in discussions backed by solid evidence. He made it clear that Pakistan will not engage in any table talks with terrorists; they will face consequences only, as the nation stands fully united to defend the country at all costs.

Russia resumes strikes on freezing Ukrainian capital

KYIV: Russia resumed strikes on Kyiv on Tuesday, Ukrainian officials said, as a brief truce announced by US President Donald Trump gave way to renewed attacks in freezing conditions. Trump said on Thursday that Russian President Vladimir Putin had agreed to stop striking Kyiv and "various towns" during cold weather. The Kremlin said the truce would last until Sunday but did not link it to the subzero temperatures. Ukraine said Moscow had kept up its strikes anyway.

Russia hit Kyiv "in the bitter cold with another massive strike" overnight, Yevgeny Tkachenko, the head of the city's military administration, said Tuesday on Telegram. The emergency services said in a later post that three people in Kyiv had been wounded.

In the eastern city of Kharkiv, two people were wounded by Russian shelling, regional military chief Oleg Synegubov said. The hours-long attack targeted energy infrastructure and aimed to "cause maximum destruction... and leave the city without heat during severe frost", Synegubov wrote on Telegram. Authorities had to cut heating to more than 800 homes to prevent the wider network from freezing, he said, urging people to go to round-the-clock "invincibility points" around the city if they needed to warm up. Overnight temperatures plunged to minus 17C in Kyiv and sank as low as minus 23C in Kharkiv. - APP

Pak-Saudi defense agreement opens new dimensions

DNA

RIYADH: Pakistan's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Ahmed Farooq, has stated that the Pak-Saudi defense agreement has given a new dimension to bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries, resulting in a significant increase in cooperation across defense and other key sectors. He expressed hope that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman will visit Pakistan in the near future, a visit expected to serve as a milestone in further strengthening bilateral ties. While briefing journalists at the Embassy of Pakistan in Riyadh on various matters, Ambassador Ahmed Farooq said that Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are two important countries of the Islamic world, working closely to promote cooperation for shared interests and a prosperous future. He noted that several investment and trade agreements signed during Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's recent visit to Saudi Arabia have now entered the implementation phase, with positive and visible impacts on Pakistan's economy.

Paper mulberry trees cut on PMO orders, CDA tells IHC

"Harmful paper mulberry trees removed, environment-friendly species planted," says authority

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Amid prevailing concerns over a tree-cutting drive in the federal capital, the Capital Development Authority (CDA) on Tuesday told the Islamabad High Court (IHC) that paper mulberry trees in Islamabad were being chopped down on the directives of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). Submitting its response in a case related to the cutting of trees in Islamabad, the CDA said that changes to the master plan fall under the authority of the federal government and that the plan has been amended several times with official approval.

"Under the planning parameters, the CDA is bound to ensure an 8% green area," the authority said, adding that greenery in the federal capital exceeds the required standard. The CDA's tree-cutting drive in the capital has sparked widespread debate in recent days, and has also become a point of contention within the ruling coalition, as several political parties and civil society groups have expressed concern over the removal of trees. The Islamabad district administration had, in January, said the campaign was specific-

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