



# Islamabad POST

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**Afghan Taliban have created a worst situation**

Detailed News On Page-08

**Gohar asks info minister to tender apology over views**

Detailed News On Page-08

**Govt keen to Benefit from Blue economy**

Detailed News On Page-03



## Reko Diq project

# Balochistan to set up dedicated Frontier Corps

Provincial govt redesigning entire security architecture, says CM Bugti's aide Shahid Rind

**BUREAU REPORT**

KARACHI: Pakistan has decided to boost its intelligence network and raise a special force to guard the mineral-rich Balochistan province and its borders with Iran and Afghanistan, a provincial government official said. The development, comes days after Canadian giant Barrick Mining Corporation said it planned to "immediately" begin a comprehensive review of all aspects of the multibillion-dollar Reko Diq copper-gold project in Balochistan.

Barrick's decision followed coordinated attacks by the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) terrorist group in several districts across Balochistan last Saturday that killed 36 civilians and 22 security personnel. Authorities said they had killed 216 militants in follow-up operations.

"In light of the terrorists events, the provincial government in tandem with security forces is redesigning the entire security architecture," Shahid Rind, an aide to Chief Minister of Balochistan Sarfraz Bugti for media and political affairs, told the Arab News.

"This includes raising a dedicated Frontier Corps for the mineral-bearing area, securing both borders, i.e., Iran and Afghanistan." Arab News reached out to Pakistan's information minister, Attaullah Tarar, but he did not respond to questions seeking comment on the matter.

The Balochistan government will also beef up its intelligence network and work closely with mining companies in the region.

"The Balochistan government is extremely serious about foreign investment in the province and considers Reko Diq as the flag-bearer of foreign investment," Rind said. "The provincial government will do whatever is

necessary to maintain that." The recent attacks have apparently alarmed international investors, especially Barrick, which is developing one of the world's largest copper and gold mines in Balochistan. "As we stated in our public documents, Barrick is undertaking a review of all aspects of the Reko Diq project, including with respect to the project's security arrangements, development timetable and capital budget," a Barrick spokesperson said in response to an Arab News email. Barrick's February 5 statement underscores both the progress and the challenges surrounding the Reko Diq copper-gold project in Balochistan. The company confirmed that site works advanced during the fourth quarter, but rising security incidents in the province have prompted management to launch a comprehensive review of all aspects of the project.

Barrick owns 50% of Reko Diq, while three Pakistani federal state-owned enterprises hold 25% and the Balochistan government controls the remaining 25%, making it a joint venture that blends foreign expertise with local ownership. Production is expected to begin in 2028, and the project is seen as central to Pakistan's ambitions of boosting mineral exports and attracting foreign investment into its underdeveloped mining sector.

Despite heightened threats in Balochistan, development linked to Reko Diq continues elsewhere in the country, with Barrick preparing to invest in port infrastructure to support future exports.

This combination of progress, risk management, and strategic investment highlights the project's potential to transform Pakistan's mining industry while also revealing the delicate balance between opportunity and security.

## 'Dalai Lama never met with Epstein'

AGENCIES

BEIJING: The office of the Dalai Lama said on Sunday that he had never met convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, after Chinese media reported the Tibetan Buddhist leader's name was mentioned in a cache of files released by the US government. The US Justice Department published last month the latest tranche of the Epstein files – more than three million documents, photos and videos related to its investigation into the disgraced financier. An AFP search of the files found the Dalai Lama's name was mentioned more than 150 times, with no mention of him meeting or interacting with Epstein. The mere mention of someone's name in the Epstein files does not in itself imply any wrongdoing by that person.

Continued on Page 06

## Iran insists on right to enrichment

**NEWS DESK**

DUBAI: Recognition of Iran's right to enrich uranium is key for nuclear talks with the US to succeed, Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said on Sunday. American and Iranian diplomats held indirect talks in Oman on Friday, aimed at reviving diplomacy amid a US naval buildup near Iran and Tehran's vows of a harsh response if attacked.

"Zero enrichment can never be accepted by us. Hence, we need to focus on discussions that accept enrichment inside Iran while building trust that enrichment is and will stay for peaceful purposes," Araqchi said.

Continued on Page 06



RIYADH: Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb in a meeting with the Economic Affairs Minister of Saudi Arabia. – DNA

## Major diplomatic reshuffle

# Pakistan envoys to UK, KSA, Uzbekistan, UN, Sweden replaced

Dr Faisal, who previously served as Foreign Office spokesperson and ambassador to Germany, is widely regarded as a frontrunner to succeed Foreign Secretary Amna Baloch upon her anticipated retirement in September

**ANSAR MAHMOOD BHATTI**

ISLAMABAD: In a major diplomatic overhaul announced today, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has approved a comprehensive reshuffle involving 24 senior postings and transfers within Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, aimed at revitalizing the country's overseas representations across critical regions including Europe, North America, the Middle East, and neighboring states.

Among the most prominent changes, Captain (retd) Usman Tipu has been nominated as Pakistan's new High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, succeeding Dr Faisal in London. The UK mission remains one of Pakistan's most strategically vital postings, given its central role in fostering political ties, providing consular services, and engaging with the large Pakistani diaspora.

Dr Faisal, who previously served as For-

ign Office spokesperson and ambassador to Germany, is widely regarded as a frontrunner to succeed Foreign Secretary Amna Baloch upon her anticipated retirement in September. In a notable shift from domestic public-facing duties, current Foreign Office spokesperson Tahir Hussain Andabi has been appointed as Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva, placing him at the helm of multilateral diplomacy on key international issues.

Neighboring Afghanistan sees a leadership change with Dr Syed Asad Ali Gillani (also referred to as Syed Asad Ali Gillani) designated as the new Ambassador to Kabul, replacing Ubaidur Rehman Nizamani. Ambassador Nizamani has been reassigned to Stockholm as Pakistan's Ambassador to Sweden. The reshuffle extends to the Gulf with Bilal Ahmad transferred from Pakistan's

Continued on Page 06



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Gynecology & Women's Health	Cardiology	Bariatric Surgery	Gastroenterology & Hepatology	Endocrinology	Psychology & Mental Health
Dermatology & Aesthetics	Urology	Pediatric Surgery	Neurosurgery	Orthopedics & Sports Medicine	Diagnostic Radiology

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**Briefs**

**Partial strike on the call of TTAP**

**STAFF REPORT**

LAHORE/ISLAMABAD/PESHAWAR/QUETTA: Most of the markets in Lahore and Islamabad were open on Sunday, despite a strike call by opposition alliance Tehreek-i-Tahafuz-i-Ainy-i-Pakistan (TTAP) in protest of alleged discrepancies in the 2024 general elections. A partial shutdown was observed in Peshawar, while a complete shutdown strike was reported in Quetta. In Lahore, all major markets remained closed, primarily due to Sunday and Basant day. The strike ended in Peshawar after 5pm. The PTI – a part of the TTAP – earlier also announced its plan to stage nationwide protests today to mark the second anniversary of the Feb 8, 2024, general elections, which it alleges were marred by rigging.

**T20WC: England beat Nepal**

**SPORTS DESK**

MUMBAI: England clung on to beat Nepal by four runs in a last-ball thriller in Mumbai on Sunday and avoid one of the biggest upsets in the history of the T20 World Cup. Chasing an imposing 185 to win, Nepal's Lokesh Bam (39 not out) needed a six off the final delivery of the match bowled by Sam Curran but could only club the ball to deep cover for a single. It was an agonising end to a valiant run chase by the cricketing minnows, who put England's premier bowlers Jofra Archer and Adil Rashid to the sword. Jacob Bethell (55) and Harry Brook (53) scored quick fifties for England but it was a late cameo by Will Jacks that took them to 184-7 in the Group C match, a total that proved just out of reach.

**India-sponsored Daesh affiliate behind Islamabad attack, says interior minister**

*Interior minister says India is funding and giving targets to terrorist groups*

**FAISAL SHEIKH**

ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Saturday confirmed that the mastermind of the Islamabad suicide blast, associated with the banned Daesh, is in the custody of Pakistan along with the attacker's facilitators. Addressing a presser in Islamabad, he said that the mastermind and the facilitators of the deadly attack were arrested in raids conducted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Peshawar and Nowshera immediately after the blast.

His comments come in the wake of Friday's deadly attack at an Islamabad imambargah during prayers, which left at least 33 people martyred and dozens injured. The suicide bomber opened fire before detonating himself at the entrance of the imambargah in the federal capital's Tariq area. "I am telling you again with clarity that their [terrorist outfit's] entire funding is being provided by India. All targets being provided to them by India," Naqvi said during his presser. He added that the KP Counter Terrorism Department has

Continued on Page 06

**Turkish FM, China condemn Islamabad attack**

**SAIFULLAH ANSAR**

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister / Foreign Minister, Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Sunday, spoke with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan. "Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan conveyed heartfelt condolences on behalf of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, himself, and the brotherly people of Turkey over the tragic loss of precious lives in the mosque bomb blast in Islamabad," the Foreign Office Spokesperson said in a press release. The DPM/FM thanked the Turkish leadership for their solidarity and reaffirmed Pakistan's unshaken resolve to combat terrorism and protect its civilians.

Continued on Page 06

**Pakistan likely to attend meeting of Gaza Peace Board**

The White House has proposed holding the first BoP meeting at the US Institute of Peace in Washington, according to an Axios report

**NEWS DESK**

WASHINGTON: Pakistan has been invited to the first proposed meeting of US President Donald Trump's "Board of Peace" (BoP) on Gaza, reported to be held in Washington on Feb 19, and is likely to attend. According to the sources, Islamabad received the invitation as part of the outreach to countries that have already joined the board, which was launched by Trump late last month. The meeting is expected to focus on giving formal shape to the board, including its structure, mandate and secretariat, the sources said. "This will be a key meeting aimed at giving a shape and structure to the board," one diplomatic source said. Asked whether Pakistan could be approached to contribute troops to a proposed international stabilisation force for Gaza, the source said such discussions were premature.

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**Top Hamas leader rejects disarmament or 'foreign rule'**

**DNA**

GAZA: A senior Hamas leader said that the group would not surrender its weapons nor accept foreign intervention in Gaza, pushing back against US and Israeli demands. "Criminalising the resistance, its weapons, and those who carried it out is something we should not accept," Khaled Meshal said at a conference in Doha. "As long as there is occupation, there is resistance. Resistance is a right of peoples under

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# Governor KP pledges full support for Red Crescent

During the ceremony, Faisal Karim Kundi laid the foundation stone of a new 250-bed block for the hospital, which is expected to significantly expand medical services. Earlier, he visited patients under treatment at the Pakistan Red Crescent Teaching Hospital, presented them with flowers and expressed best wishes for their speedy recovery

LAHORE: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Governor and President Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) Faisal Karim Kundi on Sunday lauded the outstanding services of the Pakistan Red Crescent Society (Hilal-e-Ahmar), saying its role during natural disasters, emergencies and population displacement was unforgettable and highly commendable. Addressing a ceremony at the Pakistan Red Crescent Medical and Dental College, Dina Nath, the governor said Hilal-e-Ahmar had set a remarkable example of humanitarian service by extending timely assistance to affected people in the most challenging circumstances. He said the organization's commitment to humanity reflected the true spirit of selfless service. The ceremony was attended by Chairman PRCS Punjab Mian Muhammad Hanif (Sitar-e-Imtiaz), General Secretary Mehbوب Qadir, Suhail Jahangir, Dr Ashraf Nizami, Abid Rehman, Farzand Ali Agha, faculty members, doctors, students and paramedical staff. Governor Faisal Karim Kundi particularly appreciated the services of PRCS Punjab and also pledged continued cooperation with

thanked its management for providing full support to displaced people from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during natural calamities. He said the Red Crescent had played a vital role ranging from first aid to provision of medical facilities, adding that he was pleased to see the quality of services being provided at the hospital and hostels. Announcing a major development, the Governor said the hospital would soon be upgraded into a modern 500-bed medical facility, which would provide quality healthcare services to thousands of people in the area. He praised the performance of the hospital team, saying excellent work was being carried out and doctors, teachers and paramedical staff were serving the public with dedication and commitment. He suggested that quarterly meetings among provincial Red Crescent organizations should be held to benefit from each other's experiences and ideas. He also urged the central headquarters to extend support to provincial units by providing vehicles and other facilities to further enhance field operations. The governor also pledged continued cooperation with

the Pakistan Red Crescent Society and assured full support for strengthening its humanitarian activities. During the ceremony, Faisal Karim Kundi laid the foundation stone of a new 250-bed block for the hospital, which is expected to significantly expand medical services. Earlier, he visited patients under treatment at the Pakistan Red Crescent Teaching Hospital, presented them with flowers and expressed best wishes for their speedy recovery. Later, the Governor distributed ration bags among deserving families under the Ramazan Package initiated by PRCS Punjab, saying that supporting vulnerable segments of society was a shared responsibility of the government and welfare organizations. He also distributed certificates and shields among doctors and students who demonstrated outstanding performance to encourage youth towards hard work and public service. At the conclusion of the ceremony, Chairman PRCS Punjab Mian Muhammad Hanif was presented with a traditional Khyber Pakhtunkhwa shawl and cap. Fataha was also offered for the martyrs of the Islamabad incident, with prayers for the elevation of their ranks.—APP

## Police hold flag march to maintain law & order

DNA

RAWALPINDI: On the special directives of City Police Officer (CPO) Syed Khalid Mahmood Handani, Rawalpindi Police conducted a city-wide flag march in the supervision of SSP Operations Malik Tariq Mehbوب to demonstrate its commitment to maintain law and order. The flag march commenced from Police Lines Headquarters and passed through key areas, including Ammar Chowk, Rawal Road, Shaheen Chowk, Chandni Chowk, Double Road, Faizabad, Committee Chowk, Liaquat Bagh, Peshawar Road, Chohar Chowk, Adiala Road, and other parts of the city. Senior police officials participated in the march, including the SSP Investigation, Chief Traffic Officer (CTO), Divisional SPs, SDPOs, SHOs, and a large contingent of police personnel. According to police spokesperson, the purpose of the flag march was to reaffirm the force's resolve to ensure peace across the city. The spokesperson added that Section 144 remains enforced in Rawalpindi, and no illegal gatherings will be allowed under any circumstances.

The individuals involved in violating the law or creating unrest would be dealt with strictly. He urged citizens not to become part of any illegal or disruptive activity.

Emphasizing that the protection of citizens' lives and property remains the top priority of Rawalpindi Police and will be ensured at all costs.

## Women health precautions stressed during Ramazan

SARGODHA: Weather changes have a significant impact on human health, with women being more vulnerable to related complications, said renowned gynecologist Dr. Humaira Azhar while talking to the Associated Press of Pakistan. She said sudden changes in weather, temperature fluctuations and increasing air pollution adversely affect the hormonal system of women, leading to various health issues, particularly those related to menstruation, pregnancy and reproductive health. Seasonal transitions from cold to hot or hot to cold often result in hormonal imbalance, menstrual irregularities, physical weakness, headaches, mental stress

and infections, she added. Dr. Humaira Azhar said an increase in urinary tract and reproductive system infections has been observed during the current season, attributing it mainly to weakened immunity and negligence in maintaining proper hygiene. Talking about the upcoming holy month of Ramadan, she said that although Ramadan is a blessed month, women need to take special care of their health due to limited food and water intake during fasting hours. She advised pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and those already suffering from gynecological problems to consult their doctors before observing fasts. She emphasized that a balanced

diet during Ramadan is essential for women's health. Protein-rich, fiber-based and slow-digesting foods should be taken during Sehri to sustain energy throughout the day, while Iftar should include light, nutritious foods along with adequate fluids. Fruits, vegetables, yogurt and milk products help replenish water and calcium deficiency in the body, she said. Dr. Humaira Azhar warned that seasonal changes during Ramadan may lead to dehydration, low blood pressure, dizziness and severe weakness. She advised women to avoid unnecessary exertion, ensure adequate rest and maintain proper sleep routines.—APP



HARIPUR: Provincial Education Minister Arshad Ayub Khan presenting a shield to Dr. Muhaiman.

## Murad highlights economic activity at My Karachi Expo

KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has said that 'My Karachi Expo' has become an important and permanent feature of the city's calendar, reflecting the city's resilience, diversity and economic vitality despite multiple challenges.

Addressing the 21st My Karachi Exhibition, the chief minister congratulated the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) on the successful organisation of the event and termed its continuity a major achievement.

He noted that Sunday marked the final day of the expo, which witnessed participation from millions of citizens over the past few days. The chief minister said that stalls from several

friendly countries were set up at the exhibition, where international partners showcased their products and culture. He added that a large number of people visited the expo over the last two days and actively participated in shopping and business activities.

Referring to recent tragic incidents, the chief minister said that the nation was still grieving due to the Islamabad tragedy, while the Gul Plaza incident in Karachi had also deeply saddened the people. He said the Sindh government, in collaboration with KCCI, was working to support the affected of Gul Plaza and to help rehabilitate damaged shops to compensate for losses of 2022, when nearly 70 per cent

of the province was submerged, the people of Sindh demonstrated remarkable resilience and recovered collectively.

Emphasizing democratic values, the CM said that peaceful protest was a constitutional right but must remain within the bounds of law. He said relevant forums existed for registering complaints and grievances, and matters should be resolved through institutional and democratic processes rather than media trials. Talking about public safety, the chief minister said improving the fire brigade system was among the government's top priorities. He revealed that the system was previously divided among multiple authorities and would now be brought under



SEHWAN: Devotees performing dhamaal at the shrine of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar on the occasion of 774th Urs celebration.

## US diplomatic delegation celebrates Basant

LAHORE: On the occasion of Basant festival, the US Ambassador Consul General and Under Secretary participated in kite flying activities hosted by Senior Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb. The US diplomatic delegation highly appreciated the Lahore cuisine, culture, historical heritage and hospitality. Senior Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb said that cultural activities are an effective means of bringing nations closer and Pakistan sends a message of friendship, peace and harmony through its traditions. She said that festivals like Basant highlight Pakistan's positive and peaceful identity to the world. During the event, Marriyum Aurangzeb introduced the US diplomatic delegation to traditional kite flying, while matters of mutual interest were also discussed in an informal and friendly atmosphere. She said that such opportunities play an important role in promoting mutual trust and bilateral relations. According to the senior minister, Pakistan is connected to the world with its culture, hospitality, and message of peace, and cultural diplomacy further strengthens this connection.

## Wetlands defence against climate breakdown

LAHORE: Federal Tax Officer (FTO) Coordinator Saif Ur Rehman said on Sunday that protecting wetlands in Pakistan is a practical defence against climate breakdown, economic insecurity and ecological collapse. Addressing a seminar held here in connection with World Wetlands Day, he suggested that the government to strengthen enforcement against encroachment, ensure environmental impact assessments are credible and transparent, and integrate wetland conservation into provincial land-use planning. Equally vital is restoring environmental flows to the Indus Delta so that mangroves can survive

in the long term, he added. The FTO Coordinator said, Pakistan had repeatedly been battered by catastrophic floods, therefore investing in wetland restoration should be central to disaster management planning instead of treating the wetlands as wasteland. Beyond the coast, he mentioned, Pakistan's wetlands are under mounting stress, because urban encroachment, industrial effluent, solid waste dumping and ill-planned infrastructure projects have degraded lakes such as Manchar and Haleji. Reduced river flows, driven by upstream diversions and erratic rainfall patterns, have further altered fragile ecosystems. The result is a steady decline in biodiversity, including migratory bird population that once thrived in these habitats.

Saif Ur Rehman said, "Mangroves are not decorative greenery; they are living infrastructure. They buffer coastal communities against cyclones and storm surges, reduce erosion, store vast amounts of carbon and sustain fisheries that support thousands of livelihoods in Sindh."

Wetlands are among the most effective natural tools for climate adaptation. They absorb floodwaters, recharge aquifers and filter pollutants.—APP

## Investment in human capital vital to econ growth

LAHORE: Pakistan can fast attain a sustained, inclusive and resilient economic growth by paying more attention towards investment in human capital, policy continuation, improving public-private sector trust and public administration.

A properly skilled workforce plays a decisive role in attracting domestic and foreign investment and companies only commit capital if they're confident it will be productively employed." He said, universal access to basic education is essential to ensure economic growth translates into broad-based improvements in living standards rather than deepening inequality. Education-driven skill formation is a key determinant of comparative advantage and export competitiveness, particularly in manufacturing, he maintained.

In Pakistan, he said, districts with higher literacy rates have better economic and social outcomes.

Yet, public spending on education and skills is inadequate, poorly targeted and weakly linked to labour market needs.

Iftikhar Ali Malik said, lack of policy continuity costs heavy on local and foreign investors, asserting that frequent changes in government, political instability and polarization often forced administrations into survival mode.

Rationalizing mandates, eliminating overlaps, merging or closing redundant agencies and modernizing rules are essential steps towards a functional state apparatus suited to today's challenges, he concluded.—APP

SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry former president Iftikhar Ali Malik stated this while sharing his viewpoint on the economy with a group of journalists here on Sunday.

He cited that successful economies of Japan, South Korea, China, India and Bangladesh are built on strong partnerships between the state and private enterprise, while in Bangladesh, civil society also has a constructive

role. Malik said, the country which prospered in recent decades are not those with abundant minerals or vast territory but with early and consistent investment in people's education, skills and the capacity to innovate.

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## National Days and Armed Forces Days

Feb 04/Sri Lanka National Day
Feb 06/N. Zealand National Day
Feb 06/Uganda Army Day
Feb 11/Iran Revolution day
Feb 16/DPR Korea National Day
Feb 16/Lithuania National Day
Feb 18/Gambia National Day
Feb 19/Nepal Democracy Day
Feb 23/Uzbekistan National Day
Feb 23/Brununei National Day
Feb 23/Guyana National Day
Feb 23/Russia National Army Day
Feb 23/Tajikistan Armed Forces Day
Feb 25/Kuwait National Day

Turkish Airlines.....8494949



## Emergency

Rescue (Police).....15
Bomb Disposal.....15
Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad.....1122 & 16
Emergency Ambulance.1122 & Rescue Services.4451122
Motorway Police.....9266044
Motorway Police.9270601-20
Women Police Stations Islamabad.....9222596
Rawalpindi.....9270601-20



## Enquiry

Edhi Ambulance.....115
PIA Flight Info.....114
PIA Cargo.....9280979
Railway Inquiry.....117
Railway Exchange9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi.....5555489
CAA.....9281092



## Hospitals

CMH.....5611111
MH.....561116
Cantt Hospital.....9270907-11
DHQ.....5556311-4
RGH.....9290301-7
Holy Family.....9290322-7
PIMS.....9261170-79
Polyclinic.....9218300-09
Shifa International 4603666



## Departments

CDA.....9221334-43
CDA.....9208301-04
Met Office.....9250360-6
RDA.....5555864
TMA.....5770886
Cantonment Board 927015-13



## Islamabad Metropolitan

Corporation.....9209224
Potahar Town.....9209224
Rawal Town.....5773343

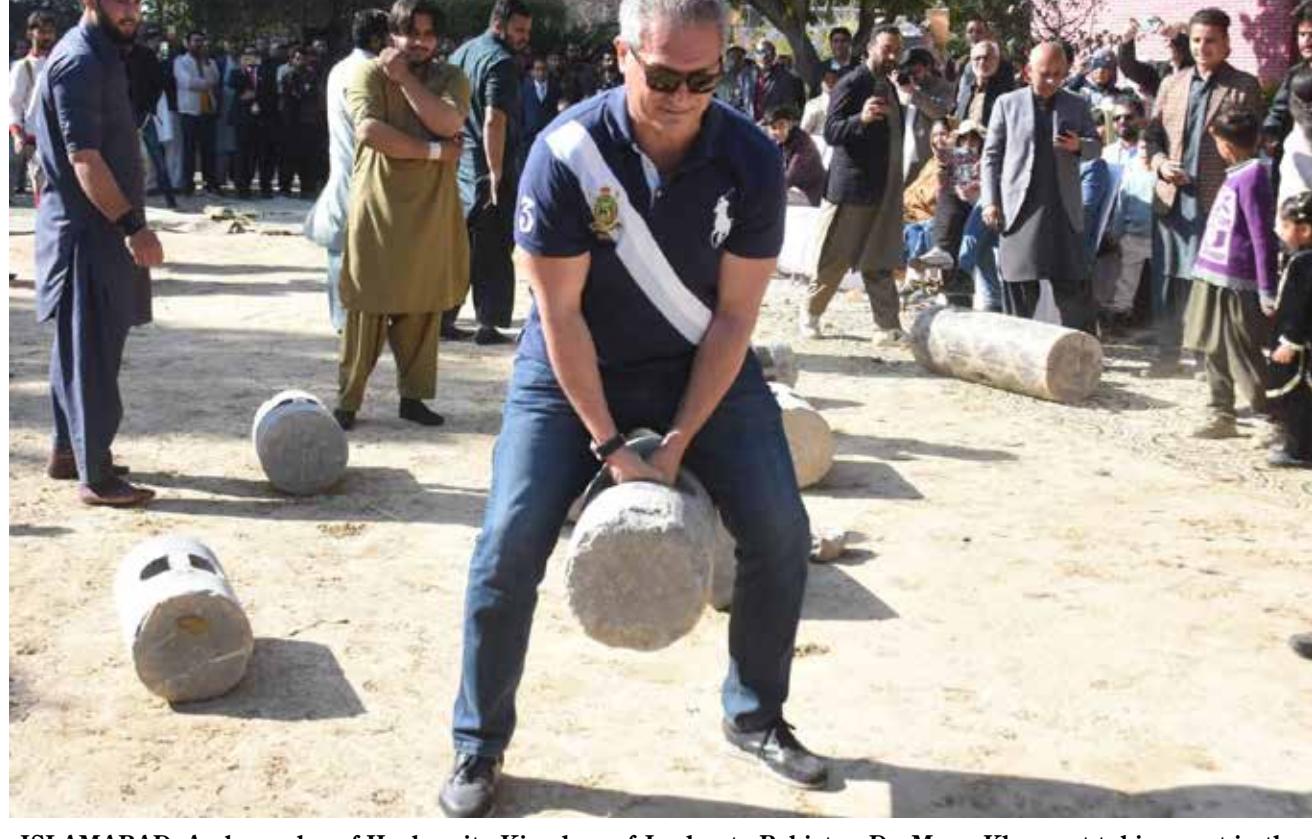
## Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480
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# Diplomats discover rich cultural heritage of Pakistan at Orange festival

## DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to Pakistan Dr. Maen Khreasat taking part in the weight lifting game along with others participants at Orange Festival. WAH CANTT :Diplomats stationed in Islamabad, along with their families, stepped into Pakistan's living heritage this weekend as they attended the 13 th Orange Festival in Taxila, a historic hub of the ancient Gandhara and Buddhist civilizations. Hosted at the Zaildar House, the cultural gathering offered foreign guests an immersive experience featuring traditional cuisine, black-stone carving artistry, rhythmic horse dance performances, and the indigenous sport of stone lifting. According to state run news agency, the festival also highlighted Khampuri oranges, a regional specialty that drew particular interest from visiting families and children. The event has been organised for more than a decade by social figures Zaildar Ahsan Shah and Zaildar Zaheer Shah, who have consistently used the platform to introduce diplomats to the cultural depth and historical significance of Taxila. Stalls displaying replicas of Gandhara art, handcrafted jewellery, and marble and stone pottery attracted wide appreciation, while local flavours – including paan and gol gappay – proved popular among international visitors. The 13th edition of the Orange Festival was attended by ambassadors and diplomats from over 50 countries. Punjab Governor Sardar Saleem



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to Pakistan Dr. Maen Khreasat taking part in the weight lifting game along with others participants at Orange Festival.

Haider Khan, the chief guest on the occasion, said such cultural initiatives play a vital role in projecting Pakistan's soft image globally. He noted that the participation of foreign envoys reflected Pakistan's active diplomatic

engagement and helped strengthen bonds with friendly nations. "Cultural heritage is Pakistan's strength and a bridge between civilizations," the governor said, adding that events like these foster understanding beyond formal

diplomacy. Traditional performances, including the Taxila horse dance, weightlifting contests, and qawwali, were also staged during the festival. Several diplomats expressed interest in revisiting Taxila to explore its archaeological and historical sites in greater detail.

# Minister stresses urgent need for functional infant feeding boards

ISLAMABAD: State Minister for Health, Dr. Mukhtar Bharath, has stated that breastfeeding is not merely a health issue but a strategic investment in Pakistan's bright future, robust economy, and the survival of the next generation. He emphasized that it is the most effective way to lay the foundation for a healthy society. He expressed these views while addressing a high-level dialogue on "Strengthening the Legislative Framework for Nutrition and Early Childhood Development" at the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS). The event, organized in collaboration with the Health Services Academy (HSA) and UNICEF, was attended by members of the National Assembly and Senate, nutritionists,

pediatricians, and officials from the Ministry of Health. Dr. Shahzad Ali Khan, Vice Chancellor of the Health Services Academy\*, pointed out that despite the existence of laws, a lack of enforcement and support systems has kept them limited to paper. He stressed the urgent need for functional Infant Feeding Boards and robust accountability mechanisms. Participants were informed of serious gaps in the implementation of breastfeeding laws in Pakistan. Only 20% of newborns receive breast milk within the first hour of birth. The rate of exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months stands at a mere 48%. Due to these factors, the stunting rate among children under five is 38%, and more than 33,000 children die annually due to a lack of timely preventive measures. The dialogue revealed that Pakistan spends over Rs. 110 billion annually on formula milk, even though fewer than 2,000 infants actually require breastmilk substitutes for medical reasons. Sharmela Rasool, UNICEF Deputy Country Representative, stated that providing facilities for mothers at workplaces and counteracting misinformation is the need of the hour. At the conclusion of the session, parliamentarians and participants endorsed a joint declaration committing to stricter legislation. They agreed to remove obstacles in the enforcement process and emphasized making the Parliament's constitutional role and oversight more effective for the better development of children.—DNA

# Punjab Governor visits blast site, condoles mosque Imam

RAWALPINDI: Governor Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider Khan on Sunday visited the Imambargah Khadija-tul-Kubra in Trilai Kalan, where a suicide blast took place a couple of days ago, resulting in the martyrdom and injury of several worshippers.

Upon arrival at the site, the Governor was briefed in detail about the entire incident by the Imam of the Imambargah, Raja Basharat Hussain Imami, who explained the nature of the blast and the situation following the attack. The Governor offered prayers for the martyrs and inquired about the well-being of the injured. Speaking to the media,

Governor Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider Khan said that terrorists carried blasts in mosques have no connection with the religion of Islam. He condemned the blast in the strongest terms and reaffirmed that terrorists would be brought to justice. "Those who target Muslims bowing down to Allah Almighty in places of worship, will be made an example and brought to justice", he said adding that issuing condemnation statements of a suicide attack on an Imambarah can never be enough. He reminded that country's valour security forces were already engaged in eradicating the terror net-

work from the country. "The officers and soldiers of the Pakistan armed forces have rendered immortal sacrifices in the war against terrorism", he said. The governor highlighted that those acting upon Indian sponsorship would be punished hard. "Indian-sponsored terrorists and their facilitators will be taken to their logical end", said the Punjab governor. He expressed deep sorrow over loss of precious lives in the blast and offered prayers for their high ranks in the world afterwards. "In this hour of grief, we stand fully with the families of the martyrs and the injured", he added.—APP

# Margalla Film Festival concludes

ISLAMABAD: The two-day Margalla Film Festival 2026 concluded here on Sunday at the auditorium of The Black Hole, a non-profit cultural organization, drawing a large and enthusiastic audience.

The festival was a celebration of independent cinema and cross-cultural storytelling, bringing together filmmakers, cinephiles, and creative voices from diverse backgrounds. Dedicated to artistic freedom and meaningful expression, the event showcased a rich selection of thought-provoking films reflecting a wide range of perspectives, experiences, and social realities. The opening day featured the screening of *Frontline: Kashmir – The Silent Struggle* by AnewZ TV, followed by an interactive discussion with the filmmaker. Other notable films screened on the first day included *Gold* by Amin ul Hasnat, *Vizontele* by Yilmaz Erdogan, and *Escape for Freedom* by Mela Magnum Production, a nominee for Best Documentary at the Italian Golden Globe, which was also followed by a filmmaker discussion. The evening session highlighted *Bolivia Camino al Cielo* by Helios Molina, accompanied by a director's video message and a discussion with Cristina. The first day concluded with the screening of *Under the Open Sky* by Sonum Sumaria. The second day of the festival featured *ISHQ: Passionate Love* by Alejandro Matran and Alix Philpon, followed by a discussion with the filmmakers. Other screenings included *Night by Jelisaveta Nikolic*, *Jimmy Sales Away* by Tamara Brocic, *Cats by Danilo Stanimirovic* with a post-screening discussion, *Wakhtuna* by Ahsan A. Khan, and *Scheherzade* by Ajija Shafi. The festival concluded with *The Injured Body* by Marz Ahmed, leaving audiences with a powerful reflection on social justice and human rights. A large number of viewers attended the festival, making it two inspiring days of storytelling, creativity, and cinematic exploration. All screenings and discussions were free and open to the public.—APP

# 7 held, Liquor and weapons confiscated

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi Police have conducted operations following arrest of seven individuals and recovered 50 liters of liquor along with weapons and ammunition. According to police spokesperson, Wah Cantt Police arrested two liquor suppliers and seized 30 liters of liquor, while Pirwadhai Police apprehended supplier with 10 liters of liquor. Additionally, Webridge Police detained another two suppliers and recovered 5 liters of liquor along with weapons and ammunition. Banni Police arrested suspect and recovered 5 liters of liquor, and Morgah Police arrested illegal arm holder and seized weapons and ammunition.—APP

# Maritime heritage conservation key to blue economy growth: Anwar

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry said maritime heritage is a national asset vital to cultural identity, education and sustainable economic growth, emphasizing the need to expand the blue economy while addressing climate risks. Junaid Anwar Chaudhry reiterated this commitment in a meeting with Federal Minister for National Heritage and Culture Aurangzeb Khan Khichi where they reviewed existing initiatives and discussed a framework for sustained inter-ministerial collaboration to promote the maritime heritage. "Talks focused on aligning policy, research and conservation efforts to ensure maritime heritage is documented, protected from degradation and integrated into broader national development strategies," Junaid Chaudhry added. He noted Pakistan's coastline over 1,000 kilometres along the Arabian Sea has, for centuries, linked South Asia with the wider Indian Ocean world. Historic ports, navigational routes, shipwrecks, lighthouses and fishing settlements testify to a long maritime tradition that remains under-documented and increasingly vulnerable. "Our maritime heritage is not only a record of our past but a strategic asset for the future," Junaid Chaudhry said, noting that preservation could support education, tourism and the blue economy while strengthening national identity. "Development and preservation are not mutually exclusive. With careful planning and cooperation, we can protect our heritage while unlocking

the economic potential of our seas." Junaid Chaudhry said our ports and sea routes had been central to regional trade and cultural exchange, leaving behind both tangible assets such as historic ports and underwater archaeological sites and intangible heritage in the form of traditional fishing practices and coastal community knowledge. Protecting these assets, he added, required a "whole-of-government approach". Coastal erosion, climate change, unregulated development and illegal salvaging pose growing threats to heritage sites, particularly underwater cultural assets, he said. "No single organization can address these challenges alone. Inter-ministerial coordination is essential to ensure that conservation goes hand in hand with sustainable economic activity." National Heritage and Culture Minister Aurangzeb Khan echoed the call for joint action, stressing the role of cultural institutions, museums and research bodies in documenting and interpreting maritime history. He said his ministry would work closely with maritime authorities to map heritage sites along the coast, support archaeological surveys and promote public awareness through exhibitions, curricula and community engagement. "Maritime heritage is an integral part of Pakistan's cultural mosaic," Minister Khan said. "From ancient trade links to living traditions of coastal communities, this heritage must be preserved for future generations. Conservation efforts must be grounded in research, respect local

communities and meet international standards." The two ministers also discussed to explore the establishment of a joint working group to coordinate policies, share data and develop project proposals. Potential areas of cooperation include the protection of historic ports and lighthouses, documentation of traditional boat-building techniques, preservation of underwater archaeological sites and the promotion of responsible maritime tourism. The discussions also highlighted the need to strengthen legal and regulatory frameworks to prevent damage to heritage sites, including stricter controls on coastal development and improved monitoring of underwater assets. Capacity-building for local authorities, as well as collaboration with universities and international partners, was identified as critical to sustaining conservation efforts. "Our objective is to attract people, especially youth, scholars and tourists towards maritime affairs," Junaid Chaudhry said. "By highlighting our maritime heritage, we can inspire careers in marine sciences, shipping, fisheries and port management, while strengthening public understanding of the blue economy." The meeting concluded with a shared commitment to translate policy discussions into actionable plans, he said, signalling a more integrated approach to safeguarding Pakistan's maritime heritage as a shared legacy for future generations.—DNA

## Heavy vehicles warned against lane violations

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) has launched Phase-II of its lane-violation enforcement plan, issuing a stern warning to heavy vehicle drivers to strictly follow lane discipline or face vehicle impoundment and heavy fines. An ITP official told on Sunday that the new phase focuses specifically on heavy traffic, which has repeatedly been found violating designated lanes, causing congestion and posing serious safety hazards on major arteries of the federal capital. Under the enforcement plan, traffic police teams have been directed to take strict legal action against heavy vehicles travelling outside the extreme left lane. The action includes issuance of challans, heavy fines and seizure of vehicles in case of repeated violations. Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Islamabad Captain (R) Hamzah Humayun said that lane discipline is essential for smooth traffic flow and the prevention of accidents, particularly on high-speed corridors. He made it clear that heavy vehicles must remain in the leftmost lane at all times and warned that no leniency would be shown to violators. The CTO said the objective of Phase-II is not punishment alone, but awareness and the creation of safer roads for all commuters. "Heavy traffic moving in the wrong lanes endangers lives and disrupts traffic. Strict enforcement will continue until full compliance is achieved," he added. He urged transporters and drivers to cooperate with traffic police, follow lane markings and traffic rules, and avoid unnecessary inconvenience and legal action. ITP officers will remain deployed at key roads and entry points to monitor compliance. Citizens have also been advised to report traffic violations through the ITP helpline 1915 or emergency helpline Pu-car-15.—APP

**Security at churches reviewed**

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations Islamabad Qazi Ali Raza conducted a review of security arrangements at churches and other places of worship across the federal capital to ensure the safety of worshippers. An official told APP on Sunday that the SSP Qazi visited various churches and worship places, inspected security deployments and reviewed measures put in place for the protection of religious congregations. During the visit, SSP Qazi interacted with police officers deployed on duty and issued clear instructions to remain fully alert, maintain strict vigilance, and ensure effective checking at all entry and exit points. He directed officers to enhance patrolling around sensitive locations and adopt all necessary precautionary measures to prevent any untoward incident, emphasizing that protection of citizens and worshippers is a top priority of Islamabad Police.—APP

**IRSA releases 81,900 cusecs water**

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Sunday released 81,900 cusecs of water from various river stations with inflow of 40,200 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in the River Indus at Tarbela Dam stood at 1489.67 feet which was 87.67 feet higher than the dead level of 1402.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam were recorded as 14,700 cusecs and 30,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in the Jhelum River at Mangla Dam was 120.05 feet, which was 150.05 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded as 8,600 cusecs and 35,000 cusecs respectively.—APP

## Briefs

## Chinese language course concludes

ISLAMABAD: A two-week Chinese language course, organized at the Capital Police College, Islamabad, with the cooperation of the Chinese Embassy, concluded here, with DIG Law and Order & Training Malik Jameel Zafar attending the closing ceremony as the chief guest. A police spokesperson told APP on Sunday that the course was aimed at enhancing the communication skills of police officers and strengthening professional coordination, particularly in view of increasing interaction with Chinese nationals and institutions in the federal capital. During the ceremony, certificates were distributed among police officers who successfully completed the course, while honorary shields were also presented to the instructors in recognition of their valuable services. Addressing the participants, DIG Malik Jameel Zafar appreciated the cooperation of the Chinese Embassy and termed the initiative an important step towards capacity building of Islamabad Police. He said that learning foreign languages, especially Chinese, would help police officers perform their duties more effectively and professionally. He emphasized that Islamabad Police remained committed to adopting modern training standards and enhancing the skills of its officers in line with international best practices. The participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity and termed the course beneficial for their professional development.—APP

FIA reports Rs 18b recoveries, 4,244 convictions

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) recorded Rs18 billion in recoveries, secured 4,244 convictions and arrested 2,333 accused during the year 2025. An official told APP on Sunday that the FIA, in its Annual Performance Report 2025, shared detailed data on enquiries, investigations, prosecutions and recoveries carried out during the year. According to the report, the agency handled a total of 68,551 enquiries, including 41,750 carried forward from 2024 and 26,801 newly registered enquiries in 2025. Out of these, 34,078 enquiries were finalized, 6,383 were converted into regular cases, while 34,473 enquiries remained under process, the report stated. Regarding case progression, the FIA dealt with 36,265 cases during the year, comprising 26,610 cases brought forward from 2024 and 9,655 newly registered cases in 2025. The agency chalked 16,236 cases, finalized 17,339 cases, while 18,926 cases were pending at different stages of investigation and trial. The report further highlighted that FIA operations led to the arrest of 2,333 accused, while courts awarded 4,244 convictions in cases pursued by the agency. —APP

Safe Citylogs 17,000 surveillances, helps trace 114 gangs

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police's Safe City Islamabad conducted nearly 17,000 surveillance operations, identified 114 wanted criminal gangs and facilitated the arrest of 160 proclaimed offenders during January 2026, reflecting a strong start to the year through technology-driven policing in the federal capital.

An official told APP on Sunday that the performance reflected the effective use of modern technology, coordinated policing, and round-the-clock monitoring under the supervision of DG Safe City / DIG Traffic Muhammad Haroon Joya. The official said that during January, Safe City cameras were used for close to 17,000 surveillance activities, leading to the identification and shifting of suspicious persons, motorcycles and vehicles to relevant police stations for legal action.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Japan Akamatsu Shuichi hosted dinner for senior journalists. Seen in the picture from L to R, Baqir Sajjad Dawn, Mateen Haider The Nation, Zahid Khawaja NNI, Waheed Hussain, Ansar M Bhatti Daily Islamabad POST/Centreline, Bilal Aga Dawn, Farooq Aqdas Jang and Aziz Alvi Nawa i Waqt. DNA

## Pakistan, Canada seek new avenues for coop

### DIG, SSP inspect security at duty points

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police senior officers, including Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Islamabad Muhammad Jawad Tariq, SSP Operations and other senior officials, visited various duty points across the federal capital to review security arrangements and boost operational readiness. An official told APP on Sunday that the senior officers remained present alongside police personnel deployed at different locations and conducted on-the-spot inspections of security duties. During the visits, the officers briefed the deployed personnel and directed them to remain fully alert at all times, ensure strict checking, and take all possible measures to protect citizens' lives and property. The senior officers emphasized professional conduct, vigilance and timely response, particularly at sensitive points, entry and exit routes, and high-traffic areas of the city. They reiterated that maintaining peace and ensuring public safety is the top priority of Islamabad Police.—APP

### Analysts say full-scale US-Iran war unlikely, strike possible

ISLAMABAD: The Institute of Regional Studies hosted a roundtable discussion to address the ongoing war-like scenario between the US and Iran. Ambassador Jauhar Saleem, President IRS, in his remarks stressed that Iran is a brotherly country and Pakistan prioritizes Iran's stability. He was of the view that strong statements issued by President Trump against Iran were rather a pressuring tactic to compel Iran for negotiations, said a press release issued here on Saturday. Defense Analyst, Rear Admiral (R), Faisal Ali Shah, emphasized that Iran should not be understood solely through the western perspective, as the system was institutionalized even to the very basic level. He said the protests were largely directed against specific policies rather than demanding the complete overthrow of the system. He further argued that external shocks did not trigger a full-scale uprising as seen during the 12-day war because many citizens prioritized stability and security over foreign intervention. Muhammad Hussain Baqri, Chairman Iqbal Forum, opined that Iranian society is in a transitional phase shaped by the evolving political and

institutional linkages. On behalf of Pakistan, Ambassador Nabeel Munir, Special Secretary (United Nations) joined by Director General (Americas) participated in the Consultations while the Canadian side was represented by Ambassador Weldon Epp, Assistant Deputy Minister (Indo-Pacific) from Global Affairs Canada and the High Commissioner Tarik Ali Khan. Foreign Office Spokespersons said in a press release. The two sides expressed satisfaction over the steady growth of bilateral relations marked by recent substantive interactions between Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister and Canadian Foreign Minister. They noted that these engagements had provided strategic guidance and momentum to the partnership and reaffirmed their shared commitment to further deepen these ties. "The two sides emphasized cooperation in trade and investment, agriculture and agri-tech, mining and minerals, energy, climate change, artificial intelligence and information and communications technology, skilled workforce development, education and research, tourism and people-to-people exchanges as key drivers for taking the relationship

forward," the press release further added. They also underscored the central role of investment in achieving sustainable and mutually beneficial growth and agreed to work towards encouraging private sector to explore emerging opportunities. The two sides also exchanged views on the evolving global and regional environment and discussed key multilateral issues of mutual interest. Both sides agreed to maintain regular consultations and expressed confidence that sustained engagement would lead to new progress in the bilateral partnership.—DNA

### Two Afghan nationals among 13 suspects held

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police carried out a grand search and combing operation in various areas of the federal capital under the supervision of zonal SPs to curb crime and strengthen public safety. An official told APP on Sunday that the operation was conducted with the participation of police teams, including women police personnel, to ensure comprehensive checking and effective enforcement. During the operation, police checked 236 individuals, 94 houses and four shops, besides inspecting 120 motorcycles and 47 vehicles in the targeted localities. The official said that 13 suspicious persons, including two Afghan nationals, along with seven motorcycles.—APP

### Chinese architectural firm opens office in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: A delegation from the Shenzhen University Institute of Architectural Design & Research Limited (SUIADR) inaugurated here its new office. The launch of the Islamabad office follows a strategic collaboration agreement signed between SUIADR and Habib Rafiq Engineering (Pvt) Ltd (HRL Group). The agreement was initially formalized in December 2025, according to a Gwadar Pro's report. With the establishment of its Islamabad office, SUIADR will provide on-ground support for architectural and urban development projects in Pakistan, introducing innovative design practices and internationally recognized standards. The initiative further reinforces Pakistan-China cooperation in infrastructure development, urban innovation and sustainable growth. The inauguration was led by Nianzhong Li, Deputy President of SUIADR. The delegation included Zhenyuan Yang and Quan Cheng, both Deputy Chief Architects, Xinyu Wan, Lead Architect of the Design Studio, and Tao Sun, Project Consultant and Chief Executive Officer of Sunchang Construction & Engineering Consulting Co., Ltd. The ceremony was attended by Muhammad Aslam Malik, Chief Operating Officer of the HRL Group; Khalid Taimur Akram, Advisor to the Chairman of HRL; and Imran Zahid, Chief Executive Officer of Capital Smart Motors, underscoring the importance of the collaboration in strengthening design excellence and knowledge exchange between Pakistan and China.—APP

### Pakistan, Bangladesh to strengthen railway coop

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Railways Hanif Abbasi has reaffirmed his commitment to further strengthening bilateral relations with Bangladesh, particularly in the areas of railway development, exchange of expertise, rolling stock and manufacturing cooperation. The Bangladeshi delegation was warmly received by senior officers of Pakistan Railways at the Headquarters and Workshop Division. During the visit, Chief Mechanical Engineer

nate D-8 Commissioner of Bangladesh, along with High Commissioner of Bangladesh to Pakistan, to the Pakistan Railways Workshop Division on Saturday, the minister emphasized that enhanced railway-to-railway collaboration could yield significant mutual benefits for both countries. The Bangladeshi delegation was warmly received by senior officers of Pakistan Railways at the Headquarters and Workshop Division. During the visit, Chief Mechanical Engineer

(Carriage & Wagons) Nasir Khalili briefed the delegation on the overall functioning, technical capabilities, and ongoing development projects of Pakistan Railways' workshops. A short documentary highlighting the operational strength and working capacity of the workshops was also presented to the visiting delegation. Addressing the occasion, Nasir Khalili said that Pakistan and Bangladesh are brotherly countries with a shared history, culture and heritage.

He underlined the vast potential for bilateral cooperation in the railway sector, including technology sharing and joint initiatives. As a token of goodwill, commemorative shields were exchanged between the Pakistani and Bangladeshi delegates. The delegation was later given a detailed tour of the Mughalpura Locomotive Workshop, where they were briefed on various stages of locomotive maintenance, rehabilitation, and manufacturing processes.—DNA

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## A stark reminder of Pakistan's security lapses

**O**n a tragic evening in Islamabad on February 6, 2026, a devastating suicide bombing ripped through an imambargah, claiming the lives of more than 35 innocent worshippers. The incident, described by eyewitnesses as one of the most horrifying attacks in recent memory, has left the nation in shock and mourning. Families were shattered, communities traumatized, and once again, Pakistan's fragile security apparatus was exposed for its glaring weaknesses. Initial reports suggested that the suicide bomber may have originated from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), with possible Afghan links. However, these claims remain unverified. Security agencies recovered an identity card from the scene, raising serious questions. Typically, suicide bombers do not carry identification, and even if they did, the sheer force of such an explosion would obliterate personal belongings. How then did an intact ID card survive when the bomber's body was mutilated beyond recognition? The timing of the attack could not have been more embarrassing for Pakistan. The blast occurred while the President of Uzbekistan was still in the country on an official visit. Such a high-profile guest should have warranted maximum security measures, yet the attack unfolded in the heart of the capital. The symbolism is damning: if Islamabad itself cannot be secured during a state visit, what hope is there for smaller towns and vulnerable communities across the nation? This tragedy underscores a recurring theme in Pakistan's governance—systemic failure of security institutions. Despite decades of counterterrorism operations, loopholes remain wide open. The absence of effective intelligence gathering, poor coordination among agencies, and lack of accountability have created an environment where militants can strike at will. The imambargah blast is not just an isolated incident; it is part of a larger pattern of negligence. At the heart of these failures lies a deeper malaise: corruption and nepotism. Key appointments in Pakistan's security and administrative structures are often made not on merit but on personal whims, political loyalty, or family connections. When individuals are placed in critical positions without the necessary competence or dedication,

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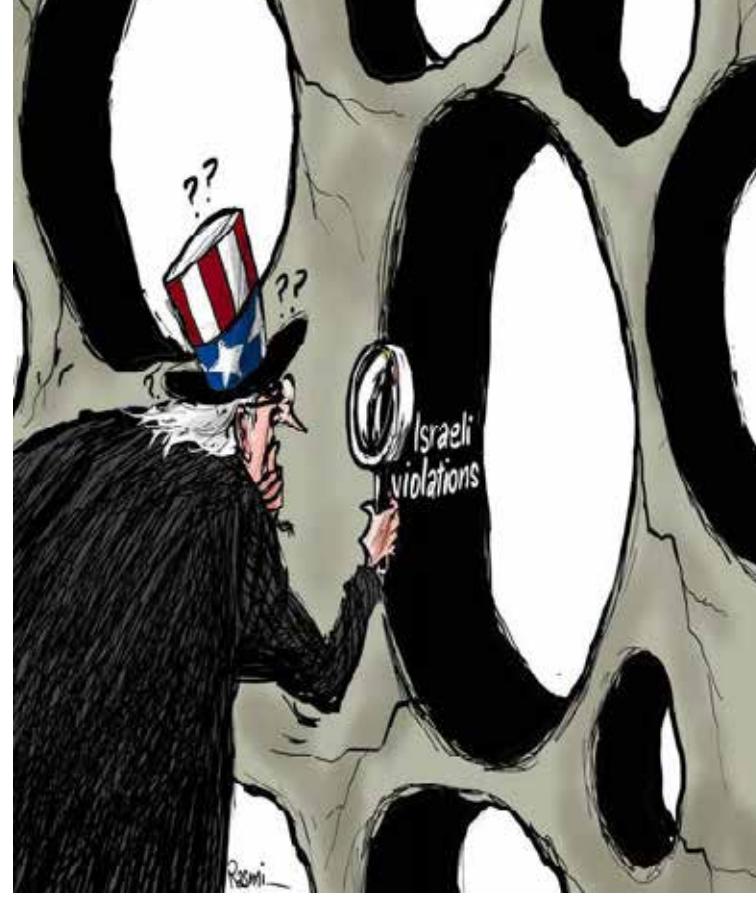
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the entire system collapses. A person who owes his position to favoritism rather than merit has little incentive to perform effectively. He lacks both the skill and the motivation to safeguard national interests. This culture of nepotism is not confined to Islamabad—it permeates every level of governance across Pakistan. From local police stations to federal ministries, appointments are routinely influenced by connections rather than qualifications. The result is a bureaucracy riddled with inefficiency, indifference, and incompetence. The victims of this blast were ordinary citizens who had gathered for worship. Their lives were cut short not only by the bomber's brutality but also by the state's failure to protect them. Each casualty represents a family plunged into grief, children left orphaned, and communities scarred forever. The human cost of corruption and negligence is measured not in statistics but in shattered lives.

The discovery of the ID card raises troubling questions. Was it planted to mislead investigators? Was it a sign of sloppy planning by the attacker? Or does it point to deeper conspiracies within the system? Until these questions are answered transparently, public confidence in the authorities will remain eroded. Unfortunately, Pakistan's history suggests that such mysteries often fade into obscurity, leaving citizens with more doubts than clarity.

If Pakistan is to prevent such tragedies in the future, it must confront the root causes head-on. Cosmetic measures—temporary security cordons, knee-jerk arrests, or hollow condemnations will not suffice. What is needed is a complete overhaul of the system: Security agencies must be led by competent professionals chosen for their expertise, not their connections. Officials who fail in their duties must face consequences, regardless of their political affiliations. Investment in modern intelligence tools and training is essential to preempt attacks. Citizens must be empowered to report suspicious activities without fear of reprisal. Above all, leaders must demonstrate genuine commitment to reform, rather than using tragedies as opportunities for rhetoric.

The gruesome blast in Islamabad's imambargah is more than a terrorist attack; it is a mirror reflecting Pakistan's systemic failures. Until corruption and nepotism are uprooted and meritocracy is established, such tragedies will continue to haunt the nation. The blood of the victims is a stark reminder that governance is not a game of personal favors; it is a sacred responsibility. Pakistan must choose whether to continue down the path of negligence or finally embrace reform. The choice will determine whether future generations inherit a safer homeland or a perpetual cycle of grief.

## US–Iran Talks: Peace or a Path to War?

**Qamar Bashir**



Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi came out of the talks calling them a "good start," and—crucially—confirming that the process will continue after consultations in both capitals. Oman's foreign minister, Badr al-Busaidi, described the discussions as "very serious" and stressed that outcomes would be weighed carefully in Tehran and Washington before the next steps are set. That language matters. It signals that neither side wanted a theatrical meeting designed to fail; both treated it as a controlled opening whose survival depends on disciplined messaging and political authorization at home

**F**EBRUARY 6, 2026 has the feel of a turning point—not because the United States and Iran suddenly became friends, but because two sworn rivals chose diplomacy at the very moment when the logic of escalation was gaining speed. In Muscat, Oman, with anxiety rising across capitals from Tel Aviv to Beijing, the world watched an extraordinary scene: U.S. and Iranian delegations meeting under Omani mediation to test whether a negotiated path still exists before the region is pushed into another cycle of strikes, retaliation, and economic shock. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi came out of the talks calling them a "good start," and—crucially—confirming that the process will continue after consultations in both capitals. Oman's foreign minister, Badr al-Busaidi, described the discussions as "very serious" and stressed that outcomes would be weighed carefully in Tehran and Washington before the next steps are set. That language matters. It signals that neither side wanted a theatrical meeting designed to fail; both treated it as a controlled opening whose survival depends on disciplined messaging and political authorization at home. Araqchi's public framing was unusually calm for this relationship. He insisted that "any dialogue requires refraining from threats and pressure" and drew a sharp boundary around the agenda: Iran will discuss its nuclear issue—and nothing else—with the United States. That insistence is not a negotiating flourish; it is Iran's strategic doctrine in diplomatic form. Tehran wants a narrow, technical bargain that can translate into sanctions relief, without turning the table into a referendum on Iran's missiles, its regional posture, or its internal politics. Washington, by contrast, has signaled a broader ambition. Publicly, U.S. officials have voiced interest in a framework that reaches beyond the nuclear file to Iran's ballistic missiles, support for armed groups in the region, and internal governance and human-rights issues. But the early reporting around Muscat suggests the first round did not become a missile negotiation. A diplomat briefed on Iran's account of the talks said Tehran insisted on its "right to enrich uranium," and that missile capabilities were not raised during the discussions themselves—a telling sign that the meeting's primary purpose was to prevent collapse at the starting line.

This is where the real contest lies: enrichment versus zero-enrichment. For Washington, domestic enrichment is treated as a red line because enrichment

can be a pathway—depending on level, stockpile, and monitoring—toward weapons capability. For Tehran, enrichment is framed as sovereign entitlement under international norms, coupled with repeated claims that it does not seek a bomb. The Muscat channel appears to be searching for a formula that neither humiliates Iran nor leaves the United States politically exposed: limits on enrichment "level and purity," more intrusive oversight, or even alternative arrangements such as a regional consortium were discussed as possibilities in the reporting. In exchange, Iran's demands were described as immediate and effective sanctions relief—especially in banking and oil—and a reduction in U.S. military pressure near Iran.

Yet, even as delegates spoke in Muscat, pressure politics continued in Washington. President Donald Trump signed an order tied to tariffs on countries that trade with Iran—described in reporting as a mechanism that could raise import costs by as much as 25% for countries purchasing Iranian goods, aimed at discouraging third-country trade with Iran in energy, metals, and petrochemicals. Some coverage emphasized that the order sets a process and authority rather than flipping an immediate universal switch—but either way, the message was unmistakable: diplomacy is being run alongside economic coercion, not instead of it.

The same dual-track approach showed up in sanctions. Reporting described new U.S. measures targeting Iranian petroleum-related networks, including entities and vessels linked to oil and petrochemical trade. That timing is not accidental; it is intended to signal negotiating leverage. But it also carries risk: Tehran can interpret such actions as proof that Washington negotiates with one hand while tightening the noose with the other—precisely the behavior Araqchi warned against when he demanded talks without "threats and pressure."

Against this backdrop, the strategic psychology is as important as the technical details. Both sides now appear to recognize that war is not a clean option. The United States holds greater conventional military power and unmatched financial leverage. Iran, however, has built a layered deterrent: missile capability, regional influence, and the ability to impose costs in a conflict that would not remain limited or predictable. The development leading up to the talks underscored the scale and seriousness of Iran's missile capability, tested during the June 2025 conflict, and the broader atmosphere of tension as talks were set.

Then there is the world's most sensitive nerve: the

Strait of Hormuz. Any confrontation that threatens energy shipping through that chokepoint would ricochet immediately through global markets. It would not be a "regional war"; it would become a global inflation event. China's energy security, South Asia's import bill, Europe's fragile price stability—all become collateral. This is why even states that distrust Tehran fear a breakdown. The Muscat talks were not just about uranium; they were about preventing a chain reaction in trade, energy, and geopolitics.

The symbolism around the meeting also tells you how close the temperature is to boiling. Hours before talks, Iranian state media highlighted deployment of the Khorramshahr-4 ballistic missile at an underground Revolutionary Guard "missile city"—a calculated signal of readiness and deterrence, designed to shape the psychology of negotiation: talk if you want, but do not assume coercion will be cost-free.

This is why the "good start" language matters more than it seems. U.S.–Iran diplomacy often collapses not because the issues are unsolvable in principle, but because the political ecosystem around the talks punishes concession and rewards confrontation. In that environment, secrecy and restraint are not suspicious—they are essential. Oman's emphasis that results must be considered carefully in both capitals is, in effect, an admission that the next phase will be decided not only by diplomats but by the domestic politics of power on both sides. Your central argument stands: the implications radiate outward—to Israel's security calculations, to Gulf state stability, to Pakistan and Afghanistan's strategic environment, and to China's energy-risk horizon. The Muscat channel is a narrow door. If it widens, a framework could emerge that limits nuclear escalation risk and reduces market fear, even if it leaves missiles and regional alliances unresolved. If it slams shut, the region returns to the most dangerous pattern: sanctions, deployments, threats, miscalculation—and the constant possibility that one strike produces an uncontrollable reply. For now, the most important fact is simple: the talks did not collapse on day one. In a relationship where collapse is often the default expectation, that alone is the first measurable achievement—and possibly the only thing standing between the region and a new inferno.

— Press Secretary to the President (Rtd)

Former Press Minister,

Embassy of Pakistan to France

Former Press Attaché to Malaysia

Former MD, SRBC

Macomb, Michigan

## Kites of Hope Amid Shadows of Sorrow

**Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal**



The juxtaposition of Lahore's revival with national grief is stark. While kites soar in the skies of the Punjab, coffins are lowered in Quetta and Peshawar. Yet, even in the face of these horrors, Pakistan refuses to let fear dictate its culture or its celebrations. The revival of Basant after twenty-five years becomes an act of courage, asserting that life, colour, and hope will persist...

**A**FTER nearly a quarter of a century, Basant has returned to Lahore, not merely as a festival but as a long-suppressed emotion rediscovering its voice. For twenty-five years, the city carried the memory of spring like a faded photograph—cherished, yet distant. Past tragedies, when careless celebrations claimed innocent lives, had silenced rooftops and hushed laughter. This year, when kites once again rose above the Walled City, and families cautiously gathered on terraces, Lahore seemed to breathe differently. The revival was neither loud nor reckless; it was measured, regulated, and reflective, shaped by time, loss, and hard-earned lessons. Basant's return symbolised not forgetfulness of past pain, but the nation's capacity to reclaim joy without surrendering prudence.

In Lahore, the festival fills the air with a tenderness that only spring can offer. The mustard fields bloom in golden swathes, blending with the vibrancy of kite-filled skies. Children dart across rooftops with thread and spool, while parents watch with pride, apprehension, and hope. The city, long deprived of this cultural heartbeat, now dances cautiously with its heritage. Alongside the kites and laughter, the air carries the scent of traditional Basant delicacies; steaming platters of samosas, pakoras, jalebis, gajraula and phirni, alongside sweetmeats, roasted peanuts, and hot puri halwa sold from roadside stalls, evoking nostalgia for generations and adding a flavor to the celebration that is uniquely Lahori. Basant is not simply an event of colour and sound; it is a living memory of resilience, reminding Pakistanis that joy, even after decades of sorrow, remains possible.

monopolise the nation's spirit. Basant, in this context, is not only a reclaiming of cultural heritage but a moral statement: that Pakistan will protect its traditions while defending its people.

The state's responsibility is immense. Security measures must be intelligent, sustained, and rooted in justice rather than mere force. Counter-terrorism is not only about weapons or checkpoints; it is also about governance, inclusion, and narrative. Citizens must remain vigilant while celebrating. A society at war cannot afford indifference, yet it must resist being defined solely by conflict. Protecting life while preserving cultural identity is the delicate balance Pakistan strives to maintain.

History teaches that nations endure not only through military might but through moral clarity and cultural continuity. External actors, seeking to fracture Pakistan's social, political, and spiritual fabric, understand this well. Basant's revival is a testament to the nation's resilience—a celebration that asserts life and joy even amid shadows of violence. As kites colour Lahore's spring once more, they carry prayers for those who cannot celebrate, for those whose springs were stolen by terror. The scent of different delicacies of traditional foods related to Basant mingles with the spring breeze, reminding the nation that life's simple pleasures—shared food, laughter, and colour—are also acts of resistance against despair.

Pakistan's challenge is to guard both joy and grief with equal seriousness—to ensure that neither recklessness nor fear defines the nation. In holding sorrow and celebration together, in mourning martyrs while reclaiming cultural traditions, Pakistan affirms its endurance. The nation rises with dignity, proving that hope can soar as high as the kites above Lahore, even when shadows linger across the land.

## Briefs

## Pakistan likely to attend...

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"That would come later. First, we have to give shape to the board, form a structure, set up a secretariat and define its direction," he added. Pakistan is among the 14 countries that signed the charter of the Board of Peace on January 22 on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, becoming a founding member of the body. The board was initially proposed in September 2025 and formally established last month. Under its charter, the US government serves as its official depository. President Trump has designated the Donald J. Trump Institute of Peace in Washington as the board's headquarters. The White House has proposed holding the first BoP meeting at the US Institute of Peace in Washington, according to an Axios report citing a US official and diplomats from four participating countries. The plans, which include a fundraising component for Gaza's reconstruction, remain at an early stage and could still change.

## Top Hamas leader rejects...

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occupation [...] something nations take pride in," said Meshal, who previously headed the group. On Sunday, Meshal urged the Board of Peace to adopt what he called a "balanced approach" that would allow for Gaza's reconstruction and the flow of aid to its roughly 2.2 million residents, while warning that Hamas would "not accept foreign rule" over Palestinian territory. "We adhere to our national principles and reject the logic of guardianship, external intervention, or the return of a mandate in any form," Meshal said. "Palestinians are to govern Palestinians. Gaza belongs to the people of Gaza and to Palestine. We will not accept foreign rule," he added.

## India-sponsored Daesh...

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arrested all individuals linked to the attack, adding that the CTD and other agencies worked together as a team during the operations. During the raids, he said that a KP policeman was martyred and a few others were injured. "We have evidence of how the attacker was trained and how he was brought here. The planning and training were carried out in Afghanistan," the interior minister said. Naqvi said that India was funding terrorist networks, including Daesh, adding that payments to each militant have increased from \$500 to \$1,500. "India has tripled its terror budget after facing a defeat in May," he said.

## Turkish FM, China condemn...

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Both leaders also exchanged views on bilateral relations, matters of mutual interest, and key regional and international developments. Meanwhile, China also condemned an attack on a mosque in Islamabad, pledging support for the government's efforts to "maintain national security and stability". "China is deeply shocked by the deadly explosion in Islamabad and the heavy casualties it has inflicted. China mourns for the lives lost, and our hearts go out to the injured and those who lost their loved ones," the foreign ministry said in a statement. "China strongly condemns the attack, opposes any form of terrorism and firmly supports the Pakistani government in safeguarding national security and stability and protecting the safety of the people," it added. The condemnation comes in the wake of the deadly attack at Imam Bargah and Mosque Khadijat-ul-Kubra in Islamabad's Tariq area during Friday prayers, which left at least 33 people martyred and dozens injured.



ISLAMABAD: Players of Rising Stars Hockey Club posing for a group photo on the occasion of a match played in connection with Chief of Army Staff Inter Club Hockey Tournament. Rising Stars hockey club beat Kuri Hockey Club 6-2 to qualify for the final of the tournament, which will be played on Monday. The team management congratulated all players for exhibiting outstanding performance in the match. — DNA

# ICC deputy chief lands in Lahore, says PCB

*BCB president also arrives in Pakistan, set to attend ICC emergency meeting on India match boycott, say sources*

DNA

LAHORE: International Cricket Council (ICC) deputy chairman Imran Khwaja reached Lahore on Sunday for talks with the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chief, after Pakistan announced it would boycott its T20 World Cup 2026 match against India. In a post on X, PCB spokesperson Amir Mir said that the ICC deputy chairman is scheduled to meet PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi today. Earlier, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) President Aminul Islam arrived in the country. During his stay in Pakistan, the BCB chief, sources added, will attend the ICC's emergency meeting later today, with other board members also expected to participate. Islam will also meet the PCB chairman before departing for Dhaka, the sources said.

Meanwhile, an ICC delegation led by its deputy chairman is also due to reach Pakistan at 4:30pm, to discuss the situation arising after Pakistan's boycott of India match. The development comes against the backdrop of Pakistan's decision to boycott its World Cup match against India, scheduled for February 15, amid what the PCB has described as the ICC's biased approach, with Bangladesh playing a central role in the dispute. Tensions flared between the cricket boards of Bangladesh and India after Bangladesh's star pacer Mustafizur Rahman was dropped from the Indian Premier League (IPL) on the directions of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), sparking outrage in Dhaka. Later, the BCB requested the ICC to shift its matches outside India, but the international cricket body rejected the plea. Following the BCB's firm stance, the ICC replaced Bangladesh with Scotland in

the tournament, saying it was not feasible to change the schedule so close to the February 7 start of the event. Furthermore, the PCB has dismissed reports by Indian media claiming that it had offered dialogue to the ICC to resolve the issue surrounding its decision to boycott the India match. PCB spokesperson Amir Mir issued the rebuttal after Indian journalist Vikrant Gupta claimed that the PCB had reached out to the ICC for dialogue on the India-Pakistan World Cup game. Any clash between arch-rivals India and Pakistan is one of the most lucrative fixtures in cricket, worth millions of dollars in broadcast, sponsorship and advertising revenue. In commercial terms, the overall value of a single India-Pakistan T20 match is estimated at around \$500 million, or approximately INR45,000 crore, when broadcast rights, advertising premiums, sponsorship

activations, ticket sales and downstream commercial activity are taken into account. According to a report, advertising slots during an India-Pakistan T20 match command between INR25 lakh and INR40 lakh for a 10-second spot, significantly higher than even knockout matches involving India against other top teams. The most immediate financial impact would be felt by the official broadcast rights holder, as advertising revenue from the India-Pakistan match alone is estimated at around INR300 crore, the Indian publication cited industry projections as suggesting. The BCB chief's reported arrival in Pakistan is also being viewed in the context of earlier Indian media reports claiming that the ICC was seeking back-channel talks with the PCB and had tasked its deputy chairman Imran Khwaja, to engage with the Pakistani board on the issue.



**FG Polo Clinches 49th EcoStar Aibak Polo Cup Title**

ANSAR BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: FG Polo produced a commanding display in the grand final to defeat defending champions Diamond Paints and lift the prestigious 49th EcoStar Aibak Polo Cup at the Lahore Polo Club. The final was graced by US Chargé d'Affaires Natalie Baker as the chief guest. She witnessed the contest alongside DWP Group Director Taha Muhammad Naqeeb, Lahore Polo Club Executive Committee members Muhammad Na-

sir and Raja Aamir, Secretary Major Amjad Ghaffor, DWP EcoStar Marketing Head Shoaib Younis, as well as a large gathering of polo families and enthusiasts.

In a thrilling final, FG Polo outclassed Diamond Paints 7-4 to register a well-deserved victory. The winners displayed exceptional teamwork, led by a standout performance from Raja Mikayal Sami, who hammered home four crucial goals. Marcos Rivarola complemented the effort with a brilliant hat-trick, contributing three goals, while the team also benefited

from a half-goal handicap advantage. Despite a spirited fightback, Diamond Paints were unable to bridge the gap. Lao Abelenda emerged as the main scorer for the runners-up with three goals, while Mohammad Ali Malik added one goal. Speaking at the closing ceremony, US Chargé d'Affaires Natalie Baker expressed her delight, saying, "It is wonderful to be here at the Lahore Polo Club. Watching such high-quality polo amidst the vibrant Basant festivities and beautiful Lahore weather has been a truly exhilarating experience."

## Seifert, Phillips shine as New Zealand beat Afghanistan by 5 wickets

Tim Seifert's fifty and Glenn Phillips's 42 off 25 balls propelled New Zealand to a five-wicket win over Afghanistan in the fourth match of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 at MA Chidambaram Stadium on Sunday. Set to chase a daunting 183-run target, the Blackcaps struck the winning runs for the loss of five wickets and 13 balls to spare, courtesy of the third-wicket partnership between Seifert and Glenn Phillips. New Zealand had a contrasting start to the pursuit as Mujeeb Ur Rahman dismissed Finn Allen (one) and Rachin Ravindra (zero) on successive deliveries in the second over. With the score board reading 14/2 in 1.4 overs, Phillips joined Seifert in the middle, and the duo raised an emphatic recovery by putting together 74 runs for the third wicket at a brisk pace. Afghanistan captain Rashid Khan eventually broke the threatening partnership in the 10th over by dismissing Phillips, who made 42 off 25 deliveries with the help of seven fours and a six. Seifert was then involved in a 36-run partnership for the fourth wicket with Mark Chapman until eventually walking back after top-scoring with a 42-ball 65, studded with 10 boundaries, including three sixes. New Zealand then suffered another setback in the 16th over, with 28 runs still required, as Chapman perished after scoring a 17-ball 28, featuring two fours and a six. But Daryl Mitchell and captain Mitchell Santner ensured there were no further hiccups in New Zealand's pursuit and steered them over the line with an unbeaten 33-run partnership off 13 deliveries. Mitchell made an unbeaten 25 off 14 deliveries, while Santner remained not out with an eight-ball 17. — Agencies



ISLAMABAD: High Commissioner of Brunei Kamal Ahmed presenting a souvenir of hockey whistle to National Umpire Ali Rizwan. — DNA

## Pakistan envoys to UK, KSA, Uzbekistan..

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UN mission in Geneva to serve as Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, taking over from Ahmed Farooq, who is set to return to headquarters in Islamabad after completing his tenure. Other significant moves include Mudassir Tipu (or Mudassir Tipu) relocating from Iran to become Ambassador to Uzbekistan, while Salman (previously based at the Prime Minister's House) has been named Ambassador to Germany. Sania Afzal Qazi takes up the role of Ambassador to Thailand, bolstering ties in Southeast Asia. Additional appointments cover Asim Ali Khan as Ambassador to Norway, Asad Shahzad as Ambassador to Uganda, Siraj Ahmad Khan as Consul General in Los Angeles, and Muhammad Faisal Aabroo as Consul General in Montreal. The broad scope of these transfers underscores Islamabad's ongoing efforts to adapt its diplomatic cadre to evolving regional priorities and prepare for leadership transitions within the Foreign Office. Pakistan Ambassadors in China and Greece are likely to continue despite expiry of their tenures. Reports suggest they have been granted an extension in service.

## 'Dalai Lama never met with Epstein'

FROM PAGE 01

"Some recent media reports and social media posts concerning the 'Epstein files' are attempting to link His Holiness the Dalai Lama with Jeffrey Epstein," the leader's office said in a statement posted on X. "We can unequivocally confirm that His Holiness has never met Jeffrey Epstein or authorised any meeting or interaction with him by anyone on His Holiness's behalf," it added. On Thursday, state-run broadcaster CGTN reported that "Dalai Lama" appeared at least 169 times in the Epstein files and mentioned an email in which an unknown sender told Epstein he was considering going to an event the Dalai Lama was set to attend. The 90-year-old Nobel Peace Prize winner fled the Tibetan capital Lhasa at the age of 23 after Chinese troops crushed an uprising in 1959. He now lives in exile in the northern Indian town of Dharamsala and leads a push for greater autonomy for Tibetans that China has condemned, calling the spiritual leader a rebel and a separatist. A search into the Epstein files, released by the US DOJ and accessed by AFP produced 154 results about the Dalai Lama.

## Iran insists on right...

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Iran and the US held five rounds of nuclear talks last year, which stalled mainly due to disagreements over uranium enrichment inside Iran. In June, the US attacked Iranian nuclear facilities at the end of a 12-day Israeli bombing campaign. Tehran has since said it has halted enrichment activity, which the US views as a possible pathway to nuclear bombs. Iran says its nuclear programme is solely for peaceful purposes. A diplomat in the region briefed by Iran told Reuters on Friday that Tehran was open to discussing the "level and purity" of enrichment as well as other arrangements, as long as it was allowed to enrich uranium on its soil and would be granted sanctions relief in addition to military de-escalation. "Iran's insistence on enrichment is not merely technical or economic (...) it is rooted in a desire for independence and dignity," Araachi said. "No one has the right to tell the Iranian nation what it should or should not have." The minister also said that Iran's missile programme, which the US would like to include in negotiations, had never been part of the agenda. President Masoud Pezeshki said in a post on Sunday that talks with the US were a "step forward" and that Tehran wanted its rights under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to be respected. The date and venue of the next round of talks will be determined in consultation with Oman and might not be Muscat, Araachi said.

## Briefs

### Top Hamas leader rejects disarmament or 'foreign rule'

DOHA: A senior Hamas leader said Sunday that the Palestinian Islamist movement would not surrender its weapons nor accept foreign intervention in Gaza, pushing back against US and Israeli demands. "Criminalizing the resistance, its weapons, and those who carried it out is something we should not accept," Khaled Meshal said at a conference in Doha. "As long as there is occupation, there is resistance. Resistance is a right of peoples under occupation ... something nations take pride in," said Meshal, who previously headed the group. Hamas, an Islamist movement, has waged an armed struggle against what it sees as Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories. It launched a deadly cross-border raid into Israel from Gaza on October 7, 2023, which triggered the latest war. A US-brokered ceasefire in Gaza is in its second phase, which foresees that demilitarization of the territory—including the disarmament of Hamas—along with a gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces. Hamas has repeatedly said that disarmament is a red line, although it has indicated it could consider handing over its weapons to a future Palestinian governing authority.—APP

**Syrian authorities bust smuggling ring, tighten border controls**

DAMASCUS: Syrian Coast Guard forces have arrested members of a people-smuggling network operating in the western town of Tartus, the Syrian Arab News Agency reported on Saturday. Authorities pounced on the smugglers as they were about to illegally take passengers from the Tartus coast to Cyprus, SANA said, citing a statement from the General Authority of Ports and Customs. "The operation resulted in the arrest of all those involved, including the organizers of the trip," the report said, adding that the smugglers' boat tried to escape as Coast Guard vessels surrounded it, but collided with rocks. No details were available on how many suspects were arrested and how many passengers were rescued. Criminal charges are being prepared against the arrested suspects, SANA said. In a separate move to regulate trade and border security, the ports and customs authority issued a new policy restricting truck access at land crossings and seaports. Commercial trucks will now be permitted entry for loading or unloading only upon presentation of an original receipt from the ministry of transport's freight office. The transfer of cargo between Syrian and non-Syrian vehicles must now take place strictly within designated customs yards at border crossings. Trucks passing through Syria in transit are allowed, provided they are under a mandatory customs escort between entry and exit points.—APP

**Over 2,200 Daesh detainees transferred to Iraq from Syria**

BAGHDAD: Iraq has so far received 2,225 Daesh group detainees, whom the US military began transferring from Syria last month, an Iraqi official told AFP on Saturday. They are among up to 7,000 Daesh detainees whose transfer from Syria to Iraq the US Central Command (CENTCOM) announced last month, in a move it said was aimed at "ensuring that the terrorists remain in secure detention facilities." Previously, they had been held in prisons and camps administered by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in northeast Syria. The announcement of the transfer plan last month came after US envoy to Syria Tom Barrack declared that the SDF's role in confronting Daesh had come to an end.—APP

# Finance minister, MD WB discuss uplift priorities

Ms. Anna Bjerde reaffirmed the World Bank Group's strong commitment to Pakistan's ten-year development program amounting to USD 20 billion, underscoring the Bank's continued support for Pakistan's reform and development agenda

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb and Ms. Anna Bjerde, Managing Director of the World Bank (WB) Group on Sunday discussed the Country Partnership framework and development priorities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, held a meeting with Ms. Anna Bjerde, Managing Director of the World Bank Group, on the sidelines of the Annual AICEL Conference for Emerging Market Economies, being held in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, said a release issued here. During the meeting, while following up on the President World Bank's visit to Pakistan last week, both sides reviewed the progress made under the Country Partnership Framework (CPF) and discussed the way forward to further strengthen development cooperation. The discussions covered a range of priority sectors including energy, education, health, climate resilience, debt-for-development swaps, fiscal reforms, and infrastructure development. Emphasis was placed on adopt-

ing a more focused approach, introducing clear performance

bust and effective implementation mechanisms to translate commitments into tangible outcomes.

Ms. Anna Bjerde reaffirmed the World Bank Group's strong commitment to Pakistan's ten-year

development program amounting to USD 20 billion, underscoring the Bank's continued support for Pakistan's reform and development agenda. She highlighted the importance of sustained engagement and effective execution to maximize the developmental impact of the program. Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb reiterated the Government of Pakistan's commitment to close collaboration with the World Bank Group and assured full cooperation through relevant federal ministries. He also underscored the role and cooperation of the provincial governments to ensure better coordination, timely execution, and delivery of measurable results under the program. The AICEL Conference for Emerging Market Economies, launched in 2025, brings together finance ministers, central bank governors, senior policymakers, leaders of international financial institutions, and leading experts from around the world to deliberate on key economic challenges and opportunities facing emerging market economies.—DNA



## Japan's Takaichi set for big election win, exit poll shows

TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's party is set to secure a big majority in Japan's lower house in an election on Sunday, public broadcaster NHK forecast, based on exit polls. Takaichi's Liberal Democratic Party is set to win 274 to 328 of the 465 seats in the chamber, well above the 233 needed for a majority, according to NHK. Together with coalition partner the Japan Innovation Party, known as Ishin, she could control up to 366 of the seats. Japan's first female prime minister, 64, called the rare winter snap election to capitalize on her buoyant personal approval ratings since she was elevated to lead the ruling LDP late last year. Voters have been drawn to her straight-talking, hardworking image, but her nationalistic leanings and emphasis on security have strained ties with powerful neighbor China, while her promises of tax cuts have rattled financial markets. Residents trudged through snow to cast their ballots with record snowfall in parts of the country snarling traffic

and requiring some polling stations to close early. It is only the third postwar election held in February, with elections typically called during milder months. Outside a polling station in the town of Uonuma in the mountainous Niigata prefecture, teacher Kazushige Cho, 54, braved below-freezing temperatures and deep snow to cast his vote for Takaichi's Liberal Democratic Party. "It feels like she's creating a sense of direction—like the whole country pulling together and moving forward. That really resonates with me," he said. But Takaichi's election promise to suspend the 8 percent sales tax on food to help households cope with rising prices has spooked investors concerned about how the nation with the heaviest debt burden among advanced economies will fund the plan. "If Takaichi wins big, she will have more political room to follow through on key commitments, including on consumption-tax cuts," said Seiji Inada, managing director at FGS Global, a consultancy. "Markets could

react in the following days, and the yen could come under renewed pressure." Niigata resident Mineko Mori, 74, padding through the snow with her dog, said she worried that Takaichi's tax cuts could saddle future generations with an even bigger burden. But younger voters are among the most supportive of Takaichi, with one recent poll finding more than 90 percent of those under 30 favored her. The prime minister has sparked an unlikely youth-led craze called "sanakatsu," roughly translated as "Sanae-mania," with the products she uses, such as her handbag and the pink pen she scribbles notes with in parliament, in high demand. On Thursday, Takaichi received the "total endorsement" of US President Donald Trump. China will also be keeping a close eye on the results. Weeks after taking office, Takaichi touched off the biggest dispute with China in over a decade by publicly outlining how Tokyo might respond to a Chinese attack on Taiwan.—APP

## Trade focus diplomacy essential to support exporters: Tahir

ISLAMABAD: President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Sardar Tahir Mehmood, has stressed the need to further strengthen Pakistan's diplomatic missions to play a proactive and results-oriented role in supporting Pakistani exporters in international markets. In a statement issued here on Saturday, he said that in today's competitive global environment, embassies and consulates must go beyond traditional diplomatic functions and actively facilitate trade promotion, market access, and business matchmaking for Pakistani products and services, said a release issued here on the other day. "Pakistani exporters face intense competition abroad. Our diplomatic missions can serve as effective bridges between local businesses and foreign markets by providing timely market intelligence, facilitating B2B connections, and addressing trade-related challenges," Sardar Tahir Mehmood stated. The ICCI President emphasized that commercial sections of embassies should be adequately staffed, professionally trained, and closely coordinated with chambers of commerce and trade bodies to ensure that exporters receive practical and targeted support. He noted that enhanced engagement between diplomatic missions and the private sector would help diversify export destinations, promote value-added products, and strengthen Pakistan's trade footprint globally. Sardar Tahir Mehmood further said that sustained coordination between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Commerce, and the business community is essential to translate diplomatic presence into tangible trade outcomes. Reaffirming ICCI's commitment, he said that the Chamber stands ready to collaborate with relevant government institutions to provide business input, exporter feedback, and market insights to Pakistan's missions abroad. He expressed confidence that a more trade-focused diplomatic approach would contribute significantly to export-led growth, job creation, and overall economic stability.—DNA

## Pakistan, Uzbekistan embrace renewed bilateral coop commitments

Among the major outcomes was a protocol expanding the list of goods under the Preferential Trade Agreement, along with the establishment of a Pakistan-Uzbekistan Inter-Regional Forum to promote business-to-business cooperation. The two sides also signed an MoU between their foreign ministries and an action plan for defence cooperation

ISLAMABAD: Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's state visit to Pakistan marked a major breakthrough in bilateral relations, and a renewed cooperation commitment with the two countries signing 28 agreements and memoranda of understanding across multiple sectors and setting a target to raise annual trade to \$2 billion. The visit, held amid shifting global trade routes and growing concerns over energy and food security, underscored the shared resolve of Islamabad and Tashkent to deepen economic cooperation and enhance regional connectivity between Central and South Asia. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and President Mirziyoyev signed a joint declaration reaffirming their commitment to a stronger strategic partnership. They also concluded a key agreement aimed at expanding bilateral trade to \$2 billion over the next five years. The signed documents covered cooperation in foreign affairs, preferential trade, defence, climate change, agriculture, food security, information technology, science, education, culture, maritime affairs, pharmaceuticals, textiles, mining, geosciences, small and medium enterprises, sports and counter-narcotics. Among the major outcomes was a protocol expanding the list of goods under the Preferential Trade Agreement, along with the establishment of a Pakistan-Uzbekistan Inter-Regional Forum to promote

business-to-business cooperation. The two sides also signed an MoU between their foreign ministries and an action plan for defence cooperation. To boost trade facilitation, both countries signed an MoU on maritime cooperation, including preferential port arrangements at Karachi, Gwadar and Port Qasim, giving Uzbekistan improved access to sea routes. Agreements were also concluded in industrial cooperation, pharmaceuticals, textiles and support for small and medium enterprises. In the energy and environmental sectors, the two sides signed agreements on ecology, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction, reflecting their shared focus on sustainable development and non-traditional security challenges. The countries also signed MoUs on agricultural research, plant protection, food security, information technology, science and education, cultural heritage preservation and sports cooperation. An agreement was reached on combating illicit trafficking in narcotics and another on the exchange of convicted prisoners. The visit highlighted the strategic importance of regional connectivity, particularly through proposed trans-Afghan transport corridors, which both sides view as essential for reducing logistics costs, shortening delivery times and unlocking trade potential between Central Asia and the Arabian Sea. Beyond economic and po-

litical agreements, the visit also featured symbolic and academic recognition of the Uzbek president. The National University of Sciences and Technology conferred an honorary Doctor of Philosophy degree and the title of professorship on President Mirziyoyev at a special convocation held at the Prime Minister's House. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and NUST Rector Dr Muhammad Zahid Latif presented the honours in recognition of the Uzbek leader's contributions to strengthening bilateral ties and promoting peace, development, education and innovation in the region. The citation noted President Mirziyoyev's role in steering Uzbekistan through political, economic and social reforms, expanding investments in higher education, research and digital transformation, and fostering collaboration between government, academia and industry. President Mirziyoyev described Pakistan as a close friend and reliable partner, while Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said the agreements reflected the political will of both sides to build a stable, interconnected and prosperous region. The signing of the 28 accords, the ambitious trade target and the symbolic honours together signalled a new phase in Pakistan-Uzbekistan relations, anchored in connectivity, economic cooperation and shared development goals.—DNA

## Czech PM in favor of social media ban for under-15s

PRAGUE: Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis said on Sunday he was in favor of banning the use of social media by children under 15, as a growing number of European countries consider similar restrictions. Countries including Spain, Greece, Britain and France are weighing tougher stances on social media use due to concern over the perceived negative effects on children, after Australia in December became the first nation to prohibit access to such platforms for the under-16s. "I am in favor because the experts I know say that it is terribly harmful to children. We must protect our children," Babis said in a regular video message posted on several of his social media accounts on Sunday, without giving further details. Later in the day, the government's first deputy prime minister, Karol Havlicek, told a television chat show on private broadcaster CNN Prima News that the cabinet was seriously considering proposing a ban. If it decides to go ahead, Havlicek said legislation would be proposed this year. Spain and Greece proposed bans on social media use by teenagers last week, as attitudes hardened in Europe against technology some say is designed to be addictive. The measures announced by Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez drew fury from Elon Musk, the billionaire owner of the X platform, formerly Twitter. Britain is considering an Australia-style ban, while France is working through legislation to ban children aged under 15 from social media use.—APP

## Bangladesh seeks UN help to probe killing of uprising leader

DHAKA: Bangladesh has requested assistance from the United Nations human rights office for an investigation into the killing of Sharif Osman Hadi, a popular leader in the country's 2024 youth-led uprising, the government said Sunday. The Bangladeshi mission in Geneva had sent a diplomatic note requesting the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to support a "fair, impartial and expeditious" probe into the killing, the interim government's press wing said. "The note requests technical and institutional assistance from the UN human rights office to support the investigation," it added. Hadi, 32, was shot by masked assailants in Dhaka last December and later died of his injuries at a hospital in Singapore. His death set off a wave of violent protests. Hadi had planned to run as an independent candidate in polls taking place on Thursday to determine the country's first elected government since the overthrow of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina. The interim government, which is led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, also reiterated its commitment to ensuring "the highest standards of transparency and accountability" in the case and pledged to identify and prosecute those responsible.

## Security officer arrested over Syria killings

DAMASCUS: Syria's authorities have arrested an internal security officer as a suspect in the killing of four civilians in the majority-Druze Sweida province, the local internal security chief said. Four people were shot dead and a fifth seriously wounded in the incident on Saturday, in the village of Al-Matana, said Hossam Al-Tahan, the state news agency SANA reported. The initial investigation, carried out with the help of one of the survivors of the attack, indicated that one suspect was a member of the local Internal Security Directorate, he said. "The officer was immediately detained and referred for investigation," he added. Earlier reports said that four people were killed and a fifth wounded by gunfire from unknown assailants as they were harvesting olives. The authorities had cleared the olive pickers to be in the northern part of the province controlled by government forces.—APP

**Briefs**

**Azerbaijan FM conveys condolences to DPM Dar**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Saturday, received a phone call from the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan, Jeyhun Bayramov. "Foreign Minister Bayramov conveyed condolences on behalf of the President, government, and people of Azerbaijan, extending prayers for the victims of the Islamabad blast and solidarity with Pakistan," the Foreign Office Spokesperson said in a press release. Strongly condemning the attack, the DPM/FM reiterated Pakistan's resolve to fight the menace of terrorism. Both leaders also discussed current regional and international developments of mutual interest, and reaffirmed the enduring partnership between Pakistan and Azerbaijan.

**Israeli PM Netanyahu expected to meet Trump**

DNA

TEL AVIV: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to meet US President Donald Trump on Wednesday in Washington, where they will discuss negotiations with Iran. Netanyahu's office said on Saturday, Iranian and US officials held indirect nuclear talks in the Omani capital Muscat on Friday. Both sides said more talks were expected soon. A regional diplomat briefed by Tehran on the talks told Reuters Iran insisted on its "right to enrich uranium" during the negotiations with the US, and that Tehran's missile capabilities were not raised in the discussions. Iranian officials have ruled out putting Iran's missiles - one of the largest such arsenals in the Middle East - up for discussion, and have said Tehran wants recognition of its right to enrich uranium. "The Prime Minister believes any negotiations must include limitations on ballistic missiles and a halting of the support for the Iranian axis," Netanyahu's office said in a statement.

**Bangladesh keen on buying rolling stocks**

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: Bangladesh has expressed keen interest in procuring freight wagons and passenger coaches after Pakistan offered the rolling stock at prices cheaper than those in other countries. A two-member delegation, headed by a senior Bangladeshi official, has also visited the Pakistan Railways (PR) carriage factory in Islamabad and the Mughalpura Workshop in Lahore to receive a briefing from the railway authorities and to witness the rolling stock manufacturing process. According to the Lahore-based PR authorities, Mr Farhad Islam, Bangladesh's Secretary for International Organisations and Consular Affairs.

# Pak, Malaysia discuss maritime cooperation

The Chief of Naval Staff also visited Malaysia's National Hydrographic Centre, emphasizing strengthened cooperation with Pakistan's National Hydrographic Office in training, data exchange, and professional collaboration

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Admiral Naveed Ashraf, NI, NI (M), T Bt, Chief of the Naval Staff, paid an official visit to Malaysia and called on the leadership of the Royal Malaysian Navy. He was received at Royal Malaysian Navy Headquarters by Admiral Tan Sri (Dr) Zulhelmy bin Ithnain, Chief of the Royal Malaysian Navy, and was accorded a Guard of Honour. Discussions focused on aligning strategic perspectives and enhancing operational cooperation, capacity building, and coordinated responses to maritime security challenges. Admiral Naveed Ashraf highlighted Pakistan Navy's contributions to regional stability through Regional Maritime Security Patrols (RMSP) and participation in the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF).

The Chief of Naval Staff also visited Malaysia's National Hydrographic Centre, emphasizing strengthened cooperation with Pakistan's National Hydrographic Office in training, data exchange, and professional collaboration. The visit reaffirmed the enduring Pakistan-Malaysia naval partnership and commitment to future-oriented maritime cooperation.



## Gohar demands apology over Tarar's claim linking PTI to terrorism

*Controversy erupted after information minister said, "Abb yeh jo dehshatgardi waapis aiy hai, iss kay peechay PTI hai"*

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali on Saturday decried Information Minister Atta Tarar's accusation that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's ruling party was the reason behind the ongoing wave of terrorism, calling it reckless and divisive at a time of national mourning. The minister gave the remarks at a press conference in Lahore alongside religious scholars, aiming to express solidarity and national unity after Friday's suicide attack at an Islamabad imambargah. Referring indirectly to ex-premier Imran Khan's plan to settle fighters from the outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in civilian areas, Tarar said the same thinking was behind the current surge in violence. Tarar also remarked, with a smile, that "Abb yeh jo dehshatgardi waapis aiy hai, iss kay peechay PTI hai" (the PTI is behind this resurgence of terrorism). In his condemnatory reaction, Gohar called the minister's statement "irresponsible" and said he should apologise immediately. "People are grieving, funerals are being held, and nation needs unity at this time."

DNA



LAHORE: Ambassador of Romania to Pakistan Dan Stoenescu enjoying kite flying during his recent visit to Lahore. — DNA

# Indian refiners avoid Russian oil in push for US trade deal

*Indian refiners may change their plan and place orders for Russian oil only if advised by govt, say sources*

NEWS DESK

NEW DELHI: Indian refiners are avoiding Russian oil purchases for delivery in April and are expected to stay away from such trades for longer, refining and trade sources said, a move that could help New Delhi seal a trade pact with Washington. The US and India moved closer to a trade pact on Friday, announcing a framework for a deal they hope to conclude by March that would lower tariffs and deepen economic cooperation. Indian Oil, Bharat Petroleum and Reliance Industries are not accepting offers from traders for Russian oil loading in March and April, said a trader who approached the refiners. These refiners, however, had already scheduled some deliveries of Russian oil in March, refining sources said. Most other refiners have stopped buying Russian crude. The three refiners and the oil ministry did not respond to requests for comment. The trade minister on Saturday referred questions about Russian oil to the foreign ministry. A foreign ministry spokesperson said: "Diversifying our energy sourcing in keeping with objective market conditions and evolving international dynamics is at the core of our strategy" to ensure energy security for the world's most populous nation.

Although a US-India statement on the trade framework did not mention Russian oil, President Donald Trump rescinded his 25% tariffs on Indian goods, imposed over Russian oil purchases, because, he said, New Delhi had "committed to stop directly or

indirectly" importing Russian oil. New Delhi has not announced plans to halt Russian oil imports. India became the top buyer of discounted Russian seaborne crude after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, spurring a backlash from Western nations that had targeted Russia's energy sector with sanctions aimed at curtailing Moscow's revenue and making it harder to fund the war. One regular Indian buyer is Russia-backed private refiner Nayara, which relies solely on Russian oil for its 400,000-barrel-per-day refinery. Sources said Nayara may be allowed to keep buying Russian oil because other crude sellers pulled back after the European Union sanctioned the refiner in July. Nayara also does not plan to import Russian crude in April due to a month-long refinery maintenance shutdown, a source familiar with its operations said. Nayara did not respond to an email seeking comment. Indian refiners may change their plan and place orders for Russian oil only if advised by the government, sources said. Trump's order said US officials would monitor and recommend reinstating the tariffs if India resumed oil procurement from Russia. Sources said last month that India was preparing to cut Russian oil imports below 1 million bpd by March, with volumes eventually falling to 500,000-600,000 bpd, compared with an average 1.7 million bpd last year. India's Russian oil imports topped two million bpd in mid-2025. The intake of Russian oil by India, the world's third-biggest oil consumer and importer, declined to its lowest level in two years in December, data from trade and industry sources show.

**Pre-Ramazan spike pinching consumers**

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The prices of tomatoes, onions, potatoes, and other vegetables have started creeping up ahead of the start of Ramazan, after hitting rare seasonal lows, thanks to a winter production glut, while prices of flour varieties and fruits have risen. As the holy month will get underway from the third week of this month, fruit vendors have already started charging higher rates for the most sought-after items like banana, apple and guava. In the flour industry, retailers blame millers for raising rates, while flour millers flatly reject the claim.

As the new Sindh wheat crop will arrive in March, a random market survey ahead of the holy month reveals a price hike in a 20 kg bag of wheat flour to Rs2,400-2,700 from Rs2,500-2,600 two weeks back, followed by a Rs141 per kg increase in fine flour, up from Rs133 per kg.

The Sensitive Price Index ending Feb 4 revealed a slight jump in the price of a 10kg bag of wheat to Rs1,100 from Rs1,050 two weeks back. Vegetable, fruit and flour prices rise ahead of holy month Roti makers also complained about a price hike of Rs450 per 50 kg in the fine flour bag, from Rs6,000 to Rs6,450, which may result in a price jump in Roti varieties if the fine flour bag crosses Rs7,000 per 50 kg.

**Rain, snow expected in coming days**

DNA

RAWALPINDI: The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) has forecast rain, snow and thunderstorms in the upper parts of the country as well as Balochistan over the next two days, as a westerly wave is likely to approach the western parts of the country on Feb 8 (today). The PMD said that due to the new weather system, landslides may occur in vulnerable areas of upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir, warning that snowfall may cause traffic disruptions and slippery conditions in the hilly areas on Feb 9 and Feb 10. Tourists have been urged to remain extra cautious and avoid unnecessary travel during the forecast period.

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# Afghan Taliban have created a worst situation: Zardari

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari on Sunday issued renewed warnings about the threats to global peace due to "terrorist organisations operating in Afghanistan", and criticised the Taliban regime's policies, which he said created conditions "similar to or worse than pre-9/11". He made the remarks in a statement thanking world leaders for showing solidarity with Pakistan over the recent attack on an imambargah in Islamabad, which killed 36 people and injured more than 160. The militant group Islamic State (IS) had claimed responsibility for the attack. In a statement issued by the President's Secretariat, Zardari reiterated the Pakistani nation's resolve to combat terrorism and violent ideology. "Pakistan has long maintained that terrorism cannot be confronted by a single country in isolation," he was quoted as saying. Citing Pakistan's experience, he said in the statement that whenever "terrorist groups are allowed space, facilitation or impunity beyond national borders, the consequences are borne by innocent civilians all over the world."

Under such a context, he continued, certain neighbouring countries had become partners in crime by allowing terrorist elements to operate against Pakistan from their soil, while some not only finance them directly but also provide them with technical and military means. "This is a reality that has shaped the regional developments in recent years. Pakistan takes strong exception to the situation in Afghanistan, where the Taliban regime has created conditions similar to or worse than pre-9/11, when terror organisations posed threats to global peace, ending in the 9/11 tragedy," the statement quoted him as saying. The Sept 11, 2001, attacks, also known as 9/11, refer to a series of coordinated plane hijackings by the armed Al Qaeda group, which claimed almost 3,000 lives. Zardari also accused India of "assisting the Taliban regime and threatening not only Pakistan but also the regional and global peace." Following Friday's mosque attack in Islamabad, government officials, including the Defence Minister Khawaja Asif and Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, had also blamed "Indian-backed proxies" for carrying out the attack. President Zardari appreciated the international community for expressing solidarity with Pakistan in its fight against terrorism.