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Gates cancels India summit speech to 'ensure focus' on AI

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KP governor calls for talks on Afghan issue

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Malaysian envoy for boosting ties with Pakistan

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Bajaur terrorism

Pak issues demarche to Taliban govt

The ministry conveyed serious concern that FAK/TTP, whose entire leadership is based in Afghanistan, operates with impunity from Afghan soil

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office summoned the Afghan Deputy Head of Mission on Wednesday afternoon and delivered a strong demarche to the Afghan Taliban regime on the terrorist attack in Bajaur on February 16, 2026 in which 11 Pakistani soldiers were martyred. "Pakistan condemned in the strongest possible terms the vehicle borne suicide terrorist attack followed by a fire raid on Pakistan Military and Law Enforcement Agencies' post in Bajaur carried out by Fitna al Khwarij / TTP," a press release issued by the Foreign Office Spokesperson on Thursday said. The ministry conveyed serious concern that FAK/TTP, whose entire leadership is based in Afghanistan, operates with impunity from Afghan soil. It was reemphasized that Pakistan has repeatedly received assurances from the Afghan Taliban regime, but, regrettably, with no visible or concrete actions. The Afghan Taliban regime has been told to take immediate, concrete and verifiable measures against all terror groups operating from its territory, including their leadership, the FO spokesperson added. The spokesperson said that the Afghan Taliban regime has also been categorically informed that Pakistan reserves the right to respond and eliminate any Khwarij belonging to FAK group along with their affiliates, wherever they are located to ensure safety of its soldiers, civilians and territorial boundaries.

Four India-sponsored terrorists killed

Security forces launched a sanitisation operation in area

BUREAU REPORT

PESHAWAR: Security forces neutralised four India-sponsored terrorists during an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Lakki Marwat district, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said on Thursday. The IBO was conducted on the night between February 18 and 19 following the reported presence of "kh-warij belonging to Indian proxy, Fitna al Khwarij," the military's media wing said. It added that troops effectively engaged the terrorists' location and killed the terrorists after an intense fire exchange during the operation. Weapons and ammunition

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WASHINGTON D.C: GSA Administrator Edward C. Forst and Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb exchange a handshake after signing a Memorandum of Understanding between the United States and Pakistan. - DNA

US, Pakistan discuss Roosevelt Hotel future

DNA

NEW YORK: The finance ministry said on Thursday that Pakistan and the United States had formally launched a strategic economic initiative, including collaboration regarding the operation, maintenance, renovation, and redevelopment of the Roosevelt Hotel in New York. In a statement, the ministry said that the initiative would include collaboration with the US General Services Administration (GSA) for the redevelopment of the hotel.

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France, India to jointly produce Rafale jets

NEWS DESK

NEW DELHI: France and India are entering a new era of defence cooperation with plans to jointly produce Rafale fighter jets as well as helicopters, French President Emmanuel Macron said on Thursday, adding France also hopes to sell more submarines to India. India's expected order for another 114 Rafales is a "new step forward" in defence ties between the two countries and France hopes to see this replicated with submarines as well, Macron told reporters at the end of a three-day visit to India. "On Rafale, what we want to do is expand. India confirmed a few days ago its willingness to

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Gaza Peace Board

Not necessary to send soldiers to fight, says Trump

Pakistan wants firm assurances from US before committing any troops to Gaza as part of proposed ISF, say sources

CENTRELINE REPORT

WASHINGTON: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is among the world leaders attending the inaugural meeting of the Board of Peace led by US President Donald Trump in Washington. President Trump in his speech said that it is not necessary to send troops for peace in Gaza. The prime minister arrived in Washington, DC, on Thursday for an official visit at the invitation of US President Donald Trump to participate in the summit. The disarmament of Hamas and accompanying withdrawal of Israeli troops, the size of the reconstruction fund and the flow of humanitarian aid to the war-battered populace of Gaza are among the major questions likely to test the effectiveness of the board in the weeks and months ahead.

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Trump hails PM Shehbaz, 'tough fighter' CDF Munir

DNA

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump on Thursday hailed Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and "tough serious fighter" Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of the Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir during the inaugural meeting of the Board of Peace in Washington. Trump, in the past, had also praised the Pakistani leadership. He said on more than one occasions that the field marshal was his favorite field marshal. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif before

Continued on Page 06

No deal for PTI founder, says Attaullah Tarar

The minister, in a news statement, said the PTI founder is a convicted criminal serving sentences handed down by the courts

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Attaullah Tarar has strongly rejected media speculations regarding any "deal" with the incarcerated founder of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). "There is no deal or leniency for the PTI

founder," Tarar said, adding that any impression of the government granting him concessions is "entirely false and misleading". The minister, in a news statement, said the PTI founder is a convicted criminal serving sentences handed down by the courts. He maintained that the news suggesting any "special relaxation" is baseless and has no reality.

Briefs

Australian mosque gets threat letter

NEWS DESK

SYDNEY: Australian police said on Thursday they had launched an investigation after a threatening letter was sent to the country's largest mosque, the third such incident in the lead-up to Ramadan. The letter sent to Lakemba Mosque in Sydney's west on Wednesday contained a drawing of a pig and a threat to kill the "Muslim race", local media reported. Police said they had taken the letter for forensic testing and would continue to patrol religious sites, including the mosque, as well as community events. The latest letter comes weeks after a similar message was mailed to the mosque, depicting Muslims inside a mosque on fire. Police have also arrested and charged a 70-year-old man in connection with a third threatening letter sent to Lakemba Mosque's staff in January.

Saudi envoy role lauded

FAISAL SHIEKH

ISLAMABAD: An inaugural ceremony related to the King Salman Bin Abdul Aziz's Iftar and Khajoor Program was held in Islamabad today. Under the program, dates will be distributed among the deserving people in different parts of the country. Minister for Religious Affairs Sardar Muhammad Yousof and Saudi Ambassador Nawaf bin Said Al-Malki were the chief guests on the occasion. Addressing the ceremony, the Minister expressed gratitude to Saudi Arabia for such a gift for the deserving people of the country. He said the hearts of the people of both countries beat together and such initiatives are the testament that Khadim Al-Haramain Al-Sharifain have great love and respect for the people of Pakistan.

IRAN-RUSSIA DRILLS

US military 'ready to strike' Iran: reports

US military could be ready for strike by weekend after sufficient air and naval resources buildup in Middle East: sources

MONITORING DESK

WASHINGTON: The United States military is ready to carry out possible strikes on Iran as early as this weekend, CNN reported citing familiar sources, as Tehran and Russia announced fresh joint naval exercises in regional waters. However, the international media report said, US President Donald Trump will make the final decision on whether to strike Iran. The report comes amid Omani-mediated talks between the two countries in Geneva, with White House confirming a "little bit of progress" but saying distance remained on some issues. It added that Tehran was expected to come back with more details in a couple of weeks. The second round of negotiations was held on Tuesday, after talks last year collapsed following Israel's attack on Iran in June,

Continued on Page 06

Iranian, Saudi FMs hold talks over phone

DNA

TEHRAN: Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and his Saudi counterpart, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, have discussed mutual ties. Araghchi held a telephone conversation with Farhan late on Wednesday to exchange views on bilateral relations. The top Iranian diplomat informed his Saudi counterpart of the developments regarding the Iran-US nuclear negotiations.

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PTI concerned over Imran health issues

"This is not merely a political matter; it is a test of national trust, human rights, and the government's responsibility," the party asserted

FAIZ CHAUDHRY

ISLAMABAD: The PTI on Thursday once again voiced concerns regarding party founder Imran Khan's health, taking exception to the government's alleged "silence and lack of clarity" over the matter. The incarcerated ex-prime minister's family and party have been raising concerns about his health since his eye ailment - right central retinal vein occlusion (CRVO) - came to light in late January. In a statement on X, the PTI expressed "profound concern over the growing anxiety spreading among the nation regarding" Imran's health. "Any ambiguity surrounding the health of a leader who commands the confidence of millions is unacceptable. The government's silence and lack of clarity have only intensified public unease rather than alleviating it," the PTI contended. "This is not merely a political matter; it is a test of national trust, human rights, and the government's responsibility," the party asserted. Stating that "any uncertainty regarding his health and safety is intolerable," it stressed that if the government had nothing to conceal, then there was no justification for "delaying full transparency". The party reiterated its demand that Imran's personal physicians be granted "immediate and unrestricted access so they may conduct all necessary medical examinations, including blood tests

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Chemical manufacturers assured of industry friendly budget

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Industries and Production Haroon Akhtar Khan on Thursday assured chemical manufacturers of policy support and an industry-friendly federal budget.

He said during a meeting with a delegation of the Pakistan Chemical Manufacturers Association and discussed key issues facing the chemical industry, the upcoming federal budget, and the proposed petrochemical policy, said a news release.

The meeting was also attended by the CEO of the Engineering Development Board (EDB) Hammad Mansoor.

During the meeting, detailed discussions were held on the challenges confronting the chemical sector, including high utility costs, elevated taxation, and the high cost of borrowing. Haroon acknowledged the pressures faced by industries and reiterated the government's commitment to addressing these concerns through targeted reforms and policy support.

He emphasized that strengthening industries in line with the economic vision of prime minister remains a top priority. "We are taking concrete measures to promote industrial growth and encourage local manufacturing across all sectors," he stated. The SAPM informed the delegation that the National Industrial Policy is being prepared to pave the way for sustainable growth and long-term development. He invited industry stakeholders to submit their detailed proposals and analytical recommendations so that practical and beneficial measures can be incorporated into the upcoming budget.—APP

22,000 scooters to be distributed among women

ISLAMABAD: The government has planned to provide 22,000 scooters to women in next three years across the country under the Prime Minister's Strategic Reforms Initiative for Women's Mobility - "Women on Wheels", with a total cost of Rs4.476 billion.

According to official documents of the Ministry of Human Rights available with Wealth Pakistan, the initiative was approved by the Central Development Working Party (CDWP) on June 23, 2023, and carries a total estimated cost of Rs 4,476.170 million. The Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR) and the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) have been designated as executing agencies. Out of the total cost, the government's PSDP share stands at Rs2,496.17 million, while Rs1,980.00 million will be borne by a financing partner bank to be selected by the Project Technical Committee.—APP

ECC okays funds release for PM's Ramzan Relief Package

The ECC also took note of the urgency involved in initiating payments and regularized the steps already taken to facilitate early disbursement through re-appropriated funds

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet met today with the Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, chairing the meeting remotely. The meeting was attended by Federal Minister for Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Syed Imran Ahmad Shah, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Industries and Production Haroon Akhtar Khan, along with federal secretaries and senior officials from the concerned ministries, divisions and regulatory bodies. The ECC considered a summary submitted by the Ministry of Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety seeking approval of funds amounting to Rs 25 billion for the Prime Minister's Ramzan Relief Package (PMRRP) 2026. The Finance Division informed the Committee that Rs. 19 billion had already been budgeted for the Ramzan package for the current financial year and that the remaining requirement would be released as and when necessary. The ECC accordingly approved the immediate release of Rs. 19 billion to enable prompt commencement of disbursement, while agreeing that any additional funds would be considered in line with evolving requirements and available fiscal space. The Committee also discussed the operational expenditure component proposed in the summary and stressed the importance of providing a detailed breakdown of costs, including payments to partner financial institutions and expenses related to outreach and communication. The ECC granted in-principle approval for operational expenses of Rs. 1 billion, subject to submission of comprehensive details to the Finance Division to ensure that allocations are aligned with actual needs and financial rules. The ECC also took note of the urgency involved in initiating payments and regularized the steps already taken to facilitate early disbursement through re-appropriated funds. It was agreed that expenditures would be managed in a manner consistent with Pakistan's fiscal commitments and that any unutilized funds would be surrendered in accordance with established procedures. The ECC reaffirmed the government's commitment to extending timely and dignified support



to deserving segments of society during Ramzan, while upholding fiscal responsibility and robust oversight in the implementation of relief measures. It emphasized the need to balance expeditious disbursement of relief with fiscal prudence and transparency in operational expenditures. The Prime Minister's Ramzan Relief Package 2026 has been designed to provide targeted financial assistance to vulnerable families during the holy month of Ramzan.

The package aims to ensure transparency and objectivity in beneficiary selection through the use of data from the National Socio-Economic Registry (NSER), thereby eliminating discretion and strengthening accountability. It envisages one-time cash assistance to identified low-income households, along with enhancement of existing social protection support, with funds to be disbursed directly to beneficiaries through formal banking and digital channels to ensure secure and efficient delivery.

Kundi calls for fair share of tobacco revenue for KP

PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Thursday said that although the province produces the largest share of tobacco in the country, it is not receiving its due financial benefits from the industry's profits and taxes. He expressed these views during a meeting with Secretary Pakistan Tobacco Board Fakharuddin at Governor House. The secretary briefed the Governor on the Board's ongoing projects, institutional capacity, tobacco cultivation, exports, and revenue generation. The briefing was attended by Principal Secretary to Governor Zubair Arshad, PTB Marketing Officer Dr Hafiz Abdul Samad, and Muhammad Waqas Gillani. Officials informed the meeting that tobacco is cultivated in several districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including

Swabi, Mardan, Charsadda, Malakand, Mansehra and Buner. They said tobacco is grown on 21.25 million hectares across Pakistan, generating an annual income of Rs320 billion and providing livelihood opportunities to around 1.2 million people. The Governor was further informed that during fiscal year 2024-25, Rs483 billion were contributed to the federal government in the form of Federal Excise Duty and Sales Tax from tobacco cultivation, sales and exports. Governor Kundi termed the tobacco industry highly significant for the province's economy and business activities, stressing that the taxes and profits generated from the sector should be spent on the development of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He urged the relevant authorities to take effective measures for safeguarding farmers' inter-

ests, promoting transparency, and introducing modern agricultural practices so that local growers could benefit while strengthening the national economy. The Governor also directed the concerned officials to devise a coordinated strategy to address farmers' issues, ensure a transparent procurement system, and enhance exports to further stabilise the provincial and national economy. Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi has said that religious scholars have a vital role in promoting unity, harmony and solidarity in the country, especially in the prevailing circumstances faced by Pakistan. He expressed these views while addressing a reception and dinner hosted in honour of the members of the Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee.—DNA

Jam engages carpet sector to address sector-specific challenges

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal Khan chaired a meeting with representatives of the Pakistan Carpet Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PCMEA) to review the challenges confronting Pakistan's hand-knotted carpet export sector, a traditional powerhouse of craftsmanship, employment, and foreign exchange earnings, and discuss immediate facilitation measures. The PCMEA delegation, led by Patron-in-Chief, Abdul Latif Malik and Senior Vice Chairman Mr. Usman Ashraf, highlighted disruptions in the supply of essential intermediates required for carpet production which are adversely affecting exporters' ability to honor international commitments.—APP

Digital transformation make admin system fast in KP

PESHAWAR: The year 2025 marked a defining chapter in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's digital journey, making digital governance operational, visible and impactful, besides building an administrative system that is faster, transparent and citizen-centric. "The progress achieved during last year demonstrates how technology, when aligned with reform and execution, can fundamentally improve governance," observed Dr Akif Khan, Managing Director of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Technology Board (KPITB). KPITB's work reflects a decisive shift from fragmented systems to integrated digital platforms that enhance efficiency, accountability and service delivery across the province, Akif Khan told APP. Sharing digital transformation in the province, Dr Akif said KPITB moved decisively beyond pilots and policy frameworks to delivering end-to-end digital public service, enabling cashless, paperless and identity-driven governance, scaled youth skills, startups, IT infrastructure and earned global recognition for citizen

centric digital innovation. About the key measure taken for digitalization of government affairs, MD KPITB said these include Transport Licensing system, introduction of virtual meeting of prisoners with their families, establishment of IT platform for job seekers, universal number plate system, motor vehicle registration system, housing scheme for government employees, Ramzan relief package, AI-powered Crop disease detection system, digitalization of Arms and Business License, Government GPT (an AI powered system to simply access official rules, regulations and policies). KPITB also facilitated formation of Digital Payment and FinTech Strategy which has been approved by provincial cabinet, with the objective of advancing the broader vision of achieving a Cashless KP by 2030. Agriculture Income Tax System has been introduced to digitalize the assessment and collection of agriculture income tax in KP by replacing manual processes with a centralized digital workflow.

A MoU was signed between KPITB and Police Department to digitalize major police services, including character certificate, registration of foreigners, tenants, domestic workers, real-time traffic update, missing persons reporting and recruitment information. E-Muhasil was developed as a digital platform to modernize field-level revenue collection and enforcement activities. An Anti-Corruption Complaint Management System was developed to digitalize and streamline the receipt processing and tracking of complaints across the organization. KPITB also signed MoU with Transport Department to advance the digital transformation of key transport services, such as driving licence issuance and route permit management were set to be integrated into the Dastak platform. To attain better public health standards, the Immunization Monitoring Performance and Coverage Tracker, a real-time digital system, was implemented to monitor immunization activities across the province.—APP

Maryam issues certain directives to concerned authorities

RAWALPINDI: Senior Provincial Minister Maryam Aurangzeb chaired a high-level meeting at the Commissioner's Office, Rawalpindi, to review progress on development projects, Ramazan arrangements and the overall law and order situation. The meeting was attended by members of the provincial and national assemblies from Rawalpindi district, Commissioner Rawalpindi Division Engineer Aamir Khattak, the Regional Police Officer and other administrative officers.

Participants were briefed on the Rawalpindi Development Plan, Parks and Horticulture beautification plan, water supply schemes and the latest update on Nullah Lai. Detailed briefings were also given on Mother and Child Hospital, Ramazan arrangements, security measures and the prevailing law and order situation. The minister assigned a two-day task to the Chief Traffic Officer to ensure full implementation of safety SOPs at construction sites. She directed authorities to formulate clear diversion plans within two days and ensure effective enforcement, along with proper deployment of traffic wardens and installation of prominent signboards to clearly mark diversions. She emphasized maintaining smooth traffic flow and facilitating citizens. Highlighting Ramazan as the most critical period for price control, Maryam Aurangzeb said the PERA force must prioritize keeping prices stable. She directed strict monitoring of bidding in wholesale markets and continuous patrolling by price control magistrates in critical bazaars. She ordered that merit and transparency be ensured in the distribution of Ramazan Nigehban Cards. A total target of 39,882 cards has been set for Rawalpindi, with 15,044 cards received and 8,566 distributed so far. Briefing participants, officials said that 16 Ramazan Dastarkhwan sites, including seven major hospitals, have been identified where 7,250 people will be hosted daily at Iftar as guests of the Chief Minister. The minister directed WASA to ensure safety SOPs at Sixth Road, Saidpur Road and other construction sites. She was informed that 4,000 homes in Murree had been equipped with rainwater harvesting systems during the past year and ordered the preparation of a feasibility report to introduce the system in Rawalpindi. She instructed that cantonment areas be included in the Suthra Punjab initiative to improve overall cleanliness. Immediate submission of summaries for filter clinics in Benazir Bhutto Hospital, District Headquarters Hospital, Holy Family Hospital and Rawalpindi Institute of Cardiology was ordered. Taking notice of the dilapidated condition of the waiting area at Benazir Bhutto Hospital, she directed immediate repair and improvement, and ordered enhancement of facilities and shades at Holy Family Hospital too. She also directed the resolution of the water issue at Rawat Hospital to make it operational at the earliest and asked the Health Secretary to prepare a feasibility report for establishing a dental college in Rawalpindi.—DNA

Call for enhancing Pak-Malaysia academic collaboration

The Rector briefed the High Commissioner on NUML's academic programs, international linkages, and its role in promoting language and cultural diplomacy

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Dato' Mohammad Azhar Mazlan, High Commissioner of Malaysia to Pakistan, visited the National University of Modern Languages (NUML) to explore opportunities for academic collaboration and further to strengthen bilateral educational ties between Pakistan and Malaysia. The High Commissioner called on the Rector, NUML, and held a meeting attended by DG NUML, Brig Muhammad Rafiq Khan, Mr. Mohd Syafiq Firdaus Bin Hasbullah, Counsellor, High Commission of Malaysia, Dean, Faculty of Languages, Dr. Jameel Asghar Jami, and Director, National International

Linkages Office (NILO). The Rector briefed the High Commissioner on



promoting language and cultural diplomacy. Both sides discussed en-

hancing people-to-people relations through student and faculty exchange programs, joint research, seminars, academic publications, and possible initiatives such as establishing an Urdu Chair at a Malaysian university, introducing Malay language and cultural programs at NUML, and exploring scholarship opportunities. H.E. Dato' Mohammad Azhar Mazlan also delivered an insightful lecture on "Malaysia-Pakistan Bilateral Relations," followed by an interactive Q&A session with students and faculty. At the conclusion, Brig Muhammad Rafiq Khan, DG NUML, expressed his appreciation to the High Commissioner for his visit and reaffirming NUML's commitment to strengthening academic cooperation with Malaysia

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

Feb 04/Sri Lanka National Day
Feb 06/N. Zealand National Day
Feb 06/Uganda Army Day
Feb 11/Iran Revolution day
Feb 16/DPR Korea National Day
Feb 16/Lithuania National Day
Feb 18/Gambia National Day
Feb 19/Nepal Democracy Day
Feb 23/Uzbekistan National Day
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Islamabad Metropolitan

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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Naqvi reviews infrastructure, modernisation push

During the visit to Police Station Kohsar, Mohsin Naqvi reviewed the newly completed building and examined public facilitation arrangements, including the front desk and operational sections. He directed officers to further improve facilities for citizens to ensure better service delivery

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi visited multiple police stations in the federal capital to review progress on newly rebuilt and under-construction facilities, highlighting the government's emphasis on modern, citizen-centric policing. An official told APP on Thursday that the interior minister, accompanied by Inspector General of Police Islamabad Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, Chairman CDA, Deputy Commissioner Islamabad and other senior officers, inspected three police stations, including Police Station Kohsar, the under-construction Women Police Station G-6, and Police Station Koral. During the visit to Police Station Kohsar, Mohsin Naqvi reviewed the newly completed building and examined public facilitation arrangements, including the front desk and operational sections. He directed officers to further improve facilities for citizens to ensure better service delivery.

Mohsin Naqvi said that modern, technology-equipped police stations were essential for strengthening the policing system and enhancing public trust. He observed that upgraded infrastructure and the use of modern technology would help align policing standards with international practices. While reviewing the under-construction Women Police Station G-6, the minister directed authorities to expedite completion of the project, assuring that all required resources would be provided on a priority basis. At Police Station Koral, Mohsin Naqvi set a two-month deadline for completion of the new building, emphasising timely progress and quality execution.

Officials said the visit reflects the government's continued focus on improving policing infrastructure and enhancing citizen facilitation across the federal capital.



Call for transparency in operations of social safety institutions

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly Standing Committee on Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Thursday undertook a comprehensive review of administrative, financial and institutional governance of the Ministry of Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety, directing authorities to ensure transparency in funding mechanisms and performance oversight of its subsidiary organizations. The 16th meeting of the Committee was held at the Parliament House under the chairmanship of Mir Ghulam Ali Talpur. The Additional Secretary of the Ministry briefed the Committee that none of the Ministry's attached or subsidiary organizations had been allocated projects under the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) for the fiscal year 2026-27. She presented a detailed overview of the Ministry's legal and administrative framework, including governing laws, rules and ordinances regulating its operations. The Ministry, established in 2022 after its separation from the Statistics Division, oversees major social protection institutions including the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal (PBM), Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), and the Trust for Voluntary Organizations (TVO). Responding to questions regarding the financial sustainability and operational structure of TVO, its representative informed the Committee that the organization continues to operate through returns generated from an endowment created from an initial USAID grant of eight

million US dollars, equivalent to approximately Rs520 million at the time, transferred by the Government of Pakistan. The organization supplements these resources through support from international partners including UNICEF and other donor agencies. The Committee was informed that TVO primarily works to strengthen local and rural non-governmental organizations engaged in women and child welfare through initiatives in health, education and poverty reduction, providing both technical and financial assistance without receiving additional government funding beyond the original seed capital. Expressing the need for financial scrutiny, the Committee directed the Ministry to submit complete funding and expenditure details of TVO for the past two years, including profit and loss statements. The members also sought specific information regarding any projects or activities undertaken in Dera Ismail Khan district. The Committee further asked the Ministry to provide a detailed status report on the Centre for Social Entrepreneurship and the Centre for Rural Economy in the next meeting. In addition, the Committee sought comprehensive details of government officials serving in subsidiary departments while on extraordinary leave (EOL), including their parent departments, duration of leave, present assignments and pay scales. A separate briefing on the Pakistan Labour Council was also requested for the forthcoming session. Federal Minister for Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety

Syed Imran Ahmed Shah informed the Committee that Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal primarily operates through government endowment funds, while Zakat collections are administered through banking channels without direct handling by the Ministry. Highlighting PBM's outreach, the Minister said the organization maintains representation in every district of the country as well as District Headquarters Hospitals (DHQs) to facilitate access to scholarships, medical assistance and emergency financial support for deserving beneficiaries. He also appreciated the performance of the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, particularly its development initiatives in Balochistan. The Committee took notice of bureaucratic delays in establishing Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal's Women Empowerment Centre in Muzaffargarh district, upon which the Minister assured immediate intervention to expedite the process. The agenda item number five relating to the Benazir Income Support Programme was deferred to the next meeting. The meeting was attended by Members of the National Assembly Mir Ghulam Ali Talpur, Nawabzada Ifikhar Ahmed Khan Babar, Makhdom Tahir Rashid Ud Din, Mohammad Ilyas Choudhary, Naima Kanwal and Huma Akhtar Chughtai. Federal Minister Syed Imran Ahmed Shah, senior officials of the Ministry and TVO were also present, while Managing Director Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal Senator Capt. Shaheen Khalid Butt and PBM officials joined the meeting via Zoom link.—DNA

Railways all set to be revamped on modern lines

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways is set to roll out an extensive package of reforms aimed at transforming the department into a profitable, modern and passenger-centric national transport system. The wide-ranging measures focus on revitalizing the freight sector, expanding passenger services, introducing technological upgrades, and improving facilities at railway stations across the country," an official in the Ministry told APP. The official said the reform agenda places strong emphasis on strengthening the freight sector to ensure long-term financial sustainability. New freight wagons have already been added to the fleet, while dedicated freight corridors are under development to accelerate cargo movement. "The measures to improve cargo handling and reduce turnaround time are also underway, along with efforts to establish strategic partnerships with major bulk clients," he added. Pakistan Railways has also introduced online freight booking, additional freight and cargo trains, and the outsourcing of freight wagons. As a result of these initiatives, the average freight payload has increased from 1,800 tons in 2023 to 2,400 tons in 2024—a significant boost to operational efficiency, he added. On the passenger side, the department is now operating at full capacity. "The number of coaches on key trains has increased from 15 to 19, and 10 new passenger trains have been launched in recent months. Improved punctuality, upgraded onboard facilities, and rationalized fares have contributed to consistent growth in passenger revenue over the last five years," he said. The modern dining cars and upgraded coaches have been introduced on popular trains such as Shalimar Express, Pak Business Express, and Islamabad Express. "LED screens with pre-loaded entertainment, water dispensers, and enhanced janitorial services are further improving the passenger experience," he added. He said the premium dining cars are now functional on Khyber Mail, Allama Iqbal Express, and Rehman Baba, while seven premium trains—including the Green Line and Pak Business Express—offer complimentary services such as high tea, bedding, newspapers, hygiene kits, and mineral water.—APP

Meeting held on crime control, Ramadan security in Sawan Zone

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police's Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations Qazi Ali Raza chaired an important meeting with officers of Sawan Zone to review crime prevention measures and security arrangements for the holy month of Ramadan. An official told APP on Thursday that SP Sawan Zone Khurram Ashraf, SDPOs, and SHOs attended the meeting. During the meeting, the SSP issued clear directives regarding maintenance of law and order, effective crime prevention, enhanced patrolling, and ensuring quality investigations. He directed officers to intensify action against drug peddlers and individuals involved in illegal possession of weapons, while emphasising the need for immediate response to any emergency situation. Qazi stated that protection of citizens' lives and property remains the top priority of Islamabad Police. He further directed officers to ensure special security arrangements at mosques.—APP

Wafaqi Mohtasib briefs Tanzanian delegation

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Tanzania can learn from each other's experiences in areas like public sector accountability, institutional capacity building besides tax administration and redressal of public complaints for ensuring fair taxation regime in both the countries. This was observed in a meeting held between the Wafaqi Mohtasib (Federal Ombudsman), Mr. Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi and Mr. Erasmus Vincent Mtui, Tax Ombudsman of Tanzania, who called on him yesterday at the Wafaqi Mohtasib Secretariat. Mr. Erasmus is currently leading a 17-member delegation from the Tax Ombudsman Service of Tanzania to Pakistan on a week-long study visit. It was further observed that exchange of experiences and best practices between the two institutions would benefit both sides. The Wafaqi Mohtasib, Mr. Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi briefed the delegation about the salient features of the Wafaqi Mohtasib's Institution. He said that owing to persistent efforts for speedy resolution of public complaints, the Institution of Wafaqi Mohtasib has emerged as the poor man's court, enjoying the trust and confidence of the general public. He said that it has processed and decided a record number of 261,101 complaints during the outgoing year 2025, as against 223,198 cases decided in 2024. This increase in the number of complaints decided has been attributed to initiatives like the Khuli Katcheries (Open Courts), Outreach Complaint Resolution (OCR) mechanism, the Informal Resolution of Disputes (IRD) and Inspection Visits of government agencies and departments. It has achieved an unprecedented implementation rate of 96.8% during the year, he maintained. Mr. Qureshi also informed that with a view to enhancing outreach and accessibility, a number of new Regional Offices and Complaint Collection Centres (CCC) have been established during the last two years mostly in the remote and far off regions of the country. Now the institution has presence in 28 cities across the country, which is instrumental in dispensing administrative justice virtually at the doorsteps of the people. Later, the delegation was given a detailed presentation on the Federal Ombudsman's mandate, operational modalities, role and functions, particularly the mechanism for receipt and disposal of public complaints, which was followed by a Question/Answer session. The leader of the Tanzanian delegation commended the outstanding performance of the Wafaqi Mohtasib's Institution, saying that it is rendering very useful service to the people. He emphasised the need to establish closer professional linkages between the Wafaqi Mohtasib's Institution and Tax Ombudsman of Tanzania to their mutual advantage.—DNA

The science of sehri What keeps fasters energised longer during Ramadan

ISLAMABAD: As whole Muslim ummah observes the fast during the holy month, medical experts are drawing attention to the growing importance of science-backed sehri habits, warning that poor dietary choices before dawn can lead to fatigue, dehydration, and declining productivity during long fasting hours across homes, hostels, and workplaces nationwide. As Ramadan reshapes daily life, the pre-dawn meal of sehri has emerged as more than a religious obligation; it is increasingly viewed as a public health concern. Dr Adnan at NIRM hospital in Islamabad warns that poorly planned sehri meals, often dominated by fried foods, refined flour, and sugary drinks, can lead to energy crashes, headaches, irritability, and reduced concentration well before iftar. Associate professor, diabetes specialist at PIMS Dr Ahmed Farhan explain that the key to lasting energy lies in choosing foods that di-

gest slowly and release glucose steadily. Complex carbohydrates such as whole wheat bread, oats, barley, and brown rice help stabilise blood sugar levels, preventing sudden drops that cause weakness and dizziness. When paired with protein such as eggs, yogurt, milk, lentils, or chickpeas, the digestive process slows further, allowing the body to remain fuelled for longer periods. Equally important is hydration, a factor often overlooked at sehri, Dr Farhan continued. Specialists advise drinking water gradually rather than consuming large quantities at once. Excessive tea or coffee, they caution, can worsen dehydration due to caffeine's diuretic effect. Fruits such as apples, oranges, and bananas are recommended not only for their water content but also for essential minerals that support muscle function and prevent cramps. Dr Urooj Yasir Khan at CDA hospital discouraged the

practice of skipping sehri altogether, a trend observed among students and working professionals seeking extra sleep. Medical data links missed sehri to increased fatigue, acidity, and reduced mental alertness, particularly during outdoor work or long commutes, Dr Khan warned. Medical experts suggest that adequate sleep is inseparable from good nutrition; fragmented rest can negate the benefits of even the most carefully planned meal. The science of sehri is gaining renewed importance amid longer fasting hours, rising temperatures, and increased screen time at night. Public health specialists argue that small adjustments, lighter portions, fewer fried items, and mindful hydration can significantly improve well-being during the month. They stress that Ramadan is not a test of physical endurance through deprivation but a balance of discipline—APP

Briefs

Media urged to lead FP, at consultative session

RAWALPINDI: The Population Welfare Department Rawalpindi organized a special consultative session for journalists and columnists to address emerging demographic challenges in the region, under the Annual Development Programme (ADP) scheme titled Chief Minister Population Management and Family Planning Programme. Held on the directions of District Population Welfare Officer Shireen Sukhan, the session aimed to bridge the gap between government initiatives and public perception. Participants were urged to play a proactive role in promoting sustainable family development and reproductive health, moving beyond conventional news reporting towards informed advocacy. Officials said the Chief Minister's programme is designed not merely to reduce statistical growth rates but to improve citizens' quality of life. The initiative prioritizes ensuring access to reproductive health services in rural areas and informal settlements, integrating maternal and child healthcare with family planning services, and addressing misconceptions through community engagement and media advocacy. Opening the session, District Population Welfare Officer (DPWO) Shireen Sukhan highlighted key demographic indicators of Rawalpindi district, noting that the current population growth rate is placing severe pressure on infrastructure, education and healthcare systems. She stressed that while resources remain limited, unchecked population growth continues to strain public services, adding that the media has the power to transform family planning from a "private matter" into a "national priority". Deputy District Welfare Officer (Population Welfare), Tehsil Rawalpindi, Rana Azhar Mahmood, outlined administrative measures taken under the scheme, including uninterrupted supply of contraceptives and counselling services across all tehsils to ensure families can make informed choices. Medical Officers Dr Asma Tariq and Dr Anam Mushtaq discussed the health risks associated with short birth intervals. Dr Asma Tariq highlighted the direct link between repeated pregnancies and maternal mortality, particularly among undernourished and marginalized communities, describing family planning as a life-saving intervention for women. Dr Anam Mushtaq emphasized an integrated approach in which health and population welfare departments work in coordination, stating that a healthy family forms the foundation of a healthy nation and that family planning is essential for achieving sustainable development goals.—APP

Ramazan beautification plan unveiled

RAWALPINDI: Deputy Commissioner Rawalpindi Dr Hassan Waqar Cheema has devised a special beautification plan for the holy month of Ramazan to enhance the appearance of the cities across the district, and provide a pleasant and spiritual environment for residents, a spokesman said on Thursday. Under the plan, beautification measures have been implemented across all tehsils of the district, including Taxila, Kahuta, Gujjar Khan, City, Cantt, Saddar and Kallar Syedan. Special arrangements have been made to decorate major highways, Bazaars, mosques, government buildings and public places in view of the sanctity and spirit of Ramazan. The district administration has directed the relevant departments to ensure that no effort is spared in carrying out the beautification plan during the holy month. To ensure the availability of quality essential items at affordable rates, Ramazan Bazaars have also been established across the district. Flour, sugar, ghee, pulses, vegetables, fruit and other basic commodities are being provided at official prices to offer relief to the public amid rising inflation.—APP

Pakistan greatly values relations with Italy: Rana

Rana Mashhood, Italy's Ambassador Armellini Discuss Trade, Education, Legal Labor Mobility and Youth Cooperation to Strengthen Pakistan-Italy Bilateral Partnership and Expand Long-Term Strategic Collaboration Opportunities

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD DNA: Chairman Prime Minister's Youth Program Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan met with the Ambassador of Italy H.E. Marlena Armellini. The meeting focused on strengthening the friendly relations between Pakistan and Italy and further enhancing bilateral cooperation. The Chairman expressed his commitment to fostering stronger partnerships in trade, investment, education, and youth development, emphasizing Pakistan's desire to transform this cooperation into a long-term, comprehensive partnership. He also thanked Italy for its support in Pakistan's bid for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council and praised the close cooperation between the two.

The meeting highlighted the importance of Italian companies' activities in economic sectors, the Joint Economic Commission meetings, and the significance of the Pakistan-Italy Business Forum.

Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan described Italy as a key educational hub for Pakistani students, emphasizing the need to expand educational and research cooperation. He praised the presence of thousands of Pakistani students in Italy and their participation in Erasmus Mundus scholarships, underlining the importance of promoting higher education, joint research projects, and institutional linkages. The main topic of discussion was the legal movement of labor. The Chairman noted that Pakistan's young and skilled workforce is a valuable asset for Italian industries. He stressed the importance of effectively implementing the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on labor mobility to ensure both countries can benefit from it. The meeting also discussed the need to simplify, streamline, and ensure transparency in the workers' and stu-



dent visa processes, preventing exploitation by unauthorized agents and ensuring a merit-based system. Additionally, they explored initiatives under the Prime Minister's Youth Program, including skills development, technical training, institutional partnerships, and youth exchange programs. The importance of increasing cooperation in the TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) sector was highlighted to align youth skills with international standards. Mutual youth cooperation, educational exchanges, innovation, business opportu-

lini expressed her appreciation for the efforts of Chairman Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan in providing opportunities for Pakistani youth. She welcomed the partnership with the Prime Minister's Youth Program and expressed her commitment to increasing cooperation in the future. Both sides expressed confidence that by implementing legal labor mobility, facilitating student access, and promoting joint programs and organized youth cooperation, the people-to-people ties between Pakistan and Italy would be further strengthened.

Iranian envoy extends warm Ramazan greetings

DNA

ISLAMABAD: On the auspicious occasion of the arrival of the Holy Month of Ramadan, Dr. Reza Amiri Moghadam, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Pakistan, has issued a heartfelt message of congratulations and spiritual reflection to Muslims worldwide, with special emphasis on the government and people of Pakistan. In his message, the Ambassador began with the Quranic verse from Surah Al-Baqarah. He extended sincere congratulations to all Muslim brothers and sisters globally and particularly to the brotherly nation of Pakistan, describing Ramadan as a divine op-



portunity for spiritual reflection, self-purification, compassion, and solidarity. The month, he noted, serves as a profound reminder of core Islamic values: patience, generosity, and unwavering devotion to Almighty

Allah. Highlighting the unbreakable bonds of the Muslim Ummah, Ambassador Moghadam emphasized unity through shared faith in One Unique God, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the Holy Quran, and the sacred Qibla. "These sacred pillars bind us together like an unbreakable thread of faith and brotherhood," he stated. "The Holy Month of Ramadan is a manifestation of these shared bonds and a powerful symbol of our unity."

The Ambassador prayed for the honor, dignity, unity, and integrity of the entire Muslim world, while specifically invoking peace, prosperity, and stability for Pakistan. "May Allah Almighty accept our prayers and fasting, and grant us His endless mercy and blessings," he concluded.

SAPM assures chemical manufacturers of policy support

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Industries and Production Haroon Akhtar Khan on Thursday assured chemical manufacturers of policy support and an industry-friendly federal budget. He said during a meeting with a delegation of the Pakistan Chemical Manufacturers Association and discussed key issues facing the chemical industry, the upcoming federal budget, and the proposed petrochemical policy, said a news release. The meeting was also attended by the CEO of the Engineering Development Board (EDB) Hammad Mansoor. During the meeting, detailed discussions were held on the challenges confronting the chemical sector, including high utility costs, elevated taxation, and the high cost of borrowing. Haroon acknowledged the pressures faced by industries and reiterated the government's commitment to addressing these concerns through targeted reforms and policy support. He emphasized that strengthening industries in line with the economic vision of prime minister remains a top priority. "We are taking concrete measures to promote industrial growth and encourage

local manufacturing across all sectors," he stated. The SAPM informed the delegation that the National Industrial Policy is being prepared to pave the way for sustainable growth and long-term development. He invited industry stakeholders to submit their detailed proposals and analytical recommendations so that practical and beneficial measures can be incorporated into the upcoming budget. Under the leadership of the prime minister, the government ensures comprehensive consultation with stakeholders before finalizing key economic decisions. The EDB will present the Petrochemical Policy after thorough consultation with all relevant industries, he added. Haroon assured that the forthcoming budget will be industry-friendly and aimed at facilitating businesses while also benefiting the general public. He noted that due to the tireless efforts of PM, economic indicators are gradually moving towards improvement. The meeting concluded with a mutual understanding to maintain close coordination between the government and industry representatives to ensure inclusive and sustainable economic progress. APP

Misbah for enhancing bilateral coop with UAE

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Advisor to the Chairman Senate of Pakistan, Misbah Khar, held a high-level meeting with the Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to Pakistan, His Excellency Salem Mohammed Salem Al Bawab Al Zaabi, at the UAE Embassy to further reinforce the longstanding and fraternal ties between Pakistan and the UAE. The meeting featured comprehensive and forward-looking discussions focused on enhancing bilateral cooperation across key areas including investment promotion, parliamentary engagement, trade expansion, and deepening people-to-people contacts. Both sides reaffirmed their shared commitment to translating the historic friendship

between the two nations into tangible economic and diplomatic outcomes. During the meeting, Ms. Khar—who also serves as Secretary of the Inter-Parliamentary Speakers Conference (ISC)—briefed the Ambassador in detail on the recent official visits undertaken by Chairman Senate Yousaf Raza Gillani to various countries, with

particular emphasis on his significant engagements in the United Arab Emirates. She underscored the importance of these interactions in strengthening parliamentary diplomacy and expanding strategic cooperation between the two brotherly nations. The UAE Ambassador congratulated Ms. Khar on the successful organization

of the Inter-Parliamentary Speakers Conference recently hosted in Pakistan and conveyed her best wishes to Chairman Senate Gilani. She commended Pakistan's continued efforts to promote dialogue, collaboration, and institutional linkages among parliamentary leaders. Ms. Khar also apprised the Ambassador of preparations for the upcoming Inter-Parliamentary Speakers Conference, highlighting its role as a vital platform for fostering mutual understanding, legislative collaboration, and multilateral engagement. The meeting concluded with both sides expressing confidence that enhanced parliamentary dialogue and economic cooperation will further solidify Pakistan-UAE relations and open new avenues of partnership in the years ahead.



CTO inspects traffic plan for Ramazan & Sahulat Bazaars

RAWALPINDI: Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Rawalpindi Farhan Aslam on Thursday took a round of Ramazan and Sahulat Bazaars in the city to inspect traffic arrangements and issued directives to ensure smooth flow of traffic and security. During the visit, he instructed the staff on duty to remain vigilant and perform their traffic and security responsibilities efficiently. He directed the circle in-charges to supervise parking and other traffic arrangements at the venues of Ramazan and Sahulat Bazaars. The CTO also asked sector in-charges to check duties periodically and provide comprehensive briefings to personnel. He emphasized that no-parking violations around Ramazan and Sahulat Bazaars would not be allowed and that encroachments around commercial centres and markets must be removed. Farhan Aslam further directed officials to keep a close watch on suspicious vehicles and motorcycles in view of security concerns and to ensure uninterrupted traffic flow on roads, particularly during Iftar hours. He urged officers and personnel to provide maximum facilitation to road users through hard work and teamwork, adding that ensuring citizens' convenience and safety during duty was part of their public responsibility.—APP

Over 3,500 Personnel for Ramazan security plan

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police have finalised comprehensive security and traffic arrangements for the holy month of Ramazan, deploying over 3,500 police officers and personnel across the federal capital to ensure public safety. A police spokesperson told APP on Thursday that special security measures have been implemented at mosques and imambargahs, where additional police deployment and walk-through gates have been ensured to facilitate worshippers. He said a robust checking mechanism, including body search procedures, has been put in place to strengthen security during Sehri, Iftar, and Taraweeh timings. The spokesperson said strict monitoring is being carried out at the entry and exit points of the city, while Dolphin Force, patrolling units, and police mobiles have been directed to maintain effective and continuous patrolling throughout the capital.—APP

CDNS secures Rs 24b in Islamic investment inflows

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Islamic finance sector continues to gain momentum as the Central Directorate of National Savings (CDNS) recorded Rs24 billion in Shariah-compliant investment inflows from July 1, 2025, to February 18, 2026, bringing the institution close to its annual target of Rs25 billion for the fiscal year 2025-26. According to a senior CDNS official here on Thursday, the achievement reflects growing investor confidence in interest-free savings instruments amid Pakistan's evolving financial landscape. Nearly 94 percent of the annual Islamic finance target has already been achieved midway through the fiscal year. We have revived and reinforced our focus on Islamic finance during the current fiscal year, which is expected to support sustainable growth of Pakistan's Islamic economy," the official said. He attributed the strong inflows to the issuance of dedicated Islamic bonds and Shariah-compliant savings certificates, which have attracted investors seeking halal returns while contributing to national savings. The latest performance builds on CDNS's recent track record in the Islamic finance segment. During fiscal year 2024-25, the directorate successfully met its target of Rs24 billion in Islamic investments. In FY 2023-24, CDNS mobilized approximately Rs75 billion through Islamic bonds alone, establishing a foundation for expanding Shariah-compliant products and institutional reforms. Officials highlighted that Islamic finance has become an integral component of the global financial system, accounting for a significant share of several major economies.—APP

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IN
PAKISTAN

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Russian, Saudi Arabia relations

SERGEI KOZLOV

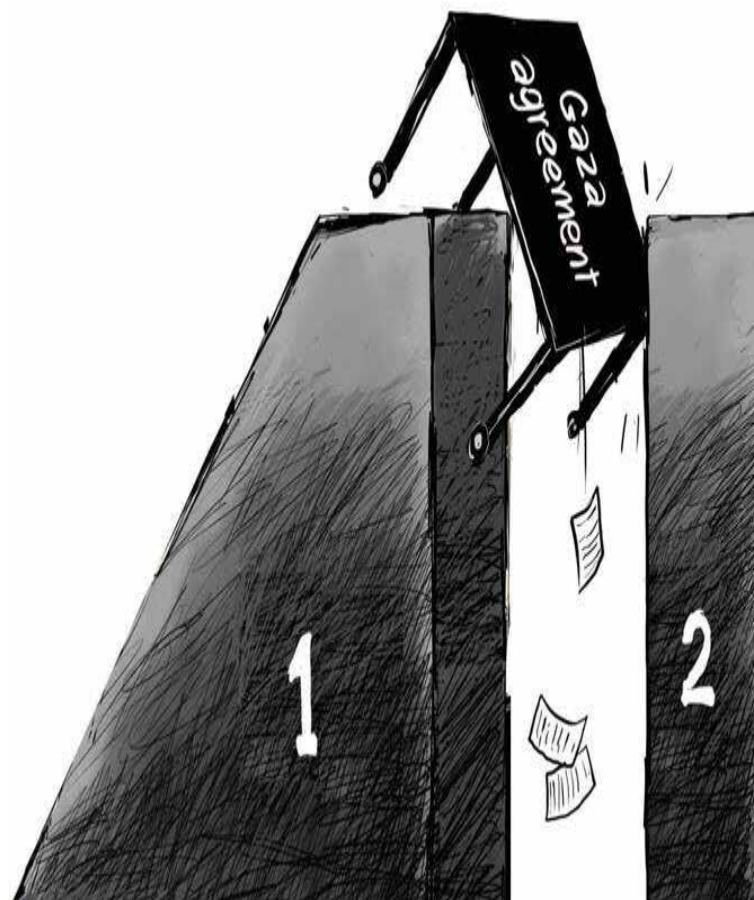
ON Thursday, Russia and Saudi Arabia celebrate a landmark date – the centenary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. The Soviet Union was the first state to recognize the Kingdom of Hejaz and Nejd, along with its dependencies, which was later transformed into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under the leadership of its founding monarch, King Abdulaziz. This step laid the foundation for the further strengthening and development of bilateral ties based on the principles of equality, mutual respect and trust.

Over the past 100 years, Russian-Saudi relations have traveled a long and meaningful path. At the current stage, our multifaceted partnership has, in essence, assumed a strategic character. In this regard, the role of trust-based, high-level dialogue can hardly be overstated. Important milestones include the first visit to Moscow in 2003 by then-Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdulaziz and, in 2007, the first ever visit by Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin to Saudi Arabia.

Our cooperation reached a fundamentally new level following the accession to the throne in 2015 of King Salman. A substantial contribution to strengthening Russian-Saudi ties has been made by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Russia highly values his tireless efforts toward the large-scale political and socioeconomic modernization of his country.

A powerful impetus to our long-standing interaction was given by the first ever state visit of King Salman to Moscow in October 2017 and the reciprocal state visit of President Putin to Riyadh in October 2019, as well as the Russian leader's visit to the Kingdom in December 2023.

In recent years, we have witnessed the active development of practical cooperation between Russia and Saudi Arabia. The key mechanism for advancing it is the Joint Russian-Saudi Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation. The Russian-Saudi Business Council has also been working effectively, facilitating direct contacts between the business communities of our two countries. As a result, bilateral trade turnover has been steadily increasing and new joint projects are being implemented in industry, agriculture and other promising sectors. Among the undisputed priorities of the Russian-Saudi partnership is the energy sector. Russia and Saudi Arabia are among the world's largest oil producers. The stability of the global economy directly depends on the coordination of our actions. It was our two countries that initiated the establishment of the OPEC+ format, bringing together



OPEC and a group of non-OPEC states. Decisions adopted within OPEC+ to limit, and subsequently to flexibly adjust, crude oil production help smooth price volatility and ensure predictability in the oil market. In recent years, our countries have taken important practical steps aimed at further stimulating business and people-to-people ties. In August 2025, regular direct flights between Moscow and Riyadh were launched and, in December 2025, flights from Moscow to Jeddah were also introduced.

Of particular significance is the agreement between the government of the Russian Federation and the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on mutual visa exemptions for their citizens signed in Riyadh on Dec. 1, 2025, on the sidelines of the ninth session of the Russian-Saudi Intergovernmental Commission. Its entry into force is expected in the near future. Notably, the Russian Federation became the first country outside the Gulf Cooperation Council member states with which Saudi Arabia decided to establish a visa-free regime.

The undertaken efforts, which perfectly complement the trade and economic agenda of Russian-Saudi cooperation, give a tangible boost to the development of tourism, business, scientific and humanitarian ties. A special place is occupied by religious travel: every year, 25,000 Russian Muslims arrive in Saudi Arabia to perform Hajj, while tens of thousands of other members of Russia's Muslim community visit Saudi Arabia for Umrah.

Exchanges in the cultural sphere are playing an increasingly visible role. A vivid example was Saudi Arabia's participation in the revived international music competition "Intervision," successfully held in Russia in September 2025, and the subsequent decision by the Saudi leadership to host "Intervision 2026" in the Kingdom. We stand ready to share our experience and provide the necessary assistance to our Saudi friends.

As ambassador of the Russian Federation, I would especially note the close foreign policy coordination between Moscow and Riyadh, including at the main international venues, among them the UN and G20. Our positions on most global and regional issues either coincide or are very close. We are united by a firm commitment to the principles of the UN Charter in their entirety, interconnection and indivisibility; by respect for the cultural and civilizational diversity of the peoples of the world; and by recognition of their right to choose independently their paths of political and socioeconomic development.

The equal and mutually respectful dialogue built over the course of a century enables us not only to take pride in what has been achieved, but also to look to the future with confidence and optimism. Especially since today our countries face new and increasingly ambitious challenges. These challenges are dictated by life itself and the logic of international relations. Together with our Saudi friends, we will continue to work toward their successful resolution and toward the further realization of the vast potential of our strategic partnership, for the benefit of the peoples of our two countries and in the name of strengthening regional and global security and stability.

Pakistan-Uzbek Relations: New Dimensions, New Heights

M. Abdullah Hamid Gul

Pakistani and Uzbek cultures and lifestyles share many values. Around four thousand words in Urdu have come from Uzbek.

Uzbekistan's official name is the Republic of Uzbekistan. It is located in Central Asia, bordering Kazakhstan to the west and north, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to the east, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan to the south. It is uniquely landlocked, surrounded only by other landlocked countries. Its national language is Uzbek, a Turkic language similar to Turkish. About 42% of its population is of Tajik ethnicity. Under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan is progressing rapidly. Understanding the shared history and culture of Pakistan and Uzbekistan's Muslim leaders is essential today.

PAKISTAN and Uzbekistan, two brotherly Muslim countries, have always maintained exemplary and friendly relations. These relations are based on mutual understanding and strong cultural and religious ties. Both countries are committed to enhancing closer relations in various fields, including people-to-people contacts, cultural exchanges, trade, investment, and energy. The recent visit of Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to Pakistan is a welcome development, as it has improved bilateral relations between the two countries.

With a historical presence on the ancient Silk Road, Pakistan and Uzbekistan are now eager to establish a strong presence together in the region's emerging economic projects. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev was awarded Pakistan's highest civilian honor, the Nishan-e-Pakistan, which reflects a bright future for Pakistan-Uzbek relations. The signing of 28 memoranda of understanding and agreements worth \$3.4 billion across various sectors, including railways, security, preferential trade, climate change, and religious tourism, marks significant milestones. Uzbekistan has offered Pakistani traders a 10-year tax exemption and set a target to increase bilateral trade volume to \$2 billion over the next five years. From 2017 to 2025, the trade volume between Uzbekistan and Pakistan has risen from approximately \$30 million to about \$500 million, showing more than a fifteen-fold increase in less than a decade. Undoubtedly, both countries are determined to expand trade and investment.

During his visit to Pakistan, President Mirziyoyev also praised the economic achievements of his government, which include doubling GDP over ten years, lifting 6.5 million people out of poverty, and reducing unemployment. The current Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Pakistan, Alisher Tukhtaev, has played a significant role in promoting Pakistan-Uzbek relations. His efforts have been crucial in enhancing bilateral economic cooperation, trade, and cultural connections. Meetings with Pakistani leaders continue to promote stability and cooperation in the econom-

ic partnership and matters of mutual interest, including recent high-level visits and President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's trip to Pakistan. Uzbekistan's crucial role in promoting stability and security in Central Asia, along with Pakistan's strategic position in South Asia, has increased their influence in regional affairs. Their joint cooperation reflects both historical ties and modern challenges, balancing strategic interests, economic cooperation, and regional engagement.

In the early years of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Uzbekistan, a series of high-level visits aimed to establish a framework for cooperation. Diplomatic, trade, and cultural relations between Pakistan and Uzbekistan have been in place since 1991. A friendship and cooperation agreement was concluded in 1992, laying the foundation for sustainable future relations in trade, security, and cultural exchanges. Pakistan joined the Ashgabat Agreement in 2016, becoming part of the international transport and transit route. Pakistan and Uzbekistan jointly support peace initiatives in regional cooperation platforms such as the SCO, ECO, OIC, and the United Nations. The Uzbek President visited the defense industry institution Defence Solutions Industrial Global (GIDS), where he reviewed various military and defense products and technologies, and an agreement was reached to develop a roadmap for military technical cooperation. Emphasis was placed on keeping the High-Level Consultative Strategic Council active.

Pakistani and Uzbek cultures and lifestyles share many values. Around four thousand words in Urdu have come from Uzbek. Uzbekistan's official name is the Republic of Uzbekistan. It is located in Central Asia, bordering Kazakhstan to the west and north, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to the east, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan to the south. It is uniquely landlocked, surrounded only by other landlocked countries. Its national language is Uzbek, a Turkic language similar to Turkish. About 42% of its population is of Tajik ethnicity. Under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan is progressing rapidly. Understanding the shared history and culture of Pakistan

and Uzbekistan's Muslim leaders is essential today. Few know that the founder of the Mughal Empire, Zahiruddin Babur was born in Andijan, a city in Uzbekistan.

Strengthening cultural and humanitarian ties with Pakistan aligns with Uzbekistan's tourism promotion plans, which aim to attract Muslim-majority tourists. Pakistan needs to boost trade links with Central Asian and Middle Eastern countries, including Uzbekistan, not just by signing agreements but by implementing them. Uzbekistan's cotton quality is excellent; Russia, China, and Europe are major buyers. It achieves high crop yields with low water usage, a technology Pakistan could acquire. Uzbek expertise in cotton can help increase production in Punjab and across Pakistan.

During the Soviet era, Uzbekistan developed power plant technology and has thousands of engineers in that sector. Pakistan could benefit from this technology and cheaper electricity. Both countries' economic cooperation is a positive step with great growth potential. Pakistan serves as an important bridge for Uzbekistan to access South Asian and global markets. Maintaining cultural ties is crucial for building stable, long-term economic, political, and security relations between the two countries. In April 2025, Uzbekistan's embassy in Islamabad organized the Uzbekistan Tourism Roadshow, themed "Uzbekistan, the Pearl of the Silk Road." Expanding direct flights between Tashkent and Islamabad serves practical diplomatic goals. Pakistan and Uzbekistan's relations are built on mutual trust and interests. They've reaffirmed support for each other on regional and international platforms, aiming to elevate these ties.

The political and military leadership of both countries is focused on boosting trade and cooperation in various sectors. Strengthening people-to-people connections through tourism, educational scholarships, and cultural exchanges is also key. In the future, Uzbekistan and Pakistan will play significant roles in Central and South Asia's economic development.

Lessons from a Divided Past for a Shared Future

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



India, observing these fissures, did not remain a passive spectator. It consistently sought to interpret prejudice as permanent hatred and to convert administrative shortcomings into ideological alienation. Through propaganda, diplomatic maneuvering, and eventually overt military intervention in 1971, it added fuel to the fire

HISTORY bears testimony that the Muslims of Bengal stood in the vanguard of the struggle which gave practical shape to the Two-Nation Theory in the Indian subcontinent. From Dhaka in 1906 to the Lahore Resolution of 1940 and then decisive elections of 1946, their political awakening, organizational strength, and electoral mandate transformed an idea into an irreversible demand. It is no exaggeration to state that without the steadfast leadership and participation of the Muslims of Bengal, the path to Pakistan would have been far more arduous and uncertain.

When the historic resolution was moved at Minto Park—now known as Iqbal Park—it was a son of Bengal, A. K. Fazlul Huq, who presented it. The resolution envisaged independent states in the Muslim-majority zones of the northwest and the east. Later, in the 1946 provincial elections, the Muslim League achieved an overwhelming victory in Bengal, thereby demonstrating that the Muslim masses of the eastern wing had placed their trust in Muhammad Ali Jinnah and his vision. The electoral triumph in Bengal was not a peripheral event; it was central to the moral and political legitimacy of Pakistan's demand. In acknowledging the creation of Pakistan, we must therefore salute the Muslim leadership of Bengal and the common people who, in towns and villages alike, played a dignified and courageous role for their distinct geographical and political identity.

Yet, the circumstances under which Pakistan emerged were fraught with inherent structural vulnerabilities. The partition of 1947 produced a state divided by a thousand miles of hostile territory. Between West and East Pakistan stood India—an adversarial power whose leadership had never reconciled itself to the logic of partition. The geographical bifurcation was not merely an inconvenience; it was a strategic dilemma of historic proportions. Communications, defense coordination, and economic integration were rendered complex from the very outset.

It is in the nature of political movements that during the struggle for a common objective, individual and collective weaknesses are often overlooked. Differences are subordinated to destiny. But once the destination is reached and

the exhilaration of triumph subsides, latent prejudices begin to surface. No society can claim complete innocence in this regard. After independence, linguistic, administrative, and economic grievances in East Pakistan gradually assumed sharper contours. The language controversy of 1948–52, culminating in the tragic events of 21 February 1952 in Dhaka, revealed that emotional integration required more than constitutional declarations. Economic disparities, whether real or perceived, deepened mistrust. India, observing these fissures, did not remain a passive spectator. It consistently sought to interpret prejudice as permanent hatred and to convert administrative shortcomings into ideological alienation. Through propaganda, diplomatic maneuvering, and eventually overt military intervention in 1971, it added fuel to the fire. The tragedy of December 1971 was not the product of a single cause; it was the culmination of political miscalculations, internal weaknesses, external conspiracies, and the failure to forge a truly participatory federal ethos. The dismemberment of Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh marked one of the most painful chapters in South Asian history. Following independence, successive regimes in Bangladesh often nurtured anti-Pakistan sentiment as an instrument of domestic consolidation. Narratives were shaped in a manner that emphasized bitterness while minimizing shared heritage. Certain political forces, aligned closely with Indian strategic interests, endeavored to widen the psychological gulf between the two peoples. For a time, it appeared that estrangement had become permanent. Yet history is seldom linear. Over the decades, many in Bangladesh began to reassess their geopolitical position. The perception that their country risked becoming excessively dependent upon, or influenced by, Indian policy generated fresh debates within their society. Political transitions, economic aspirations, and a growing sense of national self-confidence encouraged a more nuanced view of regional relations. Gradually, the clouds of inherited hostility began to thin. Pragmatism started to replace rhetoric. Today, circumstances are not identical to those of 1947,

nor can the clock of history be turned back. Bangladesh is an independent and sovereign state, and its remarkable economic strides in recent years command respect. Pakistan, too, has traversed a complex path of trials and resilience. Yet there remains between the two peoples a reservoir of cultural affinity, linguistic echoes, shared sacrifices, and intertwined memories. The recognition of historical truths—milk separated from water, as the proverb says—has allowed a clearer understanding of where responsibility lay and how manipulation operated.

In South Asia, the metaphor of the family remains powerful. In our social tradition, the family system is resilient and enduring. At times, due to necessity or unavoidable circumstances, separation between siblings becomes inevitable. Property may be divided; households may become distinct. But blood ties are not erased by walls. Relationships experience estrangement and reconciliation, distance and rediscovery. Wisdom lies in preserving the spirit of kinship even when political realities dictate separate paths.

The "dragon" of regional rivalry has not vanished. Strategic competition, unresolved disputes, and external influences continue to shape the subcontinent. Therefore, any effort at rapprochement must proceed with prudence, clarity, and self-respect. Sentiment alone cannot guide statecraft; it must be accompanied by realism. At the same time, perpetual hostility serves neither prosperity nor stability.

The lesson of history is neither to romanticize the past nor to remain imprisoned by it. The Muslims of Bengal were co-architects of Pakistan's birth, and their contribution deserves enduring acknowledgement. The tragedy of separation teaches the cost of neglecting grievances and underestimating external manipulation. The present moment offers an opportunity to rebuild bridges on the foundations of sovereignty, mutual respect, and non-interference.

If the spirit of brotherhood is kept awake—tempered by vigilance and guided by wisdom—then even divided households may rediscover harmony. Nations, like families, mature through suffering. The task before Pakistan and Bangladesh is not to erase history, but to learn from it, so that future generations inherit not the embers of resentment, but the light of understanding.

Briefs

Four India-sponsored terrorists killed

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were also recovered from the killed terrorists, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area. A sanitisation operation was being conducted to eliminate any other India-sponsored terrorist found in the area. "The relentless counter-terrorism campaign under vision 'Azme-Istehkam' (as approved by the Federal Apex Committee on National Action Plan) by security forces and law enforcement agencies of Pakistan will continue at full pace to wipe out the menace of foreign-sponsored and supported terrorism from the country," the statement added. Pakistan has experienced a rise in cross-border terrorist incidents since the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan in 2021. The provinces of KP and Balochistan, which border Afghanistan, have been particularly affected by these attacks. Earlier this week, at least 12 terrorists belonging to an India-backed proxy were killed while 11 security personnel embraced martyrdom in a terrorist attack in the KP's Bajaur district. The military's media wing said that the cowardly terrorist attack was attempted on a joint checkpoint of the security forces and law enforcement agencies (LEAs).

PTI concerned over Imran health...

FROM PAGE 01
and any other required diagnostic procedures". "Should any scans or specialised evaluations be needed, he must be permitted to be taken to a hospital or diagnostic centre of their choosing," the PTI demanded. It added: "It is the government's responsibility to provide the nation with clear, verified, and unambiguous medical facts. "A significant amount of time has already been wasted regarding concerns over Imran Khan's health," it insisted, adding that no further delay would be acceptable. Family members and senior party leaders have repeatedly attempted to meet him at Adiala jail in recent weeks, but most visits have been blocked by authorities. The SC's intervention on February 10 allowed PTI lawyer Salman Safdar to meet Imran, with the ex-premier telling the counsel he had "15 per cent" vision left in his right eye. This came after it emerged that Imran underwent a medical procedure on the night of January 24 – a development confirmed days later amid an apparent lack of knowledge by the family.

US military 'ready to strike' Iran: reports

FROM PAGE 01
which started a 12-day war. The talks were aimed at averting the possibility of US military action, while Tehran is demanding the lifting of US sanctions. Iran has insisted that the discussions be limited to the nuclear issue, though Washington has previously pushed for Tehran's ballistic missiles programme. Trump has repeatedly threatened to intervene militarily against Iran, first over a deadly crackdown on protesters last month and then more recently over its nuclear programme. According to the CNN report, the White House has been briefed that the military could be ready for a strike by the weekend, after a sufficient air and naval resources buildup in the Middle East. Meanwhile, the media outlet, quoted another source and claimed that Trump has privately argued both for and against military action and polled advisers and allies on what the best course of action is. However, Reuters, citing an unnamed senior US official, reported that top US national security advisers met in the White House Situation Room on Wednesday to discuss Iran and were told all US military forces deployed to the region should be in place by mid-March, the official said.

DPM/FM Dar calls for ending Palestinians' suffering

'These illegal measures are null and void,' DPM Dar emphasized, and a clear violation of international law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention, Council resolution 2334 (2016) and the 2024 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice

DNA

UNITED NATIONS: Pakistan has called as "gravely disturbing" Israel's decision to resume land registration procedures in a large part of the occupied West Bank, saying "Actions that alter facts on the ground and prejudice final status issues are mala fide and profoundly counter-productive." "Israel's continued ceasefire violations, annexation attempts and illegal actions across the Occupied Palestinian Territories" continue to undermine efforts aimed at ending the Middle East conflict that threatens prospects for a just and lasting peace," Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar told a high-level meeting of the UN Security Council on Wednesday. "A successful peace process requires a conducive environment built on trust, restraint and good faith," he stressed. The meeting on the situation in Palestine was chaired by United Kingdom Foreign Secretary, Yvette Cooper MP, in her capacity as President of the 15-member Council for the month of February. The Council deliberated on the unresolved conflict a day before US President Donald Trump's Board of Peace (BoP) holds its inaugural

meeting in Washington mainly to discuss war-shattered Gaza's reconstruction. Highlighting that the 15-member Council was meeting at a critical juncture, DPM/FM Dar said since the ceasefire, hundreds of Palestinians have been killed, UN premises, including UNRWA facilities have been attacked, as restrictions on humanitarian operations and pressure on international humanitarian organizations continue to impede relief assistance, which has yet to flow at the scale required. "This is unacceptable, and also reminds us of the fragility of the current situation." On its part, he said, Pakistan is "fully engaged" in diplomatic efforts aimed at permanent cessation of hostilities and a just resolution of the conflict. In joint statements on 7 and 17 February, the foreign ministers of the Group of Eight Arab and Islamic countries – Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, Türkiye and Pakistan – "condemned in the strongest terms" Israel's recent decisions to expand control over the West Bank. "These illegal measures are null and void," DPM Dar emphasized, and a clear violation of international law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention, Council resolution

2334 (2016) and the 2024 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. Against this backdrop, he said, full and faithful implementation of UNSC resolution 2803, with full respect for ceasefire to achieve a permanent cessation of hostilities. "We must ensure safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian assistance at scale," DPM Dar said, underscoring that recovery and reconstruction phase begin without delay, and without annexation, forced displacement or alteration of the territorial unity of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. "Illegal settlement activity, settler violence, and attempts to alter the demographic, legal or historical character of the occupied territory, including holy sites, must cease immediately. And it is imperative to advance a credible, irreversible and time-bound political horizon leading to Palestinian statehood, in accordance with international legitimacy." Pakistan, as part of the Group of Eight Arab and Islamic countries, he said, has joined the Board of Peace (BoP) in support of its mandate, as endorsed by UNSC resolution 2803. "We hope that the BoP, under the framework of resolution 2803, will lead to concrete steps towards the implementation of a permanent ceasefire; further scaling up of

humanitarian aid; reconstruction of Gaza; and realization of the right to self-determination of the people of Palestine through a credible, time-bound political process, consistent with international legitimacy and relevant UN resolutions, resulting in an independent, sovereign and contiguous state of Palestine based on pre-1967 borders with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital." "This is the ultimate goal supported by the international community," DPM Dar said, with an "indispensable" central role of the Palestinian Authority. Tomorrow, he said, Pakistan will participate in the inaugural meeting of the BoP with the objective of reinforcing ongoing diplomatic efforts. "We engage in this process with the firm conviction that sustained diplomacy, anchored in international law and the UN Charter and guided by accountability, provides the only viable pathway to a just and lasting peace." DPM Dar said there can be no durable peace without justice, no stability without accountability, and no sustainable solution without the realization of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. "Pakistan's solidarity with our Palestinian brothers and sisters and their just cause remains unwavering," he declared.

Not necessary to send soldiers to fight, says Trump

FROM PAGE 01
Ahead of the gathering, three sources told that Pakistan wants firm assurances from Washington before committing any troops to Gaza as part of the proposed ISF. Islamabad is seeking guarantees that the deployment would strictly be a peacekeeping mission and not involve disarming Hamas. President Trump, who is chairing the meeting, is expected to unveil a multi-billion-dollar reconstruction plan for Gaza and outline proposals for a UN-authorized stabilisation force for the Palestinian territory. Three government sources said during the Washington visit, PM Shehbaz wanted to better understand the goal of the ISF, what authority they were operating under and what the chain of command was before deciding on deploying troops. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif stressed on Thursday the need for an end to ceasefire violations in Gaza, saying that it was "very important" for long-lasting peace in the war-torn Strip.

US, Pak discuss Roosevelt Hotel future

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"This engagement was negotiated and stewarded by US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff under the leadership of President Donald J. Trump," it said. "To advance this partnership, both governments have signed an MoU formalising their cooperation," the ministry added. The statement said the MoU was signed by GSA Administrator Edward C Forst and Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb on behalf of Pakistan, and was witnessed by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Witkoff. "It establishes a structured, time-bound framework for joint evaluation of the technical, commercial, and economic parameters of cooperation, reflecting a shared commitment to transparent, disciplined, and mutually beneficial progress," the statement said.

USA and Canada on course to meet for Olympic men's ice hockey gold

MILAN: The USA and pre-tournament favourites Canada stayed on track to meet in the Olympic men's ice hockey final with quarter-final overtime wins on Wednesday. Mitch Marner scored in overtime as Canada saw off the Czech Republic 4-3 to reach the semi-finals. The Americans were also made to fight till the end against Sweden before Quinn Hughes netted 3min 27 sec into overtime for a 2-1 victory in front of thousands of US supporters in Milan's Santagiulia Arena. Canada go on to face reigning champions Finland and the USA will play Slovakia, with both semi-finals on Friday. Canada had cruised through the preliminary round and defeated the Czechs 5-0 just six days previously. But the 2024 world champions proved far tougher opponents this time until Marner applied the decisive touch.

"(It was) adrenaline: trust in your skill that you work on so hard," Marner said. "You just trust yourself to make a play there, and I was lucky enough to score." Macklin Celebrini put Canada ahead within four minutes, before Lukas Sedlak levelled four minutes later. The Czech Republic pulled ahead thanks to David Pastrnak's first goal of the tournament after a quarter of an hour. The Canadians raised their game in the second period, outshooting their opponents 17 to 5. But they lacked precision in the final touch and only a blatant foul by Michal Kempny opened up the space for Nathan MacKinnon to make it 2-2. Canada lost captain Sidney Crosby, a two-time Olympic champion in 2010 and 2014, with a leg injury that ruled him out for the rest of the game. The Czechs regained the lead with a

blistering counter finished off by Ondrej Palat. The Canadian reply came with a long-range shot from Nick Suzuki before Marner delivered the winner. The USA seized the initiative in their game with a second period goal from Dylan Larkin but Mika Zibanejad made it a fight for the Americans when he brought Sweden level in the third. Deep in overtime, Hughes skated in front of the Swedish goal and fired past the Swedish goaltender as the US bench and a large percentage of the crowd erupted in celebrations. Both Canada and the USA have rosters packed with players from the National Hockey League, who are competing at an Olympics for the first time since 2014. Earlier, Finland scraped through to the final four by beating Switzerland 3-2 in another contest that went to overtime, while Slovakia thrashed Germany 6-2. – **APP**

High-stakes showdown in Nepal's post-uprising polls

JHAPA: In Nepal's eastern plains, rival political flags depicting blue bells and red suns flutter over tea farms and brick homes – symbols of a local election campaign shaping landmark nationwide polls. Two prime ministerial candidates are going head-to-head in Jhapa-5, turning the sleepy district into a pivotal battleground in the Himalayan nation's March 5 elections – the first since deadly anti-corruption protests in September toppled the government. The district is the stronghold of Marxist leader KP Sharma Oli – the 73-year-old, four-time prime minister ousted by the unrest – who is confident of a return to power from a seat he has won multiple times. "There is no need to doubt," tough-talking Oli told reporters, as official campaigning kicked off this week. "There is no need for me to think that this is challenging." – **Agencies**

T20 World Cup: West Indies end group stage unbeaten with win over Italy

Shamar Joseph shines with 4/30 to guide West Indies to 42-run victory

KOLKATA: West Indies have topped their group in the first stage of the T20 World Cup after a 42-run win over Italy at Eden Gardens on Thursday. Setting a target of 166, the Caribbean side bowled Italy out for 123 in 18 overs, with their bowlers producing a stellar performance. JJ Smuts top-scored for Italy with 24 runs off 27 balls, including three boundaries, while Anthony Mosca contributed 19 off 12 deliveries, hitting a four and two sixes. Grant Stewart added 12 runs off seven balls, including a six, but other batters struggled to make an impact. Shamar Joseph starred with the ball for West Indies, claiming 4/30 in four overs. Matthew Forde took three wickets, Gudakesh Motie grabbed two, and Akeal Hosein chipped in with one. Batting first, West Indies made a shaky start, losing opener Brandon King on the first ball of the second over. He was dismissed by Ali Hasan after scoring four off six deliveries. The Caribbean side suffered another setback in the powerplay when Shimron Hetmyer fell cheaply for one off four balls to Thomas Draca, leaving the team at 31-2 in 4.1 overs. Skipper Shai Hope and Roston Chase then steadied the innings with a crucial partnership, guiding the total past the 50-run mark. However, their 64-run stand was broken in the 13th over when Chase was dismissed for 24 off 25 deliveries, including two fours, with the score at 95-3 in 12.3 overs. Hope was in top form with the bat and anchored the innings with a well-compiled T20I half-century, helping his side reach a competitive total. However, wickets continued to fall at regular intervals. – **Agencies**

Cuban opposition figure Ferrer supports Maduro-like US operation

MIAMI: Cuban opposition leader Jose Daniel Ferrer supports a US operation in his country akin to the one that ousted Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro should the communist leadership refuse to give up power, he told AFP in an interview Wednesday. "Cubans keep dying of hunger in prisons and on the streets, and they remain in power, oppressing and repressing the majority of the population," Ferrer, 55, said. "Therefore, if there's a Venezuela-style operation to be celebrated, I will do so, as will many other Cubans, with great pleasure." Ferrer, who has been living in exile in Miami since last October, welcomes any negotiations between the Cuban government and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio – himself a descendant of Cuban immigrants. The founding leader of the Patriotic Union of Cuba dissident group – who has spent more than 13 years in prison – said that the talks are Washington's way of giving opportunities to Cuban authorities to transition to democracy without having to take "more forceful actions." After a US military raid on Caracas saw the capture of Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, on January 3, Maduro's second-in-command Delcy Rodriguez was made interim president on the condition she would comply with Washington's demands – including the end of oil sales to Cuba. The administration of US President Donald Trump views such moves as a first step toward a democratic transition, something which Ferrer said could potentially work for his home nation as well. – **Agencies**

Lahore Qalandars announce cricket event for Press Club members

OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Super League champions Lahore Qalandars have announced a two-day cricket tournament for members of the Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi Press Clubs to promote healthy sporting activities among journalists. The announcement was made by CEO Atif Naem Rana addressed

the media alongside President Lahore Press Club Arshad Ansari. Atif Rana said the franchise aims to celebrate journalists by giving them an opportunity to take the field themselves. He added that the match format and schedule, including the possibility of holding it during Ramadan, will be decided by the respective press clubs. Responding to questions, Rana clarified that their separation from hockey

activities is temporary due to administrative matters, reiterating their commitment to promoting Pakistan's national sport. On the recent dip in form of Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf, he said players need focus and continued support. Arshad Ansari praised Lahore Qalandars for promoting grassroots cricket and termed the journalists' tournament a positive and healthy initiative for the media community.



Turkish, Bulgarian scientists uncover Antarctica's geological history

Researchers are examining what they describe as Antarctica's geological memory to understand how the continent transformed from a temperate landmass into a frozen environment over millions of years

HORSESHOE ISLAND: Turkish and Bulgarian geologists participating in Türkiye's 10th National Antarctic Science Expedition have launched a joint research initiative to uncover Antarctica's geological history and assess its implications for future climate change. The expedition is coordinated by the Scientific and Technological Research Institution (Tubitak) of Türkiye's Marmara Research Center Polar Research Institute under the Industry and Technology Ministry and the Turkish Presidency. Researchers are examining what they describe as Antarctica's geological memory to understand how the continent transformed from a temperate landmass into a frozen environment over millions of years. Goksu Uslular, deputy leader of the expedi-

tion, is working alongside Stoyan Georgiev, an associate professor at the Bulgarian Antarctic Institute, on geological fieldwork on Horseshoe Island, where Türkiye's Antarctic research camp is located. Uslular told Anadolu that the joint effort focuses on mapping the island's magmatic history, which she said would significantly advance understanding of Antarctica's geological evolution and the long-term effects of climate change. "Horseshoe Island, located in West Antarctica, hosts rocks from different magmatic phases that bear the traces of this geological evolution," she said. "Jurassic-Cretaceous magmatic rocks are especially widespread on the island, and additionally, pillow lavas, agglomerates, and various volcanic units

formed in submarine or shallow marine environments are also found in this region." Uslular said these rock formations offer important paleoclimatic evidence and help experts understand the large-scale glaciation process that began about 34 million years ago. Georgiev told Anadolu that he joined the Turkish research team to examine mineralization patterns on the island, adding that his fieldwork identified notable gabbro outcrops containing copper mineralization. "The most prominent structures visible in the field are thin veins of green malachite and green azurite minerals – these have developed as oxidation products of copper minerals," he said, noting that they represent a shallow epithermal system unique to the area. The mineralization is

linked to an extensive magmatic history spanning from the Jurassic period, about 176 million years ago, to the Cretaceous period, around 76 million years ago. Georgiev said these complex formations developed through subduction zones and slab rollback tectonic processes over long geological timescales, adding that the diverse magmatic phases observed on the Island suggest distinct metallogenic characteristics that remain largely unexplored. The findings are expected to contribute to understanding long-term climate change by reconstructing past environmental conditions. Samples collected during the expedition will undergo detailed analysis through international collaborations to refine the geological timeline of the region. – **APP**

France, India to jointly produce Rafale jets

FROM PAGE 01
command a new bunch of Rafales ... 114 ... and to co-produce in India," Macron said. The Defence Acquisition Council of India's defence ministry last week gave initial clearance to acquire 114 more Rafale jets for the air force, besides other planes and missiles, months after the worst fighting in decades between India and Pakistan. So far, India has purchased 36 Rafales for its air force and ordered another 26 marine versions of the jet for the navy. Details of the Rafale deal, including plans for co-production, expected to be sealed after technical and commercial negotiations, are yet to be made public.

Iranian, Saudi FMs hold talks over phone

FROM PAGE 01
For his part, the Saudi foreign minister expressed gratitude for the information shared by the Iranian foreign minister and hoped that the ongoing discussions would continue until a result is reached.

Trump hails PM Shehbaz, 'tough...'

FROM PAGE 01
leaving for peace board meeting made it clear that Pakistan would seek a clarification from the peace board administration about the Gaza peace force.

Briefs

Gold price surges by Rs 7,900 per tola

ISLAMABAD: The price of 24 karat per tola gold increased by Rs 7,900 and was sold at Rs 523,962 on Thursday compared to its sale at Rs 516,062 on the previous trading day. All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association reported The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs 6,773 to Rs 449,212 from Rs 442,439, whereas the price of 10 grams of 22 karat gold went up by Rs 6,209 to Rs 411,792 from Rs 405,583. The price of per tola silver increased by Rs 358 to Rs 8,404 from Rs 8,046, while that of 10 grams silver rose by Rs 307 to Rs 7,205 from Rs 6,898. The price of gold in the international market increased by \$79 to \$5,012 from \$4,933, whereas that of silver rose by \$3.58 to \$79.20, the Association reported.—APP

Seminar on industry-academia collaboration

SIALKOT: Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) President Syed Ahtesham Mazhar attended a strategic seminar titled "Industry-Academia Collaboration: The Missing Link for Global Growth - Lessons from China" at SCII Auditorium, here on Thursday. The session featured insightful perspectives from Dr. Raza Ullah Shah and was effectively moderated by Prof. Muhammad Umar of Wuhan College (PhD in Finance, Dongbei University). The discussion highlighted practical lessons from China's innovation ecosystem, emphasizing stronger industry-academia linkages, effective research integration and technology transfer, sustainable partnerships with universities and ORICs, and innovation-driven strategies to enhance Pakistan's export competitiveness.—APP

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Malaysian envoy for boosting trade ties with Pakistan

ICCI President Sardar Tahir Mehmood acknowledged the current trade imbalance and stressed the need for broader market access and diversification of Pakistani exports, particularly in agriculture, manufacturing and halal products

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The High Commissioner of Malaysia Dato' Mohammad Azhar Mazlan has reaffirmed his country's strong commitment to deepening economic and business relations with Pakistan, emphasizing that while political ties remain robust, there is significant room to expand and rebalance bilateral trade.

Addressing the business community at the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) here on Thursday, the High Commissioner highlighted the longstanding friendship between the two nations, recalling that Pakistan was among the earliest countries to recognize Malaysia's independence in 1957 and supported its constitutional development. He also acknowledged the historic role of Pakistanis who stood with Malaysia during pre-independence challenges, describing the relationship as one rooted in brotherhood and mutual respect. Referring to the visit of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to Ma-



aysia last year, he noted that seven Memorandums of Understanding were signed, including collaboration in the halal sector. Malaysia committed to importing up to USD 200 million worth of halal meat annually from Pakistan, with approximately USD 100 million already imported. Malaysia is also sourcing agro-products such as potatoes, onions and basmati rice from Pakistan, where Pakistan ranks as the second-largest rice supplier to Malaysia.

He observed that current bilateral trade, valued at approximately USD 1.6-1.8 billion, remains below potential and is tilted in Malaysia's favor. As a net food importer serving a population of 34 million, Malaysia sees strong potential to increase imports of Pakistani poultry, dairy products, halal meat and other agricultural commodities to help rebalance trade.

The High Commissioner emphasized the need to convert political goodwill into tangible

business outcomes and called for structured, sector-focused engagements between ICCI and Malaysian business chambers. He candidly noted the importance of addressing perception gaps and building stronger trust between business communities. Highlighting people-to-people linkages, he shared that over 100,000 Pakistanis reside in Malaysia, contributing USD 400-500 million annually in remittances and serving as a vital bridge between the two econ-

omies. Strong air connectivity between Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi and Kuala Lumpur further facilitates trade, tourism and investment flows, he added.

He also identified pharmaceuticals and emerging technologies, particularly Artificial Intelligence, as promising areas of cooperation. With Malaysia moving toward an aging society by 2030, increased demand for healthcare and pharmaceutical products presents opportunities for Pakistani exporters. At the same time, collaboration under Malaysia's industrial transformation and digital policies could leverage Pakistan's large youth population and technological potential.

Earlier, in his welcome address, ICCI President Sardar Tahir Mehmood stated that the visit reaffirms the longstanding friendship between Pakistan and Malaysia while opening new avenues for private-sector collaboration. He acknowledged the current trade imbalance and stressed the need for broader market access and diversification of Pakistani exports, particularly in agriculture, manufacturing

and halal products.

He noted that the halal meat sector presents immediate export potential of up to USD 200 million annually, with scope for further expansion as certification and trust frameworks strengthen. Leveraging Malaysia's global leadership in halal standards and Pakistan's production capacity, he said, can become a cornerstone of a more balanced and mutually beneficial economic partnership.

ICCI Senior Vice President Tahir Ayub expressed confidence that through sustained engagement and targeted sectoral cooperation, Pakistan and Malaysia can unlock greater trade volumes and shared prosperity in the years ahead.

Those present on the occasion also included Vice President Irfan Chaudhry, First Secretary Zulasri Rosdi, Executive members Imran Minhas, Zulqurnain Abbasi, Chairman ICCI Standing Committee on ASEAN Chaudhry Mohammad Ali, Secretary General Ghulam Murtaza ICCI member Dr. Mohammad Usman, Nawaz Basra, Ms. Nageena Khaliq and other.

Iran says no country can deprive it of enrichment rights

Separately, the Iranian and Russian navies were conducting joint drills in the Sea of Oman and the northern Indian Ocean on Thursday

TEHRAN: Iran's atomic energy chief Mohammad Eslami said no country can deprive the Islamic republic of its right to nuclear enrichment, after US President Donald Trump again hinted at military action following talks in Geneva. "The basis of the nuclear industry is enrichment. Whatever you want to do in the nuclear process, you need nuclear fuel," said Eslami, according to a video published by Etemad daily on Thursday "Iran's nuclear program is proceeding according to the rules of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and no country can deprive Iran of the right to peacefully benefit from this technology." The comments follow the second round of Oman-mediated talks between Tehran and Washington in Geneva on Tuesday. The two foes had held an initial round of discussions on February 6 in Oman, the first since previous talks collapsed during the 12-day Iran-Israel war in June. The United States briefly joined the war alongside Israel, striking Iranian nuclear facilities. On Wednesday, Trump again suggested the United States might strike Iran in a post on his Truth Social site. He warned Britain against giving up sovereignty over the Chagos Islands in the Indian Ocean, saying that the archipelago's Diego Garcia air base might be needed were Iran not to agree a deal, "in order to eradicate a potential attack by a highly unstable and dangerous regime." Washington has repeatedly called for zero enrichment, but has also sought to address Iran's ballistic missile program and its support for militant groups in the region — issues which Israel has pushed to include in the talks. Western countries accuse the Islamic republic of seeking to acquire nuclear weapons. Tehran denies having such military ambitions but insists on its right to this technology for civilian purposes. Trump, who has ratcheted up pressure on Iran to reach an agreement, has deployed a significant naval force to the region, which he has described as an "armada." After sending the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln and escort battleships to the Gulf in January, he recently indicated that a second aircraft carrier, the Gerald Ford, would depart "very soon" for the Middle East. Meanwhile, Iranian naval forces this week conducted military drills in the Gulf and around the strategic Strait of Hormuz. Separately, the Iranian and Russian navies were conducting joint drills in the Sea of Oman and the northern Indian Ocean on Thursday.—Agencies

Turkiye fires up coal pollution even as it hosts COP31

AFSIN: Kaddafi Polat rarely mentions his own health after decades of breathing the polluted air blanketing his village beneath the towering chimneys of a coal-fired power plant in southern Türkiye. What troubles him most is his children. Fine dust settles on cars, laundry and the narrow streets of Cogulhan, a village in the Afsin district of Kahramanmaraş province, leaving a grey film over daily life — and over the now-rotting playground where his kids once played. Afsin?Elibistan is one of the country's most polluting power plants, environmentalists say, but the government is planning to expand it, even as Türkiye prepares to host the COP31 UN climate summit next November. "In the mornings, when the school bus comes, dust rises everywhere," Polat, 52, told AFP at a local coffeehouse. "Children breathe this in, what will happen when they're 30 or 40? As a father, you worry." Once home to 10,000 people, most of the village's residents have fled because of the pollution, locals say. Only a few hundred are left. Crumbling houses line the streets, watched over by a solitary clock tower. The chimneys of the power plant dominate the skyline, pumping plumes of ash and smoke.—APP

King Charles' brother held for alleged misconduct in office

LONDON: A UK police force has arrested Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor on suspicion of misconduct in public office. The Thames Valley Police, an agency that covers areas west of London, including Mountbatten-Windsor's former home, said it was "assessing" reports that the former prince Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, sent trade reports to convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein in 2010. The police force did not name Mountbatten-Windsor, as is normal under UK law. But when asked if he had been arrested, the force pointed to a statement saying that they had arrested a man in his sixties. "Following a thorough assessment, we have now opened an investigation into this allegation of misconduct in public office," the statement said. "It is important that we protect the integrity and objectivity of our investigation as we work with our partners to investigate this alleged offense. UK condemns 10-year sentence for British couple in Iran LONDON: British foreign minister Yvette Cooper on Thursday condemned as "totally unjustifiable" the 10-year sentence given to two British nationals detained in Iran, saying the government would continue pressing for their release. Craig and Lindsay Foreman had been charged with espionage after Iran accused them of gathering information in several parts of the country. "We will pursue this case relentlessly with the Iranian government until we see Craig and Lindsay Foreman safely returned to the UK and reunited with their family," Cooper said in a statement.—APP

Israeli actions raising 'ethnic cleansing' fears in West Bank, Gaza:UN

GENEVA: Israel's increased attacks and forcible transfers of Palestinians "raise concerns over ethnic cleansing" in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the United Nations said Thursday. The UN human rights office said the cumulative impact of Israel's military conduct during the war in Gaza, plus its blockade of the territory, had inflicted living conditions "increasingly incompatible with Palestinians' continued existence as a group in Gaza." "Intensified attacks, the methodical destruction of entire neighborhoods and the denial of humanitarian assistance appeared to aim at a permanent demographic shift in Gaza," the office said in a report. "This, together with forcible transfers, which appear to aim at a permanent displacement, raise concerns over ethnic cleansing in Gaza and the West Bank." The report looked at November 1, 2024 to October 31, 2025. In the occupied West Bank and annexed East Jerusalem, the report said the "systematic use of unlawful force" by Israeli security forces, "widespread" arbitrary detention and the "extensive unlawful demolition" of Palestinian homes was being carried out to "systematically discriminate, oppress, control and dominate the Palestinian people." "These violations were 'altering the character, status and demographic composition of the occupied West Bank, raising serious concerns of ethnic cleansing,'" it said.—APP

Beloved teacher in Morocco unmasked

KHENIFRA: For decades in the Moroccan town of Khenifra, Jacques Leveugle was simply known as the thin Frenchman who swept the streets at dawn, offered free language lessons and organized outings for schoolchildren. He spoke fluent Arabic and Morocco's dialect, as well as Shilha, a Berber language widely spoken in the region, skills neighbors said helped him integrate into the community. He rode his bicycle to the local market, dressed simply in jeans and a button-down shirt, and opened a small library for children in the working-class Lassiri neighborhood. Now the 79-year-old is behind bars and under formal investigation in France, accused of raping and sexually assaulting 89 boys over more than five decades across several countries, a case made public by prosecutors in France last week. They said Leveugle also acknowledged smothering his mother to death when she was in the terminal phase of cancer, and later killing his 92-year-old aunt. Many of the sexual abuses occurred in North Africa, where Leveugle spent much of his life and built a reputation as a devoted teacher and a respectful man. The crimes were discovered when a relative of Leveugle's found his digital memoir on a USB drive and turned it over to authorities. In Morocco, where he lived until his arrest in 2024, he is suspected of abusing more than a dozen boys, Grenoble Prosecutor Etienne Manteaux told The Associated Press. In neighboring Algeria, where Leveugle worked as a foreign language teacher for eight years in the 1960s and 1970s, he is suspected of abusing at least two children. The revelations have sent shock waves in both countries, and renewed attention to child exploitation in a region where activists say abuse remains persistent and underreported. "This case is of exceptional seriousness and naturally provokes deep indignation," Najat Anwar, president of Moroccan child protection association Don't Touch my Child, told The AP. "We are prepared to join the case as a civil party ... if Moroccan witnesses or victims come forward." The AP spoke with a dozen people who directly knew Leveugle, including neighbors in Morocco and former students in Algeria, as well as Moroccan officials briefed on the case. Those who knew him described a man widely viewed as discreet, helpful, and who loved to spend time with kids. On the narrow streets of Khenifra's Lassiri neighborhood, home to many conservative Moroccans, the crisp sweetness of a winter morning contrasts sharply with what residents describe as a sense of shame they feel since prosecutor's revealed Leveugle's alleged crimes last week. They feel insulted and humiliated. Many are now considering moving out. They all spoke on condition of anonymity out of fear of harassment or retribution. They pointed toward Leveugle's house, an unfinished, unpainted, single-story building surrounded by fig trees, sitting alongside a river. Children play nearby. Residents said "Monsieur Jacques," as he was known, funded local projects and helped people find jobs, sometimes even giving out cash. Khenifra has long had one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, and many residents work in the informal sector. People often leave town in search of better prospects.—DNA

FPCCI president welcomes notification, thanks govt

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad (PR). Atif Ikram Sheikh, President of Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry, has warmly welcomed the issuance of the DLT notification and expressed his sincere gratitude to the Government of Pakistan for addressing the longstanding concerns of the rice exporting community. They stated that this important development has been made possible after continuous efforts, persistent engagement, and constructive dialogue between FPCCI and the concerned government authorities.

He acknowledged the positive and responsive role of the government in recognizing the genuine demands of the exporters and facilitating the growth of Pakistan's export sector. Mr. Atif Ikram & Mr. Karim Aziz emphasized that the timely issuance of this notification will provide much-needed financial relief to rice exporters, enhance their liquidity position, and strengthen Pakistan's competitiveness in international markets. They noted that the rice sector is a vital contributor to national exports and plays a significant role in earning valuable foreign exchange for the country. The President FPCCI extended heartfelt congratulations to all rice exporters across Pakistan on this achievement and appreciated their resilience, commitment, and contribution to the national economy. They reiterated that FPCCI will continue to raise the voice of the business community at every forum and

will work closely with policymakers to ensure sustainable export growth and economic stability. FPCCI remains committed to supporting all sectors

of the economy and to advancing policies that promote trade, industry, and investment for a stronger and more prosperous Pakistan.



S. Korea's Auto exports up over 20% in Jan

SEOUL: South Korea's auto exports rose 21.7 percent from a year earlier in January, driven by robust shipments of eco-friendly models and a larger number of working days, government data showed Thursday. The combined value of automobile exports came to US\$6.07 billion last month, the second-highest for any January, thanks to strong demand for electric vehicles (EVs) and hybrid cars, according to the data from the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Resources. EV exports climbed 21.2 percent on-year to \$780 million, while shipments of hybrid cars surged 85.5 percent to \$1.71 billion. The ministry said the January performance is also attributable to a greater number of working days for the month in 2026 compared with last year. In 2025, the traditional Lunar New Year holiday fell in January, leading to a fewer number of working days. This year, the extended holiday fell in February. By destination, exports to the United States expanded 19.2 percent on-year to \$2.66 billion.—APP

Briefs

Political dialogue with Afghanistan vital for regional peace: Kundi

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Faisal Karim Kundi, Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, on Thursday stressed the need for sustained political dialogue with Afghanistan, saying durable solutions to external and internal challenges depended on collective political engagement. Speaking at a dialogue session titled "Pakistan-Afghanistan Security, Trade, and Regional Economic Affairs" at the University of Peshawar, organised by its Department of International Relations in collaboration with businessman Shahid Shinwari at the Governor House, Mr Kundi said a peaceful Afghanistan was essential not only for Pakistan but for the entire region. He said Pakistan supported strong bilateral relations and enhanced trade with Afghanistan and other neighbouring countries, adding that sustainable peace across the region was key to economic and business development.

End of mob culture in Bangladesh

DHAKA: Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed said the mob culture in Bangladesh has ended with the BNP government assumed office through the landslide victory in the 13th parliament election. "Mob culture in Bangladesh ends. The mob culture in no way to be tolerated," he added. He made the remarks while speaking to reporters on his first working day at the Home Ministry in Bangladesh Secretariat here this afternoon. The Home Minister said they will not tolerate anymore occupying the highways and roads and mob culture in the name of realizing the demands. "The logical demands will be met through due process," he said. He, however, said meetings, rallies and other lawful democratic rights can be exercised. Ahmed, also a Standing Committee member of BNP said his government would transform the Bangladesh Police into a people-friendly force with regaining its lost glory. — APP

PHF President Tariq Bugti tenders resigns

PM Approves Resignation of PHF President; Rana Mujahid PHF Secretary also resigns; Wani to look after hockey federation affairs

DNA

LAHORE: In a dramatic development shaking Pakistan hockey, Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) President Mir Tariq Hussain Masoori Bugti announced his resignation on Wednesday, sending his resignation letter directly to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the patron-in-chief of the federation. Bugti held the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) entirely responsible for the gross mismanagement during the national team's FIH Men's Pro League 2025-26 campaign in Hobart, Australia, and called for sweeping reforms to make the PHF autonomous like the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB). Addressing the media, Bugti said the reliance on PSB must end immediately. "Hockey needs its own board, just like the PCB, which generates its own resources. We cannot keep depending on PSB for everything. The federation must be empowered to raise funds independently and manage its affairs professionally," he declared. He accused certain elements within the setup of creating hurdles and said the Pro League arrangements collapsed due to PSB's failure to handle logistics, accommodation, travel, and finances despite adequate funding being released by the government. The resignation comes amid the raging controversy over the national team's disastrous Australia tour. Players, led by captain Aamjad Shakil Butt, publicly alleged they were forced to clean toilets, wash dishes and clothes, cook their own meals, and stay in substandard Airbnbs after hotel bookings allegedly fell through. The team suffered heavy defeats and returned home humiliated, with Butt claiming mental torture and restrictions on speaking to the media. In a strong retaliatory move, Bugti announced a two-year ban on Pakistan captain Aamjad Shakil Butt from both in-



ternational and domestic hockey, accusing him and some players of "playing politics" and undermining the federation. "Some players chose politics over performance. This cannot be tolerated," Bugti said. He demanded that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and the highest authorities immediately constitute a neutral inquiry committee. "Whoever is responsible for this mess must be taken to task. A neutral committee should investigate the entire episode

without bias," he urged. Pakistan hockey, once a global powerhouse with Olympic gold medals in 1960, 1968 and 1984, has been in steady decline for decades due to chronic financial woes, administrative interference and lack of autonomy. Unlike the PCB, which runs as a profitable, independent entity generating billions through sponsorships and media rights, the PHF remains heavily dependent on annual grants from the PSB and government. Repeated attempts at reform have failed, leading to frequent leadership changes and poor international results. The latest Pro League fiasco exposed deep cracks. The government had released substantial funds, including over Rs10 million for the Australia leg, yet arrangements collapsed. PSB officials claimed they fulfilled their role, while PHF pointed fingers at external directives, including a Senate committee ruling that shifted logistical responsibility to PSB. Captain Butt's explosive press conference upon return — where he admitted initially downplaying the issues to "protect Pakistan's image" — forced the crisis into the open, prompting Prime Minister Sharif to order a high-level probe. Bugti's resignation and the ban on the captain have intensified calls for complete overhaul. Analysts say the episode underscores the urgent need for an autonomous PHF that can market the sport, attract sponsors, and operate free from bureaucratic control — exactly the PCB model Bugti advocated. Sports circles are now watching whether the Prime Minister accepts the resignation and sets up the demanded neutral committee. Until then, Pakistan hockey remains in turmoil, with its future hanging in the balance. The federation has summoned players and management for an emergency meeting, but the two-year ban on the national captain has already sparked outrage among fans and former Olympians.

'Imran Khan doesn't want to become Nawaz Sharif'

Federal Information Minister Attaullah Tarar says there is no deal or concession regarding PTI founder

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: With PTI founder Imran Khan behind bars for more than two years, a leader from the former ruling party has said that he doesn't want to be released via a deal like PML-N President Nawaz Sharif. "When you sit in these kinds of negotiations, you have to give many concessions too. The biggest example before us is of Nawaz [Sharif]," PTI's Barrister Umair Niazi said during a response to a question. "He paid a price for those negotiations; he had to leave practical politics, had to leave the country, go into exile, and had to sign a paper deal," the PTI leader said as to why Imran didn't want to be released. Responding to host Hamid Mir's question whether Imran was not making a deal because he doesn't want to become Nawaz, Barrister Niazi said: "It is exactly that kind of situation". Barrister Niazi's remarks come as the PTI, since 2023, has been at odds with the ruling coalition and has even marched multiple times to Islamabad in bid to secure Imran's release.



ISLAMABAD: His Excellency Mr. Khazar Farhadov, Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan to Pakistan, called on the Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination Dr. Musadik Malik. — DNA

At least 16 killed as first-floor gas blast brings down part of building

Deaths in incident include four children and five women in Soldier Bazaar No 3

BUREAU REPORT

KARACHI: At least 16 people, including four children and five women, were killed and 14 others injured following a cylinder explosion in a three-storey residential building in Soldier Bazaar No 3, rescue officials said on Thursday. The blast occurred on the first floor on Wednesday night, causing part of the building to collapse, rescue sources on the ground said and added that all the available resources were being used in the search operation. Police said initial information suggests the explosion was caused by a gas leak, possibly from a cylinder or a gas suction machine. Rescue teams launched a search operation and pulled several people from the rubble. A 10-year-old

girl, identified as Nazia, and a 60-year-old man, Mohammad Riaz, were among those killed. Rescue officials said the body of a 17-year-old girl was recovered from the rubble. They also said the body of a 19-year-old girl has been recovered from the debris. The body of a woman was recovered, and rescuers later recovered the body of another woman, while the identification of another victim was under way. Officials said a 14-year-old girl was rescued in an injured condition. Children were among the wounded, who were shifted to the hospital. Two people are still believed to be trapped under the debris. Rescue authorities said narrow streets around the building were making the operation difficult. Police cordoned off the area and tightened security as search efforts continued.

Foreign selling, weak earnings drag PSX lower

BUREAU REPORT

KARACHI: The bourse fell on Thursday as continuous foreign selling and weak corporate results kept sentiment fragile, while thinner participation on the first day of Ramadan saw slower trade after the previous session's sharp rebound. The Pakistan Stock Exchange's benchmark KSE-100 Index traded between a high of 179,279.74 (up 426.65 points, or 0.24%) and a low of 173,893.54 (down 4,959.55 points, or -2.77%) against the previous close of 178,853.09. Mohammed Sohail, CEO of Topline Securities, cited "continuous foreign selling and weak corporate results" as causes for the bearish trend. "Today the volumes are lacklustre

due to the 1st Ramadan day and generally lower activity. The sharp rise yesterday is seeing some profit taking today and likely to continue depending on the quality of results," said AAH Soomro, an independent investment and economic analyst. "Current Account data has paused the correction phase," he added. Foreign direct investment (FDI) in 7MFY26 (July-January) fell 41% year-on-year to \$981.4 million, central bank data showed. Net FDI stood at \$173 million in January, reversing a \$135 million net outflow in the previous month, while cross-border investments were down 25.5% from a year earlier. China remained the largest investor, though net Chinese investment declined to \$495.5 million from \$857.1 million a year earlier. Sector-wise, power inflows fell to \$541.8 million from \$890.3 million, while telecoms posted outflows of \$442.7 million, as compared to \$79.6 million outflows last year. Financial businesses attracted \$460 million, up from \$432.4 million. In Wednesday's market Treasury bills auction, the government raised Rs651 billion (realised value), with yields mixed, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The one-month cut-off eased 5 bps to 10.1482%, while the three-month rose 9 bps to 10.2853%, the six-month increased 12 bps to 10.4437%, and the 12-month climbed 20 bps to 10.5996%.

Bill Gates cancels India summit speech to 'ensure focus' on AI

Gates this month said he regrets "every minute" he spent with Jeffrey Epstein, as his former wife Melinda said he still had questions to answer over his relationship with the late convicted sexual offender

DNA

NEW DELHI: Bill Gates has cancelled his speech that was scheduled for Thursday at a major AI summit in India, the Gates Foundation said, after the Microsoft founder was named in the Epstein files. "After careful consideration, and to ensure the focus remains on the AI Summit's key priorities, Mr. Gates will not be delivering his keynote address," the foundation said in a statement. "The Gates Foundation remains fully committed to our work in India to advance our shared health and development goals," it said. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and tech CEOs will speak about the opportunities and threats posed by artificial intelligence at the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi on Thursday. The Gates Foundation said the president of its Africa and India offices would speak instead. Gates this month said he regrets "every minute" he spent with Jeffrey Epstein, as his former wife Melinda said he still had ques-



tions to answer over his relationship with the late convicted sexual offender. The latest tranche of documents released by the US Justice Department contained emails between many prominent figures and Epstein — often revealing warm friendships, illicit financial dealings and private photos. In a draft email among the documents, Epstein alleged Gates engaged in ex-

tramarital affairs. Epstein wrote that his relationship with Gates ranged from "helping Bill to get drugs, in order to deal with consequences of sex with Russian girls, to facilitating his illicit trysts, with married women." "Every minute I spent with him, I regret, and I apologize," Gates, a billionaire philanthropist, told 9News Australia in an interview. "That email was never sent. The email is false," he said. "I don't know what his thinking was there. Was he trying to attack me in some way?" Gates's spokesperson issued a similar denial after the fresh cache of millions of files related to the investigation into Epstein, who died by suicide in prison in 2019, were released. "The only thing these documents demonstrate is Epstein's frustration that he did not have an ongoing relationship with Gates and the lengths he would go to entrap and defame," the spokesperson said. Melinda French Gates told US National Public Radio that the document dump brought back "memories of some very, very painful times in my marriage".

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