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Japanese ruling party wins two-thirds majority in elections

Detailed News On Page-08

Iranian Nobel prize winner given sentence

Detailed News On Page-08

KP govt starts rehabilitation projects: Afridi

Detailed News On Page-02

**Briefs****Breaking News**
Pakistan to 'play' T20 WC match against India**SPORTS DESK**

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has decided to play its scheduled T20 World Cup match against India on February 15, sources confirmed. The Prime Minister made this decision after a telephonic talk with the Sri Lankan President. Earlier, in a significant diplomatic engagement, Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif held a telephone conversation with Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake on Tuesday. A key topic of discussion was the possibility of the high-profile Pakistan-India match in the upcoming T20 World Cup being played in Sri Lanka.

President Dissanayake formally extended an invitation for the marquee clash to be hosted on Sri Lankan soil. He recalled the strong support Pakistan provided to Sri Lankan cricket by continuing bilateral tours during the island nation's challenging period with terrorism, highlighting the deep historical ties between the two countries.

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India seizes Iranian oil tankers**DNA**

TEHRAN: The Indian coast guard has reportedly seized three Iranian oil tankers in the Arabian Sea in what it called a "coordinated operation against an international oil smuggling network, according to Iranian media. The development came weeks after the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government withdrew from the Chabahar port agreement with Iran. New Delhi was forced to abandon its involvement in the port after the United States imposed a 25% tariff on countries doing business with Tehran. The Economic Times reported last week. Taking to X, the Indian Coast Guard, without naming Iran, claimed that it intercepted the vessels around 100 nautical miles west of Mumbai on Friday following what it called "tech-enabled surveillance and data-pattern analysis." However, tanker-tracking analysts and Iranian media claimed the vessels were linked to Iran.

Gulf visas linked to Pak beggars' mafias**FIAZ CHAUDHRY**

ISLAMABAD: Defence Minister Khawaja Asif on Monday lamented that Gulf nations had imposed visa restrictions for Pakistanis due to the menace of beggary. Taking to X, the security czar posted a video of noted social worker Zafar Abbas, wherein he can be seen interviewing a child in Karachi's Shah Faisal area, who begs to make ends meet. The child, while talking to Abbas, made startling revelations that he, along with his two brothers, makes around Rs10,000 to Rs12,000 weekly, and recently they have bought a house. Captioning the video, Asif regretted that begging has turned into a fully organised profession, with established contractors running the network and earning millions of rupees by recruiting children, women and people posing as disabled.

West Bank issue

Pakistan, other Muslim nations warn against Israeli plans

Muslim countries say Israeli actions "assault on inalienable right of Palestinian people" to realise sovereign state

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan, among eight Muslim countries, on Monday warned that Israel's expansionist policies in the West Bank were aimed at enforcing "a new legal and administrative reality in the occupied West Bank". In a joint statement on Monday, the foreign ministers of Pakistan, Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar termed the Israeli illegal acts as "accelerating attempts at its illegal annexation and the displacement of the Palestinian people." "They reaffirmed that Israel has no sovereignty over the occupied Palestinian territory," read the statement issued by the Foreign Office spokesperson. The statement follows an approval of a series of steps by Israel's security cabinet on Sunday that would make it easier for settlers in the West Bank to buy land while granting Israeli authorities more enforcement powers over Palestinians. Citing statements by Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and Defence Minister Israel Katz, Israeli news sites Ynet and Haaretz said the measures included scrapping decades-old regulations that prevent Jewish private citizens from buying land in the West Bank. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said the new measures were dangerous, illegal and tantamount to de-facto annexation. The eight Muslim nations, in the joint statement, warned that continued expansionist Israeli policies in the West Bank would fuel

violence and conflict in the region. The ministers rejected Israel's illegal actions, terming them a blatant violation of international law, which undermined the two-state solution. They lambasted the illegal actions as "an assault on the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to realise their independent and sovereign state on the June 4, 1967, lines, with occupied Jerusalem as its capital". The statement said that such actions undermined the ongoing efforts for peace and stability in the region, affirming that these illegal measures in the occupied West Bank "were null and void". The Israeli policies, they said, also constituted a clear violation of UN Security Council resolutions, particularly Resolution 2334, which condemned all Israeli measures aimed at altering the demographic status of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem. The ministers noted that the 2024 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice had found that Israel's policies and practices in the occupied Palestinian territory and its continued presence were illegal. They urged the international community to fulfil its legal and moral responsibilities and to compel Israel to halt its dangerous escalation in the occupied area and the inciting statements of its officials. They stressed that the fulfilment of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and statehood remained the only path to achieving just and comprehensive peace in the region.

Bid to embarrass Germany envoy Controversy at Asma Jahangir Conference

Interestingly, in 2024 Asma Jahangir conference the then German Ambassador had to face similar situation when a pro-Palestine protester had interrupted his speech and chanted slogans

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: At the Asma Jahangir Conference in Lahore, a tense moment unfolded when Germany's Ambassador to Pakistan, Ina Lepel, faced an unexpected interruption during a question-and-answer session. A participant accused Germany of being complicit in the "genocide of Gaza's people" by supplying weapons to Israel. Before Ambassador Lepel could respond, the individual was swiftly escorted out of the hall by security personnel. According to eyewitnesses, the man was later taken into custody by police, sparking a wave of mixed reactions both inside and outside the conference. Some attendees argued that the participant had every right to raise a question, especially in a forum dedicated

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Dar says Pakistan committed to meet GSP Plus obligations

The deputy prime minister was chairing a high-level inter-ministerial meeting to review measures aimed at strengthening Pakistan's economic and trade cooperation with European Union

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Ishaq Dar on Monday said that Pakistan had successfully completed four biennial GSP Plus reviews remained committed to fully meeting its obligations under the scheme to expand mutually beneficial trade opportunities. The deputy prime minister was chairing a high-level inter-ministerial meeting to review measures aimed at strengthening Pakistan's economic and trade cooperation with the European Union. He underscored the importance of deepening and expanding trade and economic engagement with the EU, noting that the EU remained a key economic partner for Pakistan, particularly under the GSP Plus framework. The meeting was attended by Federal Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazir Tarar, SAPM Tariq Bajwa, Secretary Foreign Affairs Ambassador Anna Baloch,

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INDEPENDENCE DAY OF SRI LANKA

ISLAMABAD: Chief Guest Federal Information Minister Attaullah Tarar, Real Admiral Fred Senevirathne & High Commissioner of Sri Lanka, Heads of Missions of SAARC countries and others cutting cake to celebrate the 78th Anniversary of the Independence of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, at Islamabad Serena Hotel. — DNA

Pakistan to invest \$1bn in artificial intelligence**DNA**

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday announced that Pakistan will invest \$1 billion in artificial intelligence by 2030 to build a national AI ecosystem, declaring the country fully prepared to join the world in the next wave of technological transformation. The prime minister made these remarks while addressing the inauguration ceremony of Indus AI Week 2026, attended by federal ministers, delegations from countries including Saudi Arabia and Turkey and others. "The Government of Pakistan is committed to investing \$1 billion in AI by 2030, which will go a long way in building an AI ecosystem in our country," he announced.

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SC dismisses request for 'immediate meeting' with Imran Khan

CJP Afridi says meeting plea needs notices and must clear maintainability objections first

Visa requests of Imran Khan's sons pending

PTI founder's sons couldn't get visa from Pakistan High Commission in London due to lacunas in applications

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Diplomatic sources in London have said that the visa applications of incarcerated Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan's sons were pending with the Ministry of Interior. The sources added that Kasim Khan and Sulaiman Khan couldn't get a visa from the Pakistan High Commission in London due to lacunas in their applications and that the PTI founder's sons didn't pursue their applications

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KP CM okays vagrancy control, rehabilitation bill

The chief minister emphasized that removing children from begging and providing them with protection, rehabilitation and education is the constitutional and moral responsibility of the state

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Sohail Afridi has approved the presentation of the Vagrancy (Beggary) Control and Rehabilitation Bill in the provincial cabinet, aimed at ensuring effective action against organized, forced and exploitative begging in the province. The proposed legislation seeks to address the issue of beggary through a rights-based, reformative and dignity-centered policy, focusing not only on punishment but also on rehabilitation and aftercare mechanisms. The government aims to establish a strong system for protection, rehabilitation and social reintegration of affected individuals. Under the proposed law, strict legal action will be taken against those who force children into begging, with no leniency. The chief minister emphasized

that removing children from begging and providing them with protection, rehabilitation and education is the constitutional and moral responsibility of the state. According to the proposed bill, organized and forced begging will be declared a serious punishable offence, while a clear distinction will be made between professional beggars and individuals compelled by circumstances. The law also proposes sustainable solutions through rehabilitation centers, skill development and employment opportunities. During the briefing, the chief minister was informed that first-time involvement in simple begging may result in a warning, referral to a rehabilitation center, or up to one month imprisonment with a fine. Repeated offences could lead to

imprisonment of up to one year and a fine of Rs 50,000. Fraud, deception and fake disability may attract one to two years imprisonment, while involvement in organized or forced begging could result in imprisonment of up to three years and a fine of Rs 400,000. Ringleaders and facilitators of beggary networks will face the strictest punishments. It was stated that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is set to become the first province to introduce a comprehensive, sustainable and humane solution to the serious social issue of beggary. The chief minister also appealed to the public to channel charity through credible rehabilitation systems instead of giving directly to organized networks, in order to completely eliminate exploitation.—APP

NAB engages youth to promote culture of integrity

LAHORE: The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Lahore has intensified its awareness and prevention efforts by engaging youth-led platforms to promote integrity, transparency and good governance. A session was held at NAB Lahore, here on Monday, with members of the Pakistan Youth Parliament, where Additional Director Awareness NAB Lahore Atta Azmat highlighted the importance of collaboration with young citizens in strengthening democratic values and fostering ethical behaviour in society. She said youth participation was vital for sustainable national development and long-term accountability.

She briefed participants on NAB's mandate under Section 33(c) of the NAB Ordinance, which assigns the Bureau the responsibility of educating the public, reforming systems and promoting a culture of integrity alongside its investigative role. She added that the Awareness and Prevention Wing was working to sensitize communities against corruption through sustained outreach.

Atta Azmat said that under the guidance of Director General NAB Lahore Mirza Faran Baig, the bureau had launched extensive awareness initiatives including anti-corruption seminars, workshops, awareness walks, wall of culture campaigns and the establishment of Character Building Societies in educational institutions. These initiatives aim to strengthen public trust and encourage collective responsibility in countering corruption. Representing the Pakistan Youth Parliament, its President Abu Baker stressed the need to bridge the gap between youth and state institutions.—APP

KP public rejects PTI shutter-down call: Murtaza

ABBOTTABAD: Former Federal Minister and Provincial General Secretary of Pakistan Muslim League, Murtaza Javed Abbasi, has said that the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have decisively rejected Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's call for a shutter-down strike, calling it a clear expression of public distrust in the provincial government policies and its failed style of politics. In a statement issued on Monday, Murtaza Javed Abbasi said that business activities across the province continued as usual.

Condemning the practice of forcing people to participate in protests, he said that political parties should respect the democratic right of citizens to carry out their lawful economic activities without fear or pressure. He added that PTI should learn a lesson from the public response to its call and reconsider its confrontational approach. Murtaza Javed Abbasi further stated that the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have once again proved that Pakistan's development and prosperity are their top priorities.—APP

Punjab expands skill base to meet global workforce demand

Punjab is rapidly strengthening its technical and vocational education system to meet rising international, national and local demand for skilled workers, particularly in markets such as Gulf countries, Japan, and some others

LAHORE: According to Regional Manager Punjab Vocational Training Council (PVT) Asif Ali, 15,000 students are currently acquiring technical education in the Multan, Bahawalpur and Dera Ghazi Khan divisions alone, while the overall number of trainees across Punjab is being increased to one lakh during the current year. Talking to APP Multan, he said that at present 190 technical institutes are operating in Punjab, offering training in 60 different trades. These institutes not only provide

theoretical knowledge but also ensure practical, industry-based training to equip students with market-relevant skills. He added the syllabus is being upgraded every year in line with changing technological and market requirements, while new trades are being introduced to enhance employability and open pathways to jobs at the international, national and local levels. Asif Ali further said the Punjab government is establishing three Centres of Excellence to deliver advanced, future-oriented

education. These include a Mechanical Hub in Multan, a Hospitality Hub in Rawalpindi, and an IT Hub in Lahore. The centres will have the capacity to train more than 1,000 students at a time in modern professional skills. He maintained that the upgradation of 375 laboratories across the province is another significant initiative aimed at improving training standards and ensuring that Punjab's skilled workforce remains competitive in both domestic and global job markets.—APP

Russian envoy highlights Russia-Pakistan diplomatic ties

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Russian Ambassador Albert P. Khorev delivered a keynote statement at the seminar "Legacy of Russian Diplomacy: Current State and Prospects of Russia-Pakistan Relations," marking the upcoming Diplomat's Day, celebrated annually on February 10 by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Opening his remarks, Ambassador Khorev recalled that Diplomat's Day commemorates the establishment of Russia's Ambassadorial Service on February 10, 1549, under Tsar Ivan IV. He emphasized, however, that Russian diplomacy has roots stretching back several centuries earlier, with Ancient Rus actively participating in international relations as early as the 9th century.

The Ambassador outlined key milestones in the evolution of Russian diplomacy,

including the first recorded Russian embassy to Constantinople in 838, the Treaty of Peace and Love with the Byzantine Empire in 860, and the emergence of a structured diplomatic hierarchy by the 11th century. He noted the important role played by educated envoys

and clergy, particularly after the adoption of Christianity, in shaping successful diplomatic engagements.

Addressing the Mongol period, Ambassador Khorev highlighted the pragmatic diplomacy of Russian princes, especially Alexander Nevsky, whose policy of compromise

with the Golden Horde preserved the Orthodox Church and laid the groundwork for the reunification of Russian lands.

He traced the institutional development of Russian foreign policy to the creation of the Ambassadorial Service in 1549 and praised its first

head, Ivan Viskovaty, for his significant contributions to Russian diplomacy. The Ambassador then reviewed the legacy of prominent Russian statesmen who shaped the country's foreign policy, including Vasily Golitsyn, Andrei Osterman, Karl Nesselrode, Alexander Gorchakov, Georgy Chicherin, Vyacheslav Molotov, Andrei Gromyko, and Yevgeny Primakov.

Special attention was given to Andrei Gromyko's role in international diplomacy and in Russia-Pakistan relations. Ambassador Khorev recalled that diplomatic relations between Russia and Pakistan were established on May 1, 1948, following an agreement between Gromyko and Pakistan's Foreign Minister Zafarullah Khan. He also highlighted the Soviet Union's mediation efforts during the 1965-1966 India-Pakistan conflict, which led to the signing of the Tashkent Declaration.



KARACHI: Consul General of the Federal Republic of Germany in Karachi Thomas E. Schultze meeting with Nazir H. Siyal, Bureau Chief of diplomatic Newspaper, daily "Islamabad Post". In the meeting, Mr Thomas discussed the longstanding humanitarian services of Marie Adelaide Leprosy Centre (MALC), which has been serving Pakistan since 1956 under the legacy of Dr. Ruth Pfau.

Empowering youth top priority of govt: Mashhood

LAHORE: Prime Minister's Youth Programme (PMYP) Chairman Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan has said that it is a top priority of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif to empower the youth and positively engage them in a meaningful and productive manner. He said this while addressing the Pakistan International Culinary Championship (PICC) 2026 here on Monday. He said, "NAVTC (National Vocational and Technical Training Commission) contributes significantly to the nation's workforce development and economic growth." The PMYP chairman lauded NAVTC's role and said it was leading in technical education, hospitality, IT, and other training-related areas. He said that providing technical education to youngsters was one of the country's biggest challenges so that they could secure good earning opportunities both within and outside Pakistan. He said, "The Prime Minister Youth Skill Development Fund has become the largest fund in the region for technical education." He said, "The government's role is to provide support to institutions that have established their identity in the market so that they can create further opportunities for the people." He said that the Basant Festival, not only boosted economic activity but also created social cohesion, adding that the credit went to Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz. He congratulated the College of Tourism and Hotel Management (COTHM), its President Ahmad Shafiq, and all partners for organizing the event. He also welcomed the dignitaries from 27 countries who arrived in Pakistan and expressed hope that they would have the best time during their stay in the country.

MNA Shaista Pervaiz Malik also spoke on the occasion. Earlier, the chairman inaugurated PICC 2026 by cutting a ribbon.—APP

Rising trend of aerial firing at weddings alarms KP

PESHAWAR: The increasing trend of aerial firing by underage boys during weddings and other celebrations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has become a serious cause of concern. In Peshawar and several other cities, the lack of parental guidance and social negligence has led young individuals to use weapons recklessly. According to police, on Monday, videos showing intense aerial firing by several youths in the Baghwan area under Bhana Mari Police Station went viral on social media, creating fear among women

en, children and other citizens. Police arrested Aqeel Ahmed, Adeel Ahmed, Abdul Samad alias Sameer, Abdul Basit, Asad, Adnan Ahmed, Ghulam Fareed and Ahmed in connection with the incident. Similarly, due to the growing practice of grooms firing shots during wedding ceremonies, Urmair Police arrested a groom named Yaseen from Ooch Canal and recovered a pistol from his possession. In another incident, police also arrested an underage suspect in Hayatabad Phase 6 for firing in the air while riding a motorcycle.

Shafi calls for expedited completion of uplift projects

PESHAWAR: In an important high-level meeting, SACM Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Information and Public Relations, Shafiq Jan on Monday reviewed ongoing and proposed development projects in Kohat and assessed measures for improving the city's urban infrastructure. The meeting was attended by Deputy Commissioner Kohat Muhammad

Nawaz Wazir, Additional Deputy Commissioner (F&U) Amir Ali Shah, Chief Engineer KPCIP, representatives of SNGPL, officials of the Urban Area Development Authority, and Qasim Zubair, focal person of MNA Shehryar Afridi. Participants held detailed discussions on the construction and rehabilitation of roads, gas pipe-

ISLAMABAD ELECTRIC SUPPLY COMPANY (IESCO) INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

(TENDER Notice No.15 IESCO/CIVIL/NCB-127)

IESCO invites sealed bids from the contractor Registered with Pakistan Engineering Council and renewed for the year 2025-26, Single Stage - Single Envelope Bidding procedure as per below mentioned detail, under National Competitive Bidding (NCB) basis in accordance with Provisions of PPRA Rules.

EXECUTION OF SMALLER SPECIAL REPAIR WORKS IN IESCO REGION.

T No.	Name of Work	Estimated Cost (Rs)	Comp: Period
127	PROVIDING MOTOR TO OPERATE GATE, CLADDING ON OUTER WALLS OF RECEPTION AND BARRIERS AT ENTRY GATE AT IESCO HEAD OFFICE G-7/4 ISLAMABAD.	=3218436.00	30 Days

Bid Submission Date & Time: 27.02.2026 - 11:00 AM

Bid Opening Date & Time: 27.02.2026 - 11:30 AM

ELIGIBILITY

This Invitation for Electronic Bid is open to all Bidders meeting the following requirements:

1. Electronic bidding document containing detailed requirements terms and conditions is available on E-PADS at www.procure.gov.pk & www.ppra.org.pk and also available at IESCO website.
2. Bid must be accompanied by a Bid Security duly generated from firms / owner own account and should be in the form of pay order/ CDR in favor of Executive Engineer Civil Division IESCO. The prospective bidders shall upload scanned copy of Bid Security on E-PADS in PDF format and original will have to submit before closing of bid submission time non-refundable printing charge of Rs.200/- per tender is to be paid in cash the time of submission of CDR in the office of Executive Engineer Civil Division IESCO street No.63 Sector G-8/I Islamabad, otherwise bid will be rejected.
3. The Firm / contractors already working with this office, Performance certificate / completion certificate duly received by xen concerned must be provided by the contractor duly signed by XEN / SDO concerned must be upload on E-PADS for consideration as responsive bidder.
4. Pakistan Engineering Council Registration renewed for year 2025-26 with at least Category C-6 having Specialization Code of CE-10.
5. Bidder will provide the fresh (maximum 30 Days older) bank balance of firm upto 50% of estimated cost.
6. Firm / Company successfully completed similar nature of work in any Govt / Semi Govt. organization / Autonomous body successfully handed over to concern Department (Work order & Completion Certificate must attach).
7. Firm / Company must attach active registration certificate issued by the PRA and FBR with their Bids.
8. In case of total bid amount is less than 10% below the N.I.T amount the bidder shall submit additional call deposit as performance security equal to the difference between N.I.T amount and total quoted amount less 10% of N.I.T amount the additional performance guarantee shall be submitted along with bid. Bids having rates below 10% of N.I.T without additional call deposit will be rejected.
9. All entries in bidding documents must be filed which are mandatory to participate in the tender as per PPRA rules.

TERMS & CONDITIONS:

- a. Presentation of false / wrong documents will be strictly discouraged and their CDR shall be forfeited besides black listing.
- b. Deposit Earnest Money @ 4% of Estimated Cost in the form of CDR in favor of Executive Engineer Civil Division IESCO Islamabad.
- c. The successful bidder shall produce 10% of contract price in shape of pay order / Bank guarantee/CDR performance security before signing the contract agreement in favor of Executive Engineer Civil Division IESCO Islamabad.
- d. The IESCO reserves all the rights to accept or reject the any / all tender under PPRA rule 33 (1).
- e. In case of public holiday tender will be open on next working day.
- f. All the PPRA rule regarding Electronic Bid are applicable on all tenders whether mentioned above or not.

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.....451152
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 Exchange.....9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi.....5555489
CAA.....9281092



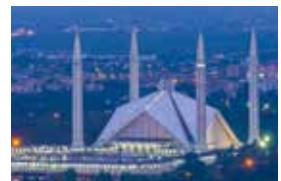
Hospitals

CMH.....5611111
MH.....561116
Cantt Hospital.....9270907-11
DHO.....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
Potohar Town.....9209224
Rawal Town.....5773343

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

AIOU Gramora for Urdu to promote digital linguistics

ISLAMABAD: A launching ceremony of the artificial intelligence-based linguistic software "Gramora for Urdu" was held at Allama Iqbal Open University to promote the Urdu language and align it with modern technological requirements.

The chief guests of the ceremony were Minister of State for Education and Professional Training Ms. Wajih Qamar and senior politician and intellectual Senator Pervez Rashid while the event was hosted by Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood.

Addressing the ceremony, Wajih Qamar said that Urdu is a symbol of our national identity and cultural heritage and linking it with modern technologies such as artificial intelligence is an important need of the time. She stated that this software would prove to be a significant advancement in the fields of academic research, digital learning, translation and natural language processing.

Senator Pervez Rashid said that Urdu is not merely a language of communication but a custodian of our intellectual and cultural history and that such linguistic software will play an important role in securing the digital future of the Urdu language.

He termed the software an extraordinary and commendable initiative, describing it as a major milestone among efforts undertaken so far.

On this occasion, he congratulated Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood and Director of the Centre for Languages and Translation Studies, Dr. Ghulam Ali on this successful endeavor. Former Chief Minister of Gilgit-Baltistan Hafiz Hafeez-ur-Rehman said that nations progress through their mother tongues. Emphasizing the commercialization of the software, he added that in the future it should be available on every student's mobile phone. Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood stated that the university is utilizing modern research and technology for the promotion of the national language. He explained that "Gramora for Urdu" will play an effective role in automated linguistic analysis, text classification, and the processing of speech and written data.—DNA

Commendation certificates awarded to Police officials

The Additional Inspector General of Police, Muhammad Wisal Fakhar Sultan lauded the officers on their dedicated approach towards official tasks

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Additional Inspector General of Police, National Highways and Motorway Police (NHMP), Muhammad Wisal Fakhar Sultan Monday awarded Commendation Certificates and cash awards to NHMP officers in recognition of their exceptional performance and dedication towards official duties. IP/SPO Abdul Nasir was awarded Commendation Certificate I (CC-I) along with a cash prize in acknowledgement of his exemplary passion while undertaking official duty during recent snowfall at Sector IMDC (Murree). Meanwhile, IP/SPO Kashif Mehmood was awarded CC-I along with suitable cash award in recognition of his active and cautious duty at weight station. IP Kashif, while deployed at weight station, showed extraordinary vigilance and alertness keeping in view the campaign against overloaded HTVs. The Additional Inspector General of Police, Muhammad Wisal Fakhar Sultan lauded the officers on their dedicated approach towards official tasks. He directed all ranks to maintain the spirit of public service and uphold the high working standards of National Highways and Motorway Police. The Additional IGP further resolved that good performing officers will be rewarded in the future as well.



Shaza presents Islamabad AI declaration

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja on Monday said Pakistan has formally articulated its vision on artificial intelligence through the adoption of the Islamabad Artificial Intelligence Declaration, aimed at promoting a sovereign, inclusive and outcome-driven AI ecosystem. Addressing Indus AI Week 2026, the minister said the declaration was finalised after detailed deliberations, including a high-level roundtable held the night before with more than 40 global technology leaders from across the world. The event brought together national and international AI experts, industry leaders and government representatives to engage in high-level discussions and envision the future of artificial intelligence in Pakistan. She thanked international participants for travelling to Pakistan and acknowledged the efforts of the Pakistan Digital Authority,

the Ministry of IT team, Pakistan Software Export Board, Universal Service Fund, and other institutions involved in organising the initiative. Shaza Fatima said the declaration underscores a private sector-led and government-enabled approach to artificial intelligence, with a focus on strengthening Pakistan's digital society, digital economy and digital governance. She emphasised that the framework is anchored in public value and public trust, supported by strong institutions, responsible safeguards and disciplined execution, while ensuring space for innovation and entrepreneurship. The minister outlined eight core pillars of the Islamabad AI Declaration: sovereign purpose and measurable public value; human accountability under constitutional authority; use case-first pragmatic delivery; sovereign data privacy and trust; explainable, auditable and safe AI; a whole-of-government approach to AI governance; inclusive and responsible innovation; and private sector-led, sovereign and open AI ecosystems. She said the declaration was developed under the direction of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and reflects some of his earliest directives to define Pakistan's position on artificial intelligence at the global level. Approved by the prime minister and shaped through consultations with local and international stakeholders, the declaration represents Pakistan's formal commitment to responsible AI development. Shaza Fatima reaffirmed that Pakistan aims to lead by example in adopting artificial intelligence that is ethical, transparent and aligned with national priorities. Former Chief Information Officer of Estonia, Siim Sikkut, who also addressed the event, said nationwide digitalisation was essential to deliver services efficiently, remain competitive and strengthen governance.—DNA

Pakistan reforms report 2026 launched

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Reforms Report 2026 was launched in Islamabad on Monday, documenting more than 600 governance reforms carried out across 135 federal ministries, divisions and affiliated institutions during 2025, according to the organisers Prepared by Mishal Pakistan — the country partner institute of the World Economic Forum — the report is the second annual edition of what is described as Pakistan's first systematic documentation of governance reforms. It notes a fivefold increase in reform activity compared to the previous year. The report indicates a shift in policy focus from crisis stabilisation toward strengthening long-term state capacity. The energy sector accounted for roughly 40 per cent of the recorded reforms, followed by law and justice, and digital governance and IT, highlighting an emphasis on structural and digital transformation. More than 200 reforms were implemented through digital platforms aimed at improving transparency and reducing administrative discretion. Fiscal and energy sector measures, including renegotiated independent power producer contracts, are projected to generate about Rs1.4 trillion in power-sector savings. The report also notes progress in natural resource development, including the \$6 billion Reko Diq copper-gold project and new tight gas and offshore exploration policies targeting around \$5bn in potential investment. Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination Dr Musadik Malik, who attended the launch as chief guest, stressed the importance of credible documentation in strengthening public trust and improving Pakistan's standing among international partners and investors. He said transparent, fact-based reporting helps shift public discourse from policy announcements to implementation and outcomes. Mishal Pakistan Chief Executive Officer Amir Jahangir said the report aims to create an institutional memory of governance reforms, enabling year-to-year comparison and long-term analysis. Co-founder Purvesh Chaudhary said the initiative focuses on documenting reforms that improve access, transparency and trust, particularly in digital governance, justice delivery and citizen services. According to the report, a significant proportion of reforms align with Sustainable Development Goal 16 — peace, justice and strong institutions — indicating a policy emphasis on institutional strengthening, rule of law, accountability, regulatory modernisation and public access to information. The report places these developments within the broader national context of 2025, marked by fiscal pressures, security challenges and geopolitical tensions, but notes that reform momentum continued, particularly in digitisation and regulatory modernisation.—DNA

Roots celebrates Parents Day with vibrant cultural performances

ISLAMABAD: Roots Millennium School (RMS), Trafalgar Campus, organized its Annual Parents Day 2026 at the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) with the inspiring theme "Education for Sustainability, Leadership and Global Harmony." The event featured colourful student performances reflecting creativity, cultural diversity, and global awareness; creative Artificial Intelligence themed presentation, highlighted innovation, values, and social responsibility, while a cultural showcase represented countries including the United Kingdom, China, South Africa, and

Palestine. One of the most engaging segments was a patriotic performance on "Dil Dil Pakistan," with students wearing traditional cultural dresses representing all provinces of Pakistan, celebrating unity in diversity. The presentation on Sustainable Development Goals by the students also received huge appreciation. Addressing the gathering, Executive Director, The Millennium Education, Anna Faisal, said that Parents Day is being celebrated across all Millennium institutions, providing children a platform that builds lifelong confidence. "When children perform on such stages, the confidence and memories stay with them for life. Our teachers put tremendous energy into nurturing students every day," she said, adding that the institution is moving toward digital classrooms and skill-based learning to shape the future of children. She appreciated the dedication of teachers and staff, noting the immense effort behind every successful student. Also speaking on the occasion, Amna Salik, Director of Education, The Millennium Education (TME), said that success is not only about academic results but about building resilience, personality, attitude, integrity, and strong character.—APP

ICCI showcases region's investment potential

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Raja Faisal Mumtaz Rathore, has said that his government is fully committed to providing all possible facilities to investors and creating a conducive environment for industrial development and export promotion. He announced that the AJK government is all set to host an Overseas Investment Conference on February 15-16, 2026, aimed at showcasing the region's immense investment potential.

The AJK Prime Minister was addressing an impressive and hugely attended ceremony held in his honour at the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) on Monday. He emphasized that promotion of the private sector and strengthening public-private partnerships remain top priorities of his government. Highlighting AJK's vast untapped potential, he said the region offers lucrative opportunities in natural resources, tourism, hydropower, minerals, and agricultural production. Prime Minister Rathore pointed out that Azad Jammu and Kashmir is located at just one hour's drive from Islamabad, making it a highly accessible and attractive destination

for investment. He urged the Pakistani business community, particularly entrepreneurs from Islamabad, to seriously consider investing in AJK and invited them to attend the forthcoming Overseas Investment Conference to witness firsthand the available opportunities.

ICCI President Sardar Tahir Mehmood, in his welcome address

emphasizing that Pakistan's business community has consistently stood in solidarity with the people of Kashmir and will continue to advocate for their political, moral and diplomatic rights at national and international forums.

Highlighting the vast economic

potential of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Sardar Tahir Mehmood said the region offers attractive opportunities in tourism, hydropower generation, agriculture, minerals, handicrafts and

small and medium enterprises. He stressed the need for enhanced collaboration through joint ventures, investment facilitation, trade delegations and business-to-business linkages to ensure shared prosperity for the people and business communities of both Islamabad and AJK. Advisor to the Prime Minister of AJK on Investment, Fahd Yaqub, highlighted the government's investor-friendly policies, includ-

ing tax holidays and comparatively lower electricity tariffs, and showcased the industrial and tourism potential of the region. Chairman ICCI Founder Group Sheikh Tariq Sadiq said that trade and economic linkages between Pakistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir are strong and reaffirmed ICCI's full support in coordinating efforts to promote AJK's investment potential.

Dr. Rashid Ilyas Khan, President

of Centaurus Group, stressed the need for establishing an industrial zone in AJK, along with focused career counselling and skill development initiatives to prepare youth in line with international market requirements.

President AJK Traders Wing Saradar Amjad Azam underscored the importance of closer collaboration between the business communities of AJK and Islamabad, terming it a win-win situation for both sides.

ICCI Senior Vice President Tahir Ayub, who conducted the event in an impressive manner, dedicated the ceremony to the oppressed Kashmiri who are victims of Indian state terrorism. In his vote of thanks, ICCI Vice President Irfan Chaudhry expressed hope that the AJK Prime Minister's visit would serve as a milestone in bringing the business communities of Islamabad and AJK closer together. Prominent attendees included former ICCI Presidents Khalid Javid, Mohammad Ejaz Abbasi, Mian Shaukat Masood, and Zafar Bakhtawari, along with Executive Members Ms. Fatima Azim, Ms. Shumaila Siddiqui, Imran Minhas, Raja Naveed Satti, Zulqarnain Abbasi, Malik Abdul Aziz, Ishaq Sial, Nasir Mehmood Chaudhry, and Mirza Mohammad Ali, among a large number of market representatives.



Briefs
FCCP hears case

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Constitutional Court on Monday heard a case concerning the alleged disqualification of National Assembly member Sohail Sultan from Swat and issued notice to the Attorney General seeking assistance on constitutional and legal questions involved in the matter. During the hearing, the Court sought the Attorney General's assistance and raised the question whether the Office of the Speaker of the National Assembly can send a reference regarding a disqualification dispute before elections. The Court also asked the Attorney General to clarify whether the Election Commission has the authority to hear a reference relating to a pre-election disqualification dispute. Counsel for Sohail Sultan, Barrister Gohar, argued that in cases of this nature neither the Election Commission has the jurisdiction to hear the matter nor can the Speaker of the National Assembly send such a reference. A two-member bench headed by Justice Aamir Farooq heard the case and adjourned the proceedings for an indefinite period.—APP

IMCG
I-14/3 hold
intercollegiate
competitions

ISLAMABAD: An inter-collegiate competition of flower arrangement and card making was held at Model College for Girls I-14/3. The chief guest on the occasion was Educationist Javed Mughal, while the event was presided over by Principal Professor Shazia Wazir. Students from eleven colleges participated in the competition. The panel of judges included Ali Akbar, Osama Hassan, Nosheen Fakhri, and Naheed Amjad.

According to the judges, in the flower arrangement competition, Momina Zubair from host college secured first position. While Fatima and Umama from G-10/4 secured bagged second position, and Aoun, Muskan and Mahnoor from F-7/2 secured third position. Myra Waseem and Sheeza Ali from F-11 Home Economics received the encouragement award, while Fiza Ilyas and Hooria Shahid from ICG were also given appreciation prizes.

In the card making competition, Zainab Bibi secured first position but later withdrew, after which Ayesha from F-11 Home Economics College was awarded first place. Maria Noor from F-7/2 secured second position, and Amina Azhar from F-6/2 got third position. Model College Kuriang Town received the encouragement award.

In her welcome address, the principal prof shazia said that despite limited resources, she has worked hard for the development of the institution, and now around one thousand students are studying here. Compared to major colleges in the federal capital, this college does not have a proper hall for students and also faces a shortage of staff and other necessary facilities. She added that a request has already been submitted to the Federal Directorate of Education.—APP

Pakistan faces high burden of eye cancer in children: Al-Shifa Trust

All genetic testing at the hospital is provided free of charge, despite the high costs involved, said Major General (Retd) Rehmat Khan, president of Al-Shifa Trust Eye Hospital

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Al-Shifa Trust Eye Hospital in Rawalpindi has completed genetic testing for 139 patients from 91 families with inherited eye conditions, marking one year since opening Pakistan's first genetic testing lab dedicated to eye disorders. The lab, launched in January 2025, helps doctors identify genes that cause inherited vision loss. These conditions affect roughly eight million people globally. Pakistan's genetic eye disease burden is substantially higher than the global rate, though no official data exists, said Dr Rataba Gul, Geneticist, Department of Ophthalmic Genetics.

The hospital's Department of Ophthalmic Genetics employs advanced DNA testing to confirm causes of inherited eye diseases. This technology enables earlier and more precise diagnoses, she added. Pakistan's higher risk of inherited eye diseases is partly due to cousin marriages, which are common in many regions. Research indicates that over 70 percent of inherited retinal disease cases in Pakistan occur in children born to closely related parents. Consequently, these disorders are more prevalent than in Europe, the United States, or other Asian countries. The genetic lab diagnoses many conditions that, if left untreated, could lead to severe vision loss or blindness. Patients are referred to the genetics department by eye specialists based on symptoms and family history. Once a genetic cause is confirmed, families receive genetic counselling to understand the risks to other family members and future children, as well as available treatment options. Additionally, Prof. Dr Tayyab Afghani, Head of the Orbit and Oculoplastic



Department, noted that Pakistan also faces a significant burden of eye cancer among children. Al-Shifa Trust hospitals treat around 700 children with eye cancer each year, approximately twice as many as

in India. All genetic testing at the hospital is provided free of charge, despite the high costs involved, said Major General (Retd) Rehmat Khan, president of Al-Shifa Trust Eye Hospital.

Zong partners with MOITT

ISLAMABAD: Zong, Pakistan's is partnering with the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication (MOITT) for Indus AI Week 2026, Pakistan's flagship national initiative on Artificial Intelligence (AI). This represents a defining step in Pakistan's journey toward responsible, scalable, and inclusive AI adoption and adaptation. This event brings together national to international AI Experts, industry and government leadership to engage in high-level dialogue and envision future of Artificial Intelligence in Pakistan. Zong's strategic partnership with Indus AI Week 2026 reflects its commitment and leadership in Pakistan's journey toward Digital Transformation. It is defined by artificial intelligence, intelligent networks, innovation-driven infrastructure, and digital platforms. As a technology leader, Zong is expanding beyond connectivity, enabling digital capabilities required to scale AI across sectors and institutions. This partnership is augmented by China Mobile's global technological leadership, bringing deep expertise in AI, Cloud, Big Data, and next-generation networks. During the event, at the Indus Innovation, Learning & Engagement Arena (AI marketplace - Sports Complex Islamabad), Zong will assert its technological leadership by showcasing a comprehensive portfolio of AI-driven solutions, products, and digital services designed to accelerate Pakistan's intelligent transformation. Zong's showcase spans advanced AI platforms, consumer and enterprise solutions, and digital ecosystems, including Z-AIVA, Zong A-EYE, OZ GPT, My Zong App, next-generation gaming platforms, and more, demonstrating the depth and maturity of its AI capabilities across multiple use cases and industries. Key highlight of the showcase will be the unveiling of Z-Smart Hub, a powerful convergence of Z-SAIS Cloud and DICT, enabling secure, scalable, and intelligent digital services. Complementing this will be the introduction of next-generation ZTE AI-enabled handsets and smart glasses, reinforcing Zong's commitment to delivering best-in-class, future-ready technology experiences. On the partnership with MOITT AI Indus Week, Hua Junli, Chairman & CEO, Zong said, "Artificial Intelligence is now central to economic competitiveness and national progress. Zong's partnership with Indus AI Week 2026 reflects our commitment to lead Pakistan's transition toward an intelligence-driven digital economy. By combining advanced networks, intelligent platforms, and China Mobile's global technological expertise, we are enabling a resilient AI ecosystem, one that empowers innovation, strengthens digital sovereignty, and delivers long-term value for the country". Through this partnership, Zong is institutionalising its role as a national digital enabler, driving Pakistan's transition to a high-value, AI-led economy. Zong is aligning global expertise with national priorities to contribute future-ready and resilient Digital Pakistan.—DNA

Rana Ihsaan receives Cambodia's Cham Nimul

ISLAMABAD: Rana Ihsaan Afzal Khan, Coordinator to the Prime Minister on Commerce, Government of Pakistan, today received Ms. Cham Nimul, Minister of Commerce of the Kingdom of Cambodia, at the State Lounge of Islamabad International Airport. Accompanied by a senior official delegation, Cham Nimul is in Pakistan from February 10-11, 2026, to co-chair the 2nd meeting of the Pakistan-Cambodia Joint Trade Committee (JTC), said a release issued here on Monday. The inaugural JTC session was held in Phnom Penh on January 21, 2025, led by Pakistan's Minister for Commerce, Mr. Jam Kamal Khan. The JTC serves as the primary platform to advance bilateral trade, investment, and economic cooperation.

Diplomatic ties between Pakistan and Cambodia were formalized on May 28, 1952, with Pakistan among the first nations to recognize Cambodia's independence from French colonial rule. While bilateral trade volumes remain modest, Pakistan consistently enjoys a surplus. In FY 2024-25, Pakistan exported goods worth \$29.2 million to Cambodia, against imports of \$4.70 million, yielding a trade balance of \$24.5 mil-

lion (source: TDAS). Key Pakistani exports include medicaments (USD 11.74 million), woven cotton fabrics (\$5.23 million), cotton yarn (\$2.72 million), and prepared leather products. Imports from Cambodia feature structures (\$2.29 million), cocoa powder (\$1.85 million), and select apparel items. The 1st JTC explored collaboration in trade facilitation, investment, agriculture, textiles, customs, and related sectors, with discussions on a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA). This visit will feature the official announcement of the launch of PTA negotiations, designed to lower tariffs, improve market access, expand trade volumes, and promote joint ventures. This engagement supports Pakistan's strategy to build bilateral ties with ASEAN members amid efforts toward broader ASEAN integration. Cambodia, with its robust growth (around 6% GDP in 2024, driven by tourism and manufacturing) and participation in RCEP and multiple FTAs, offers complementary opportunities. The Government of Pakistan is committed to elevating economic relations with Cambodia, fostering sustainable growth, and unlocking mutual benefits through enhanced trade and investment linkages.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Workers busy in installing peacock model on a green belt at Constitution Avenue, in the Federal Capital.

CDNS achieve Rs750b savings inflows

ISLAMABAD: The Central Directorate of National Savings (CDNS) has attained Rs750 billion in savings inflows from July 1st to February 6th of the current fiscal year 2025-26, achieving over half of its annual target and reflecting steady progress in promoting a savings culture in the country. According to officials, the CDNS has set an overall savings inflows target of Rs1.3 trillion for FY 2025-26. The inflows recorded so far indicate encouraging public participation in national savings schemes during the first half of the fiscal year. Similarly, the CDNS has fixed a target of Rs50 billion for investments in Islamic savings instruments during the current fiscal year to support the growth of the Islamic economy, a senior CDNS official told APP here Monday. Sharing details of previous performance, the official said National Savings had set an annual target of Rs1.63 trillion for FY 2024-25, alongside a Rs170 billion target for Islamic finance investments, both aimed at strengthening the savings culture and expanding Shariah-compliant financial options. Replying to a question, he said the CDNS realized Rs1.742 trillion in fresh bonds during FY 2023-24, surpassing 100 percent of the annual target. National Savings had set a target of Rs1.7 trillion for that year, and exceeding it was an encouraging sign of public confidence. The CDNS had also achieved its target of Rs1.6 trillion in fresh bonds in FY 2022-23, which was Rs200 billion higher than the Rs1.3 trillion target set for FY 2021-22. The savings target for FY 2021-22 was later reviewed upward to Rs1.4 trillion in view of market trends and the objective of further improving the national savings culture. The official said institutional reforms were under way in the CDNS, with new initiatives, innovations and policy measures being introduced to enhance efficiency and expand outreach across the country.—APP

NDMA dispatches 28th humanitarian aid consignment to Palestine

ISLAMABAD: National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has dispatched an additional humanitarian aid consignment for the people of Palestine following the special directives of Prime Minister.

The 28th relief consignment, comprising 100 tons of tents, has been sent with the support of Alkhidmat Foundation. The relief goods were dispatched through a special flight from Allama Iqbal International Airport, Lahore to Al-arish Egypt for onward delivery to Gaza.

With the dispatch of this latest consignment, the total volume of humanitarian assistance sent to Palestine through 28 consignments has reached 2,727 tons. The sending-off ceremony was attended by Punjab Housing Minister, MPA Mian Bilal Yasin as chief guests. Senior officials from NDMA, MoFA, along with representatives of government departments and Alkhidmat Foundation, were also present on the occasion. Government of Pakistan and the people of Pakistan stand firmly with the people of Palestine in this difficult time and will continue to make every possible effort to support them and address their humanitarian needs.—APP

Zonal SPs lead grand search operation

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police conducted a grand search and combing operation in various areas of the federal capital under the supervision of zonal SPs to curb criminal activities and ensure public safety. An official told APP on Monday that the search operation was carried out with the participation of zonal police teams, including women police officers, to ensure thorough checking and effective implementation of security measures. During the operation, police teams checked 145 individuals and 84 households, while 59 motorcycles and 20 vehicles were also inspected as part of the verification process. The official said that during the operation, 11 suspicious persons, including six Afghan nationals, along with 10 motorcycles were shifted to concerned police stations for further verification and legal action. He added that illegal weapons along with ammunition were also recovered during the search operation. The official said that the objective of the operation was to prevent crime, identify suspicious elements and maintain peace and order in the area. Following the directives of Inspector General of Police Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, grand search.—APP

Al-Sharaa through Lebanese eyes

THE Lebanese politician said he was at a loss every time he thought about Syrian President Ahmad Al-Sharaa. He has an intriguing and complex past that merits deep study to understand the major transformation he has gone through. He admitted that he was alarmed when he saw the 40-something man take over Damascus after the downfall of Bashar Assad's regime. He was quick to clarify however: "I was never sorry to see the collapse of the Assad regime. In the end, those who deserve to fall will fall. He mismanaged the legacy he inherited and did not amend the several deep flaws inside the ruling system. "He believed that running the palace means being able to run Damascus, and that running Damascus means running the whole of Syria. He never acknowledged the massive suffering or the terrible figures and statistics. Oppression, poverty and despair. He couldn't build trust with the everyday Syrian. He never dared to open a window and, when he did, he was quick to close it. He banked on fear in making the people submit," added the politician. Moreover, Assad "lost the image of the strong leader after the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon in the wake of Rafik Hariri's assassination. After the eruption of the Syrian revolt, one thing was clear: Qassem Soleimani was in control of Syria, more so than Hafez Assad's son. The same could be said of Hassan Nasrallah. Assad was the weakest player in that triangle."

The politician acknowledged that in the early days following Al-Sharaa's assumption of power, he feared that "he would run Syria as Abu Mohammed Al-Golani, who spent years in Iraqi jail." The politician said that the Beirut-Damascus route was mandatory for anyone who wanted to become involved in public life. The exception was a few who resisted the two Assads' insistence on running Lebanon and making it subservient to Damascus. Those traveling that route hoped Damascus would learn from Beirut a degree of openness in terms of the economy and flexibility in regional and international politics. That never happened. Assad's Syria's ties with Turkiye teetered between love and hate before seating itself in the so-called Axis of Resistance. Today, the politician wonders why Beirut has not learned from Damascus, especially in terms of setting priorities, decision-making and building regional and international credibility.

The politician said that Al-Sharaa, after spending years in Idlib, took the major decision of returning to the Syrian map and rearranging its dreams within its borders. He abandoned dreams that could lead to regional conflicts, adopting instead the slogan of "Syria first," meaning saving Syria's unity, rebuilding its economy and returning refugees and the displaced. In one year, he managed to establish Syria's regional and

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international presence, transforming the country into a player after it had been a playground under Bashar Assad. The key to this was Al-Sharaa's handshake with US President Donald Trump, at the encouragement of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Trump lifted the Caesar Act sanctions and other obstacles soon after. Another test: Al-Sharaa knew that Russia was waiting for an opportunity to eliminate him in Idlib. He never gave in to the need for revenge. Instead, he realized the importance of Russia in overcoming the past, deliberately "forgetting" the demand for Assad's deportation so that he can stand trial. And so, Al-Sharaa entered the Kremlin and, in turn, Europe.

The network of international relations allowed Al-Sharaa to deliver the message that the new Syria was focused on bolstering its stability and working toward prosperity. The new Syria is not concerned with policies of destabilizing its neighbors or meddling in their internal affairs. The network of relations helped lead to a solution with the Syrian Democratic Forces based on the principle that the new Syria is a home for all its components. With complete pragmatism, Al-Sharaa realized that the new balance of power established after the Al-Aqsa Flood Operation and the ensuing savage Israeli war demanded that Syria quit the military aspect of the conflict with Israel. These were all tough decisions for a man emerging from the Al-Nusra Front and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham.

The politician now asked two important questions about the future. First, can the Iranian leadership rearrange its policies and quit meddling in regional affairs? Can it return from the dream of changing the features of the region through violations, parallel armies and "resistance" and turn to a dream of stability inside its own map and pursue prosperity and investment? The point is for Iran to become a normal state. Iran is an important country in the region that boasts vast means, in contrast to its current economy and the dire conditions its people and currency are enduring.

The second question is can Hezbollah return from its costly regional trip and rearrange its papers and ambitions as a normal party that enjoys massive support inside its environment, while abandoning its arsenal and goals that go beyond Lebanon's ability to endure? The politician said the new balance of power is stark and painful. Israel is a savage country with vastly superior technology and the international community does not want another war along the Israeli border. The Lebanese politician's comments may not reflect the position of all Lebanese people, but the majority feels that way. It is definitely in Lebanon's interest to raise the slogan of "Lebanon first" and form normal and fair relations with Syria. It should benefit from the reconstruction in Syria and restore regional and international trust in its ability to establish a state that is serious about reconstruction and building the economy. Rebuilding a prosperous Lebanon is the best response to Benjamin Netanyahu's barbaric policies. Obstructing the Lebanese government's efforts will only cost Lebanon the opportunity to get out of the abyss and lead the world to leave it to its own fate at the bottom of the new Middle East that is taking shape.

Tianjin Declaration and Eurasian Cooperation

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



Moscow's initiative, first floated during its chairmanship activities in 2025, reflects both pragmatic and political calculations. By hosting the inaugural SCO Sustainable Development Forum in Omsk and later proposing a formal council at the Heads of Government meeting in Moscow, Russia signalled its intent to shape the organisation's economic agenda. The focus on sustainable development, energy security and regional models of growth allows Russia to remain relevant within the SCO despite the economic pressures it faces elsewhere.

THE Tianjin Declaration, adopted at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's 25th summit in September 2025, passed without the dramatic headlines that often accompany global gatherings. Yet its significance lies precisely in its restraint. In an era marked by loud proclamations and performative diplomacy, the document reflects a quieter recalibration of Eurasian politics, one that privileges continuity over spectacle and gradual alignment over sudden rupture. Held in the northern Chinese port city of Tianjin, the summit was the largest in the SCO's history. Leaders from China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Iran and Central Asia gathered alongside observers and dialogue partners, marking a quarter-century since the organisation's founding. Chaired by President Xi Jinping, the meeting reaffirmed what the SCO has consistently presented as its guiding philosophy: the so-called "Shanghai Spirit" of mutual trust, respect for sovereignty, equality among states and non-interference. At first glance, the declaration reads like a familiar catalogue of principles. It reiterates support for a multipolar world order, stresses adherence to the United Nations Charter and renews commitments to combat terrorism, separatism and extremism. Economic cooperation, regional connectivity and sustainable development are highlighted as shared priorities. There are also nods to global challenges, from trade disruptions to technological governance, reflecting the concerns of a region that now accounts for a substantial share of the world's population and economic output. What makes the Tianjin Declaration noteworthy, however, is not the novelty of its language but the context in which it was issued. The international system remains deeply polarised, with major powers locked in strategic competition and multilateral institutions under strain. Against this backdrop, the SCO is positioning itself not as a challenger to existing structures but as an alternative forum where non-Western states can coordinate policies without the pressures of ideological conformity. This aspiration is evident in the declaration's emphasis on inclusivity and equality. Unlike alliances built around security guarantees or shared political values, the SCO continues to define itself as a platform for dialogue among diverse politi-

cal systems. The presence of rivals such as India and Pakistan, alongside countries with varying relations with the West, underscores this point. The organisation's strength lies in its ability to accommodate difference, even if that very diversity limits its capacity for swift collective action.

One of the more substantive outcomes linked to the Tianjin summit was the approval of the SCO Development Strategy through 2035. This long-term framework seeks to align economic cooperation with social and environmental considerations, echoing global discussions on development without explicitly adopting Western templates. It also provides the backdrop against which Russia's proposal for a dedicated SCO Council on Sustainable Development should be understood.

Moscow's initiative, first floated during its chairmanship activities in 2025, reflects both pragmatic and political calculations. By hosting the inaugural SCO Sustainable Development Forum in Omsk and later proposing a formal council at the Heads of Government meeting in Moscow, Russia signalled its intent to shape the organisation's economic agenda. The focus on sustainable development, energy security and regional models of growth allows Russia to remain relevant within the SCO despite the economic pressures it faces elsewhere. The proposal has found a receptive audience. SCO Secretary-General Nurlan Yermekbayev described the idea as worthy of serious consideration and subsequent meetings have indicated gradual progress.

By early 2026, references to sustainable development as a core SCO priority had become more frequent, including discussions held in Islamabad that linked the agenda to poverty reduction, food and energy security and environmental protection. Importantly, the Tianjin Declaration itself endorsed closer cooperation on sustainability, particularly in industry and energy. While the document stops short of detailing institutional mechanisms, it provides political cover for initiatives such as Russia's proposed council. In this sense, Tianjin can be seen as a moment of convergence, where broad principles were translated into a shared direction of travel rather than immediate commitments. For countries like Pakistan, the implications are both promising and cautionary. On the one hand, the SCO's emphasis on development and connectivi-

ty aligns with Islamabad's longstanding interest in regional trade, energy corridors and investment. Participation in sustainability-focused initiatives could offer access to expertise and financing tailored to regional conditions rather than externally imposed benchmarks. On the other hand, the SCO's consensus-driven nature means progress will be incremental. Competing national priorities, economic disparities and unresolved bilateral tensions continue to shape the organisation's trajectory. The Tianjin Declaration does not resolve these contradictions; it merely manages them. The broader geopolitical message of the summit is equally measured. By reaffirming support for a multipolar world, the SCO signals dissatisfaction with existing power hierarchies without articulating a clear alternative order. This ambiguity is deliberate. It allows member states to express shared frustrations while preserving strategic autonomy.

For China, hosting the summit reinforced its role as a convening power in Eurasia. For Russia, it offered a stage to demonstrate diplomatic relevance.

For others, it provided reassurance that their voices remain part of a collective conversation.

In this light, the Tianjin Declaration should be read less as a manifesto and more as a barometer.

It reflects a region seeking stability through cooperation rather than confrontation, aware of global uncertainties yet unwilling to be drawn into rigid blocs. The SCO's gradual turn towards sustainable development, exemplified by Russia's initiative, suggests an effort to anchor security concerns within a broader socio-economic framework.

Whether this approach will yield tangible results remains an open question. Much will depend on implementation, resource allocation and the ability of member states to move beyond rhetoric.

Yet the very fact that such issues are now central to SCO discussions indicates a maturation of the organisation's agenda. As global politics grows more fragmented, the Tianjin summit reminds us that not all recalibrations are dramatic. Some unfold through carefully worded declarations, incremental institutional changes and the steady accumulation of shared priorities. In a turbulent world, that quiet persistence may prove to be the SCO's most enduring contribution.

The urgent need for a peaceful settlement on Iran

Chris Doyle

The Iranian leadership has some unsavory options in a full-blown war scenario.

Ballistic missiles may still be dispatched toward Israel. Blocking the Strait of Hormuz, even partially, is another possibility, causing an immediate and damaging hit to the global economy. One can only guess at the sleeper cells Iran might unleash if the regime's survival is threatened. To counter that, proponents of military action may argue that many of the worst-case scenarios did not materialize in last year's 12-day war. This time around, however, the Iranian leadership may see it as a fight to the death.

THE first round of the latest series of talks between the US and Iran appears to have progressed in Oman. Further negotiations are slated for this week. Hope lingers. The prize is huge. An Iran that no longer pursues a nuclear path would be a major victory for nuclear disarmament at a time when Russia and the US no longer have any nuclear arms treaties binding them. Failure looks as if it would trigger war in the form of US military strikes. President Donald Trump has the military capabilities assembled in the region. War is always risky. War never has many certainties. Trump knows full well that kicking off a war is far easier than ending one. War may happen soon by design but also as a result of a flashpoint, a misunderstanding between sides where trust is extinct. What would be bombed? What would be the objective and would it be in any way achievable? It is unlikely Trump would sanction strikes to achieve regime change, as he knows this does not tend to happen. But an epidemic of wishful thinking still infects the thinking of too many external fly-by-night observers.

Degrading Iran's capabilities is conceivable – for example, a decapitation strike. But this is not simple and, as with any strikes, civilian casualties could mount up. And how long would the strikes last – days, weeks or months? The Iranian leadership has some unsavory options in a full-blown war scenario. Ballistic missiles may still be dispatched toward Israel. Blocking the Strait of Hormuz, even partially, is another possibility, causing an immediate and damaging hit to the global economy. One can only guess at the sleeper cells Iran might

unleash if the regime's survival is threatened. To counter that, proponents of military action may argue that many of the worst-case scenarios did not materialize in last year's 12-day war. This time around, however, the Iranian leadership may see it as a fight to the death. All this is happening in the wake of arguably the largest protests in recent Iranian history and the subsequent brutal crackdown, which killed thousands. A war will not reincarnate the thousands killed in the protests. For those Iranians dreaming of regime change, bombing from on high has a patchy record of success. Many envisage a large portion of Iranians closing ranks in the face of any US or US-Israeli strikes on Iran. It risks a "blitz" effect, whereby Iranians may tap into patriotic, nationalistic feelings. Many Iranians want to be able to handle their domestic challenges internally.

Let's face reality. There are zero easy fixes for all the issues involving Iran. Every option has risks. Regime collapse could see the end of the Iranian state, with an enduring breakdown of law and order leading to a huge refugee crisis and interethnic strife. With Iran's population of nearly 100 million and numerous identity groups, this would make the Iraq and Syria crises look like minor squabbles. Collapse could see some form of military takeover, with the removal of the theocratic classes from power. A deal could ensure regime survival, even its prolongation, which would not be attractive to those that oppose it. What about a deal? Time will be pressing. Trump is clearly not going to wait months, maybe not even weeks. He is pressuring other states to end their business dealings with Iran, threatening a 25 percent tariff on those that continue such trade. One risk is that a deal is done too hastily and is not properly worked out, left riddled with holes and gaps. A weak deal could be one of the worst outcomes. The Iranian negotiators could have alternative careers as poker players. What might a deal include? It could be narrow or broad; partial or full. In public, both sides proclaim their red lines. Iranian officials claim that any deal will only focus on the nuclear issue. The Trump administration insists Iran's ballistic missile program and regional conduct are also on the table. One assumes a major freeze on its nuclear program leading to its dismantling is a core part of any draft, with sanctions relief included. But is a broader deal possible? The Iranian leadership has relied on its allies across the region, from Hezbollah to Hamas and the Houthis, as a deterrent to military strikes and a means to disrupt whole swathes of the Middle East. Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Palestine and Yemen would benefit massively from less Iranian interference. It costs the Iranian regime too, as sustaining these groups is a drain on its depleted financial resources.

Perhaps the greatest unknown is, as ever, the array of ambitions among the Iranian leadership, often stubborn to extreme, unwilling to be seen to cave in to external bullying. All should be wary of running the clock down on a negotiated path forward. If "sense" and "sanity" made decisions, an Iran deal would have been signed ages ago. Trump craves a deal. The Middle East wants to see a nuclear-free Iran playing a responsible role in the region, not an inflammatory one. Iranians crave sanctions relief, for their economy to lift off and for the horrors of war to be avoided.

Briefs

Pakistan to 'play' T20 WC match against India

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Prime Minister Shehbaz warmly acknowledged the sentiments and the historic solidarity expressed by the Sri Lankan leader. He reciprocated by mentioning Sri Lanka's unwavering support for Pakistan during its own difficult phases, including its commitment to touring Pakistan when other teams were hesitant—a gesture he termed "unforgettable" for the Pakistani people.

Controversy at Asma Jahangir Conference

FROM PAGE 01
The episode highlights the growing sensitivity around international involvement in the Gaza conflict and the challenges diplomats face in navigating public opinion during such discussions. Interestingly, in 2024 Asma Jahangir conference the then German Ambassador had to face similar situation when a pro-Palestine protester had interrupted his speech and chanted slogans. The then Germany's Ambassador to Pakistan Alfred Grannas was speaking at the 5th Asma Jahangir Conference titled 'People's Mandate: Safeguarding Civil Rights in South Asia'. Just moments after the ambassador began his speech, the protester can be heard saying, "Excuse me, Mr Ambassador. I am shocked by the audacity that you are here to talk about civil rights while your country is brutally abusing the people speaking for the rights of the Palestinians."

Italy, EU condemn Islamabad suicide...

FROM PAGE 01
Pianetedosi said, adding that Italy stands firmly with the bereaved families and the people of Pakistan during this difficult time. He reaffirmed that Italy "strongly condemns all forms of terrorism" and remains ready to continue cooperation with Pakistan to combat the shared threat of extremism. European Commissioner Magnus Brunner also extended condolences, stating, "Our prayers are with the victims and their families. We stand with the people of Pakistan in this hour of grief." Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi thanked the Italian leadership and the European Commissioner for their expressions of solidarity. He said Pakistan has served as "a shield for the world against terrorism" and stressed the need for stronger global efforts, noting that "today, the world requires robust international measures to remain safe from terrorism."

Pakistan to invest \$1bn in artificial intelligence

FROM PAGE 01
Furthermore, he said that an AI curriculum would be introduced in all federally run schools as well as in educational institutions across Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan and remote parts of Balochistan to prepare young people for leadership roles in the digital economy. He also announced that 1,000 fully funded PhD scholarships in artificial intelligence would be awarded to students from across the country by 2030 to develop world-class research capacity and fully equipped national research centres. PM Shehbaz also said a nationwide programme would be launched to train one million non-IT professionals in AI skills, enabling them to improve productivity and livelihoods. Highlighting sectoral priorities, Shehbaz said the main focus of AI deployment would be agriculture, mines and minerals, and youth empowerment. He said Pakistan's population stands at around 240 million, and nearly 60% comprises young people who must be equipped with modern knowledge and techniques.

Japan restarts world's biggest nuclear plant again

The facility had been offline since Japan pulled the plug on nuclear power after a colossal earthquake and tsunami sent three reactors at the Fukushima atomic plant into meltdown

TOKYO: Japan switched on the world's biggest nuclear power plant again on Monday, its operator said, after an earlier attempt was quickly suspended due to a minor glitch. A problem with a monitoring alarm in January forced the suspension of its first restart since the 2011 Fukushima disaster. The Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in the Niigata region restarted at 2:00 pm (0500 GMT), the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) said in a statement. The facility had been offline since Japan pulled the plug on nuclear power after a colossal earthquake and tsunami sent three reactors at the Fukushima atomic plant into meltdown. But now Japan is turning to atomic energy to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels, achieve carbon neu-

trality by 2050 and meet growing energy needs from artificial intelligence.

Conservative Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, who pulled off a thumping election victory on Sunday, has promoted nuclear power to energise the Asian economic giant. TEPCO initially moved to start one of seven reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant on January 21 but shut it off the following day after a monitoring system alarm sounded. The alarm had picked up slight changes to the electrical current in one cable even though these were still within a range considered safe, TEPCO officials told a news conference last week. The firm has changed the alarm's settings as the reactor is safe to operate. Commercial operations will commence on

or after March 18 after another comprehensive inspection, according to TEPCO officials. Kashiwazaki-Kariwa is the world's biggest nuclear power plant by potential capacity, although just one reactor of seven was restarted. Fourteen reactors, mostly in western and southern Japan, have resumed operation since the post-Fukushima shutdown under strict safety rules, with 13 running as of mid January. Kashiwazaki-Kariwa is the first TEPCO-run unit to restart since 2011. The company also operates the stricken Fukushima Daiichi plant, now being decommissioned. The vast Kashiwazaki-Kariwa complex has been fitted with a 15-metre-high (50-foot) tsunami wall, elevated emergency power systems and other safety upgrades. But

public opinion in the area around the plant is deeply divided: Around 60 percent of residents oppose the restart, while 37 percent support it, according to a survey conducted by Niigata prefecture in September.

Residents have raised concerns about the risk of a serious accident, citing frequent cover-up scandals, minor accidents and evacuation plans they say are inadequate. On January 8, seven groups opposing the restart submitted a petition signed by nearly 40,000 people to TEPCO and Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority. "We will continue to demonstrate our commitment to safety as our priority at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Station through our actions and results," TEPCO said in a statement Monday.

Moody's changes Pak banking outlook

LONDON: Moody's Ratings has changed Pakistan's banking system outlook to stable from positive, saying the operating environment is recovering "but only gradually" as the economic and fiscal outlook improves and the external position strengthens. Komal Kenneth Shakeel, Head of Partnerships and Collaborations at Ignite, said the move reads less like a fresh upgrade cycle and more like a signal that volatility has eased without a strong growth push behind it. "Moody's decision to revise Pakistan's banking outlook from positive to stable is essentially a signal of stabilisation without acceleration," said Shakeel, who is an economist. In its outlook, Moody's Ratings said banks' financial performance is expected to remain stable over the next 12-18 months, even as lenders continue to face asset quality and profitability challenges. - APP

Dar says Pakistan committed to meet...

FROM PAGE 01
the federal secretaries of commerce, interior, overseas Pakistanis and human rights, Pakistan's Ambassador to the EU, along with senior officials from relevant federal and provincial departments.

Russia-Turkey relation reach strategic partnership level

"Russia, for its part, is satisfied with the level of bilateral cooperation with Turkey. However, more could have been done. In terms of foreign policy, we always expect Ankara to take into account Russia's interests as concerns Ukraine," Ivanov added

ISTANBUL: Relations between Russia and Turkey have reached a level of strategic partnership, Russia's Charge d'Affaires Alexey Ivanov said. "We share the opinion that relations between Russia and Turkey have reached a level of strategic partnership in recent years. We have flagship projects that are markers of such high-level cooperation," he said in an interview with the Nefes newspaper. Among the most promising areas of cooperation this year, he cited energy, first of all nuclear energy, supplies of Russian gas, oil, and oil products, as well as agriculture and tourism. "We believe that these are driving engines of our trade and economic cooperation," he noted. According to Ivanov, Moscow and Ankara have established close coordination on the most pressing issues on the international and regional agenda, including Ukraine, the Black Sea, the South Caucasus, the Middle East and Africa, and Afghanistan. Among the problems facing both countries, the Russian diplomat cited Western pressure. "Many in the West don't like the constructive progressive development of Russian-Turkish relations. Hence, illegal sanctions, direct blackmail, and even threats. Such instruments are well-known and are used not only against Russia," he stressed. "Russia, for its part, is satisfied with the level of bilateral cooperation with Turkey. However, more could have been done. In terms of foreign policy, we always expect Ankara to take into account Russia's interests as concerns Ukraine," Ivanov added. - Agencies

Lebanon building collapse toll rises to 9: civil defence

The building consisted of two blocks, each containing six apartments, he added. Residents estimated some 22 people were inside at the time of the collapse, he said

TRIPOLI: The death toll in a building collapse in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli on Sunday climbed to nine, a civil defence official said – the second such incident in weeks. The state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported the "collapse of an old building" in Tripoli's Bab al-Tabbaneh neighbourhood, the poorest in the impoverished city. Rescuers were still searching for survivors. Security personnel evacuated adjacent buildings fearing further collapses, it added. An AFP correspondent saw teams of rescue workers toiling into the night on the rubble of the collapsed structure, as ambulances stood by. Civil defence director general Iman Kheirish told local media that nine people had been killed but that six others who were rescued were taken to hospital. The building consisted of two blocks, each containing six apartments, he added. Residents estimated some 22 people were inside at the

time of the collapse, he said. Local activist Jumana al-Shahal told AFP at the site that the incident was "a testament to the accumulated neglect of this forgotten city". Mayor Abdel Hamid Karimel told journalists "we declare Tripoli a disaster-stricken city" due to unsafe buildings. "Thousands of our people in Tripoli are threatened due to years of neglect," he said. "The situation is beyond the capabilities of the Tripoli municipality." This latest disaster came after another deadly building collapse in Tripoli late last month. After Sunday's incident, the NNA reported that angry young men took to the streets on motorbikes, some heading "to the offices of some politicians" and vandalising metal barriers there. In January, the head of the higher relief authority, Bassam Nabulsi, citing Tripoli municipality statistics, said 105 buildings required "immediate" warning notices to their residents to evacuate". Local media reported the

structure that collapsed on Sunday was not included in a list of buildings at imminent risk. Lebanon is dotted with derelict buildings, and many inhabited structures are in an advanced state of disrepair. Many buildings were built illegally, especially during the 1975-1990 civil war, while some owners have added new floors to existing apartment blocks without permits. Prime Minister Nawaf Salam said "thousands of people" were still living in unsafe buildings in Tripoli more than a year after a major earthquake centred on Turkey and neighbouring Syria had had weakened the structures. Even before the February 2023 quake, Tripoli residents "had raised the alarm about their dire housing situation, caused by decades of neglect and contractors' lack of compliance with safety regulations", it said. The situation was compounded by Lebanon's years-long economic crisis meaning residents could not afford repairs or alternative housing, it added, urging authorities to "urgently... assess the safety of buildings across the country". - APP

Thailand's Anutin readies for coalition talks

BANGKOK: Thailand's caretaker premier Anutin Charnvirakul was preparing for coalition talks Monday after a stunning election victory for his conservative Bhumjaithai Party. Bhumjaithai was forecast by Channel 3 to have won almost 200 seats in Sunday's vote, well ahead of others but short of an outright majority in the 500-member lower house. The progressive People's Party trailed at a little above 100 seats, while jailed former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra's Pheu Thai party came in third. Pheu Thai is seen as a likely coalition partner for Anutin, as they were allies until Bhumjaithai pulled out over a scandal linked to the Cambodia border dispute. Thaksin is serving a one-year prison sentence for corruption in office, but many observers expect him to be released earlier than scheduled alongside a political agreement. Anutin, who took office in September, declined to be drawn Sunday on potential coalition talks, noting the election results remained unofficial. "We will wait until its more clear, and every party has to meet their executive board to discuss the position," he said. Political analyst Napon Jatusripitak expected Bhumjaithai to "move quickly" to form a government in which its interests would prevail. "Given the seat distribution, Bhumjaithai is likely to lead a government in which its influence predominates and weighs most decisively in shaping both policy direction and implementation," he said. - APP

Arguments to begin in key US social media addiction trial

Meta co-founder and chief executive Mark Zuckerberg, along with the bosses of Instagram and YouTube, are expected to be called as witnesses during the trial

LOS ANGELES: Arguments are set to begin Monday in a landmark US trial that could establish a legal precedent on whether social media companies deliberately designed their platforms to lead to addiction in children. The case in Los Angeles Superior Court is being seen as a bellwether proceeding because its outcome could set the tone for a tidal wave of similar litigation across the United States. Defendants at the trial are Alphabet and Meta, the tech giants behind YouTube and Instagram. Meta co-founder and chief executive Mark Zuckerberg, along with the bosses of Instagram and YouTube, are expected to be called as witnesses during the trial. Social media firms are accused in hundreds of lawsuits of leading young users to become addicted to content that has led to depression, eating disorders, psychiatric hospitalization and even suicide. Lawyers for the plaintiffs are borrowing strategies used in the 1990s and 2000s against the tobacco industry, which faced a similar onslaught of

lawsuits arguing that companies sold a harmful product. On Friday, lawyers for the defense unsuccessfully sought to bar plaintiffs from comparing their platforms to tobacco and other addictive products. The trial before Judge Carolyn Kuhl focuses on allegations that a 20-year-old woman identified by the initials K.G.M. suffered severe mental harm because she became addicted to social media as a child. "This is the first time that a social media company has ever had to face a jury for harming kids," Social Media Victims Law Center founder Matthew Bergman, whose team is involved in more than 1,000 such cases, told AFP. The center is a legal organization dedicated to holding social media companies accountable for harm allegedly caused to young people online. Internet titans have argued that they are shielded by Section 230 of the US Communications Decency Act, which frees them of responsibility for what social media users post. However, this case argues that those firms are culpable for business models designed to hold people's attention and to promote content that can harm their mental health. "The allegations in these complaints are simply not true," said Jose Castaneda, a YouTube spokesperson. "Providing young people with a safer, healthier experience has always been core to our work," he added. - DNA

Centre-left candidate Seguro beats far-right to Portugal's presidency

The election campaign had been upended by two weeks of storms and fierce gales that killed at least seven people and caused an estimated four billion euros (\$4.7 billion) in damage

LISBON: Centre-left candidate Antonio Jose Seguro scored a convincing win over far-right rival Andre Ventura in Portugal's presidential election on Sunday, with the run-off vote held after days of devastating storms. The result was quickly welcomed by European Union chief Ursula von der Leyen and French President Emmanuel Macron. With more than 99 percent of the ballots counted, Seguro had won 66.8 percent of the vote to Ventura's 33.2 percent. That means the 63-year-old Socialist candidate will, as expected, succeed the conservative Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa as president. The election campaign had been upended by two weeks of storms and fierce gales that killed at least seven people and caused an estimated four billion euros (\$4.7 billion) in damage. The storm disruption forced around 20 of the worst-hit constituencies to postpone the vote by a week, but it went ahead for nearly all the 11 million eligible voters in Portugal and abroad.

The winners tonight are the Portuguese people and democracy," the president-elect said, pledging to be a leader for "all Portugal". Ventura conceded defeat while noting that his party had achieved the "best result in its history." "We lead the right in Portugal and we will soon govern this country," he told supporters. EU chief von der Leyen said Portugal had demonstrated its support for "shared European values" remains "strong". Macron welcomed the result, saying he hoped to reinforce ties between the two countries. Far-right Ventura, 43, had criticised the government's response to fierce weather and sought in vain to have the entire election postponed. Ventura is the first extreme-right candidate to make it through to a run-off vote in Portugal. Seguro is a veteran political operator and former Socialist party leader, having begun his career in the party's youth wing. In 2014, he lost an internal power struggle, and was pushed out as secretary general of the party by future prime minister An-

tonio Costa, who is now president of the European Council. Despite being out of the public eye for the past decade, he never renounced his belief in a "modern and moderate left". He began his presidential campaign without the backing of the Socialist Party's leadership, though most of them came around to support him. He slowly climbed in the polls, with one on Wednesday crediting him with 67 percent of voting intentions in the run-off election – a figure reflected in Sunday's exit polls. His camp had nevertheless been concerned that the recent foul weather and complacency among his supporters might hurt them. Earlier Sunday, casting his vote in Caldas de Rainha, where he lives, Seguro said: "Come and vote. Make the most of this window of good weather." Ventura campaigned on a promise to break with the parties that have governed Portugal for the past 50 years. Seguro positioned himself as a unifying candidate and warned of a "nightmare" if his opponent won. Seguro took the most

votes in the first round of the election in January, in which 11 candidates stood, with 31.1 percent, ahead of Ventura on 23.5 percent. Since no one won a majority, the top two went through to a second round. Seguro secured the support of many political figures from the far left, centre and the right. But Prime Minister Luis Montenegro declined to endorse either candidate in the second round. His minority centre-right government relies on support from either the Socialists or the far right to get legislation through parliament. Ventura's Chega (Enough) party, created as recently as 2019, became the leading opposition force at the May 2025 general election. He is seeking to "assert himself as the true leader of the Portuguese right", political science professor Jose Santana Pereira told AFP. In Portugal, the head of state has the power to dissolve parliament and call early elections but otherwise has a largely symbolic role. The new president will take office in early March. - Agencies

FROM PAGE 01
He further reminded the petitioner that related matters were already pending before other courts. "We are of the view that this case has become ineffective," the chief justice observed. He also noted that the case before the court stemmed from an order issued on August 24, 2023. Reiterating the court's position, the chief justice said no order regarding a meeting could be passed without issuing notice. He added that the court would have to determine whether the case had become infructuous or could still be pursued. In recent months, the former ruling party has staged multiple protests over the lack of access to the jailed leader. Khan, who has been in jail since August 2023, faces several cases ranging from corruption to terrorism, following his ouster from power through the opposition's no-confidence motion in April 2022. Last week, the Supreme Court said that a memorandum submitted by PTI leadership on February 6 had once again been conveyed to the "relevant executive authorities" for appropriate consideration under the law.

SC dismisses request for 'immediate..

FROM PAGE 01
The court's position, the chief justice said, was that the case before the court stemmed from an order issued on August 24, 2023. Reiterating the court's position, the chief justice said no order regarding a meeting could be passed without issuing notice. He added that the court would have to determine whether the case had become infructuous or could still be pursued. In recent months, the former ruling party has staged multiple protests over the lack of access to the jailed leader. Khan, who has been in jail since August 2023, faces several cases ranging from corruption to terrorism, following his ouster from power through the opposition's no-confidence motion in April 2022. Last week, the Supreme Court said that a memorandum submitted by PTI leadership on February 6 had once again been conveyed to the "relevant executive authorities" for appropriate consideration under the law.

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Briefs

US Congress to depose Epstein accomplice Ghislaine Maxwell

NEWS DESK

NEW YORK: Jeffrey Epstein's accomplice Ghislaine Maxwell will be questioned behind closed doors by the US Congress, though she's expected to invoke her right to not answer questions. Maxwell, currently serving 20 years in prison for trafficking girls to the disgraced financier Epstein, will face questions from prison via videolink, in a deposition by the House of Representatives' Oversight Committee. Though no new US prosecutions are expected after the latest dump of government files on Epstein, numerous political and business leaders have fallen into scandal or resigned as their ties to the convicted sex criminal were revealed. The House Oversight Committee is probing Epstein's connections and how information about his crimes was handled. Maxwell, however, is expected to invoke her right to not incriminate herself, guaranteed in the Fifth Amendment of the US Constitution.

New Zealand mass killers appeals against conviction

NEWS DESK

AUCKLAND: A white supremacist who shot and killed 51 worshippers at two New Zealand mosques in 2019 launched an appeal Monday seeking to overturn his conviction. Brenton Tarrant, an Australian former gym instructor, admitted carrying out New Zealand's deadliest modern-day mass shooting before being sentenced to life in jail in August 2020. Now, the convicted killer argues that his "torturous and inhumane" detention conditions during his trial made him incapable of making rational decisions when he pleaded guilty, according to a court synopsis of the case. Tarrant is being held in a specialist unit for prisoners of extreme risk at Auckland Prison, seldom interacting with inmates or other people. "I did not have the mind frame or mental health required to be making informed decisions at that time," Tarrant told the court, according to the New Zealand Herald. Tarrant said his state of mind was such that he had considered trying to implicate President Donald Trump in the crime.

Hong Kong sentences pro-democracy Jimmy

DNA

HONG KONG: A Hong Kong court sentenced pro-democracy media mogul Jimmy Lai to 20 years in prison on Monday for national security crimes, a punishment rights groups condemned as "effectively a death sentence" and a symbol of the city's shrinking press freedoms. The 78-year-old founder of the now-defunct Apple Daily newspaper was found guilty in December on two counts of foreign collusion under a sweeping national security law imposed by Beijing, as well as one count of sedition. His sentence is by far the harshest handed out under the national security law, surpassing the previous record of 10 years given to legal scholar Benny Tai in 2024. A summary document from the judges said they had settled on 20 years' imprisonment "after considering the serious and grave criminal conduct of Lai". Two of those years will overlap with Lai's existing prison term, meaning that he will serve an additional 18 years, the judges wrote. Lai, who has been behind bars since 2020,

President Zardari, PM Shehbaz greet her

Ruling Liberal Party wins super majority in Japan

Takaichi, the first woman to serve as Japan's prime minister, had announced on Jan. 19 the dissolution of parliament and the call for early elections, capitalizing on high public approval that reached around 70% according to recent opinion polls

TOKYO: The ruling Liberal Democratic Party, led by Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae secured a historic victory in the Lower House election held on Sunday. Japan's NHK News reported that the Liberal Democratic Party secured 316 seats, surpassing a 261-seat absolute majority in the 465-member lower house. This figure is a record since the party's establishment in 1955, exceeding the previous record of 300 seats achieved by the late Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone in 1986. With its new ally, the Japan Innovation Party, winning 36 seats, Takaichi's ruling coalition secured a total of 352 seats. Following her sweeping victory, Takaichi said in statements that she is now ready to move forward with policies aimed at making Japan strong and prosperous, stressing that she will seek to gain support from the opposition while firmly pursuing her policy goals.

Takaichi, the first woman to serve as Japan's prime minister, had announced on Jan. 19 the dissolution of parliament and the call for early elections, capitalizing on high public approval that reached around 70% according to recent opinion polls. Meanwhile, President Asif Ali



Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday congratulated Prime Minister of Japan Sanae Takaichi on the historic landslide victory of her Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in the lower house elections, securing a commanding majority in the House of Representatives. The president, in a statement, noted that the decisive electoral outcome reflected the strong confidence of the Japanese people in Prime Minister Takaichi's leadership and her commitment to making Japan strong and prosperous. President Zardari observed that the scale of the mandate, marking a post-1955 record for the party, underscored public endorsement of Prime Minister Takaichi's policy direction and governance agenda at a critical moment for Japan. He conveyed his best wishes to Prime Minister Takaichi for success in fulfilling the responsibilities entrusted to her by the Japanese electorate and expressed confidence that Japan would continue to advance stability, progress and prosperity under her leadership. The president also reaffirmed Pakistan's desire to further strengthen friendly relations with Japan and to deepen cooperation across areas of mutual interest for the benefit of both peoples. - APP

'State can't afford 70% electricity discount'

Country's industrial power rate has come close to other countries in the region, says Energy Minister Leghari

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: In the midst of a booming trend in which masses are turning to solar energy, Federal Minister for Energy (Power Division) Awais Leghari has said that the number of consumers using less than 200 units of electricity has increased from 9 million to 21 million. "Affluent individuals make their way into the list of consumers using less than 200 units by installing solar systems. It is not up to the state to give a 70% discount on electricity prices to such a large segment," said Leghari while speaking to Geo News programme "Naya Pakistan" on Sunday. Speaking on the power rates, he said that the country's industrial power rate has come close to other countries in the region and that the claims of six to seven US cents per unit of electricity in Bangladesh were wrong. "We will try to restructure the power sector's debt in order to bring down the electricity rates overall and not just for industries," he remarked. Noting that there was no fiscal space for further subsidies, the minister said that the government can rationalise the issue by changing the tariff structure, i.e., increasing the fixed rates and reducing the per unit cost. The minister's statement comes days after the federal government rolled out relief measures for the industries, announcing a Rs4.04 per unit reduction in electricity tariff while also reducing the export refinance scheme rate from the current 7.5% to 4.5% to provide immediate relief to businesses and accelerate export-led growth.

Separately, the Centre has proposed a downward revision of up to Rs1.53 per unit in the base electricity tariff for some domestic power consumers, while recommending higher fixed monthly charges for certain protected and unprotected households, according to a motion filed with the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra). Under the proposal, protected consumers using 51-200 units would face fixed charges of Rs200-300 per month, while unprotected consumers consuming up to 600 units could see up to 100% increases in fixed charges, with monthly rates rising from Rs200 to Rs675 depending on consumption. Conversely, households consuming 601-700 units and above 700 units would see fixed charges reduced from Rs800-1000 to Rs675 per month.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif visits different kiosks at "AI Indus Week", an Initiative of Ministry of Information Technology, Islamabad. - DNA

Court indicts YouTuber Ducky Bhai, wife in gambling, betting application case

Saadur Rehman, other accused deny allegations; court summons witnesses on Feb 23

DNA

LAHORE: A district court in Lahore on Monday indicted YouTuber Saadur Rehman, popularly known as "Ducky Bhai", his wife and others in a case pertaining to the alleged promotion of online gambling and betting applications. During the hearing of the case, conducted by Judicial Magistrate Naeem Wattoo, the YouTuber and other accused denied the allegations. Meanwhile, the court has summoned the witnesses on February 23. Rehman, his wife and others face a case registered by the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) where the authority has accused the YouTuber of allegedly promoting various online gambling and betting platforms, including Binomo and 1xBet, through his YouTube channel, the FIR claimed.

Ducky Bhai, one of Pakistan's most-followed digital content creators, with over 800 videos uploaded and more than 10 million subscribers on YouTube, was arrested on August 17, 2025, after a case was registered against him by the state through the NCCIA.

Pact signed to launch B2B Saudi-Pakistan Bridge Initiative

Platform aims to accelerate private investment flows and cross-border partnerships

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Regional Economic Forum and Saudi Bridge have signed a strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish business-to-business (B2B) initiatives between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan with the help of Chinese technologies. According to an official announcement issued on Sunday, the two sides signed the MoU to launch the "Saudi-Pakistan Bridge Initiative", a structured bilateral platform aimed at accelerating private sector investment flows, market entry and cross-border economic partnerships between Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and other regional countries. Signed in Riyadh in the presence of senior government and institutional leadership, the MoU establishes a long term framework aligned with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, focused on moving beyond general cooperation towards operational execution and measurable outcomes. The initiative will function as a standing activation platform, enabling transaction-oriented collaboration between investors, enterprises, funds and ecosystem stakeholders. It covers priority sectors including energy, mining, sports goods manufacturing, logistics, food and agri-processing, healthcare, technology, industrial manufacturing, construction and strategic services. The platform will roll out sector-focused delegations, market-entry and soft-landing programmes, regulatory workshops, joint investment forums and a One-Stop Bridge Desk to support bilateral engagement over its initial three-year term. Talking to The News, economist Haroon Sharif said that this forum was able to identify and finalise joint ventures of half a billion dollars between B2B of both countries, as they were working with the help of the Saudi government and Pakistan's Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC). - DNA



Iranian Nobel prize winner handed further sentence

NEWS DESK

TEHRAN: Nobel Peace Prize winner Narges Mohammadi has been handed further prison sentences of seven-and-a-half years by an Iranian court, her lawyer has said. The human rights activist was sentenced to six years for "gathering and collusion", and one-and-a-half years for "propaganda activities" by a court in the north-eastern city of Mashhad. Mostafa Nili announced on social media on Sunday. Mohammadi was arrested in December for making "provocative remarks" at a memorial ceremony. Iranian authorities said at the time. Her family said she was taken to hospital after being beaten during the arrest. The 53-year-old was made a Nobel laureate in 2023 for activism against the oppression of women in Iran. Nili, who spoke to Mohammadi for the first time since 14 December, said she had also been handed a two-year ban on leaving the country and two years of exile to the eastern Khusf region. The Narges Foundation, which supports her, described the hearing on Saturday as a "sham" and explained she had begun a hunger strike on 2 February. Nili said she had been taken to hospital three days ago "due to her poor physical condition" before being returned to the detention centre she is being held in. "When she began to explain the events and how she was detained, the phone was disconnected." Mohammadi's husband, Taghi Rahmani, said she offered no defence while in court due to her "steadfast" belief that "this judiciary holds no legitimacy" and that the proceedings were "a mere charade with a pre-determined end". "Though she was likely forced to attend, she remained silent - she did not utter a single word, nor did she sign a single paper."

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