



Islamabad POST

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Malaysia envoy Dato Azhar Mazlan hosts Iftar dinner for friends

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Italy wants to get migrants from Pakistan

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US President builds case for Iran attack

Detailed News On Page-08



ISPR claims

34 terrorists killed in separate engagements

Fitna al Khawarij is a term the state uses for terrorists belonging to the banned TTP while Fitna al Hindustan is a term designated by the state for terrorist organisations in Balochistan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said on Wednesday that a total of 34 terrorists were killed in separate operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. In a statement, the military's media affairs wing said that over the last few days, security forces had conducted a series of "high tempo, intelligence-driven operations" aimed at eliminating Indian proxies Fitna Al Khawarij and Fitna Al Hindustan. Fitna al Khawarij is a term the state uses for terrorists belonging to the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) while Fitna al Hindustan is a term designated by the state for terrorist organisations in Balochistan. The statement said that on Feb 24, 26 terrorists belonging to Fitna Al Khawarij were killed in four separate engagements in KP, while eight terrorists belonging to Fitna Al Hindustan were killed in an operation in Balochistan's Sambaza.

Giving a breakdown, ISPR said that the movement of a group of terrorists trying to infiltrate through the Pak-Afghan border was picked up by security forces in KP's North Waziristan. It said troops engaged the terrorists, killing one in the process. "It is significant to highlight that the killed kharji has been identified as an Afghan national," the statement said. It went on to say that an intelligence-based operation (IBO) was conducted in KP's Lakki Marwat district. During the operation, troops effectively engaged the terrorists' location and after an intense fire exchange, three militants were killed, it said. According to ISPR, 10 terrorists were killed in Narmi Khel in KP's Bannu district while 12 were killed in North Waziristan's Mir Ali. It went on to say that troops also conducted an IBO in Sambaza in Balochistan's Zhob district. "After an intense fire exchange, eight terrorists belonging to

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Six killed after gunmen open fire at house

Police say bodies of those killed and injured in firing shifted to Turbat Hospital

BUREAU REPORT

QUETTA: At least six people have been killed after unknown gunmen opened fire at a house in the Buleda area of Balochistan's Turbat, the police said on Wednesday. The deceased includes a woman, whereas two others have been injured in the incident, added the police. The bodies of the deceased and the injured have been transferred to Turbat Hospital for medico-legal formalities. The incident comes as the province, along with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, remains the most affected by violence and terrorist incidents. Last month, Balochistan witnessed coordinated terror attacks — linked to the banned outfit the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) — across the province with militants targeting Quetta, Mastung, Nushki, Dalbandin, Kharan, Panjgur, Tump, Gwadar, and Pasni. The attacks martyred 36 innocent civilians, including women and children.

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ISLAMABAD: Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif in Islamabad. — DNA

Relief for businesses

PM Shehbaz hints at reducing direct taxes in upcoming budget

Indirect taxes taken from consumers, are not being deposited with the govt, laments premier

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday stressed the need to reduce direct taxes in the forthcoming federal budget, acknowledging that sustainable economic growth cannot be achieved by increasing the tax burden. "How long can we keep stretching this?" the prime minister said. "[...] Unless there is growth and unless production and exports increase, and unless you invest and attract foreign direct investment, how much more tax can you continue to impose?" The premier stated this while addressing the inaugural session of the Pakistan Governance Forum 2026 in Islamabad today. PM Shehbaz emphasised that in the upcoming budget, expected in the coming months, the government would need to cut direct taxes across the board. The objective, he noted, was to facilitate the business community and provide confidence to investors. He added that entrepreneurs and investors should feel assured that their capital would not be eroded by excessive taxation. The prime minister also underlined the

need to enhance tax net and said currently due to different initiatives, the country's tax to GDP had reached to 10.5%. He also highlighted the importance of growth and production, exports and investment, foreign direct investment (FDI) and across the board reduction in indirect taxes in the upcoming fiscal budget. The prime minister regretted that indirect taxes taken from the consumers and end users were not being deposited with the government which was a huge injustice with the nation. He underlined the significance of the whole of the government's approach to tackling pending economic challenges, and urged all stakeholders to move ahead on the path of economic growth with collective endeavours. The prime minister said in June 2023, Pakistan was at the verge of default, but with the grace of Allah Almighty and with collective efforts, the government pulled the country back, and within two years, macro economic situation was stabilised due to the great teamwork of the federal, provincial governments and the military hierarchy.

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Pakistani visitors to the UK can now use eVisas

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Those travelling to the UK, including tourists, can now use a new eVisa system, receiving confirmation by email rather than stickers in passports. Visitors will continue to submit their applications online and attend a visa application centre to provide biometrics. Successful applicants will have a digital record of their immigration status provided through an eVisa, accessible through an online UK Visas and Immigration account. It means applicants no longer need to attend a visa application centre a second time to collect their passport, instead holding on to it after their biometrics session.

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Earthquake jolts Islamabad, KP areas

FIJAZ CHAUDHRY

ISLAMABAD: An earthquake measuring 5.6 magnitude on the Richter scale struck parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Islamabad and Rawalpindi on Wednesday, causing panic among residents in several localities. According to the seismological centre, the quake originated in the Hindu Kush region of Afghanistan and was recorded at a depth of 114 kilometres. Tremors were felt in major cities such as Peshawar, Rawalpindi, Swabi and its outskirts. Shocks were also felt in Bajaur, Damer city and nearby localities.

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Mohsin Naqvi in Greece Pakistan, Greece to check human smuggling

The ministers also reached consensus on finalizing a migration cooperation agreement that has remained pending for the past two years, paving the way for formalized collaboration

DNA

ROME: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi held a productive meeting in Rome with Greece's Minister for Migration and Asylum, Athanasios Plevris, as part of his high-level engagements in Italy focused on addressing irregular migration flows and strengthening bilateral ties. The discussions centered on concerted efforts to combat illegal immigration and human smuggling networks operating between the two regions. Both ministers expressed strong commitment to

joint actions aimed at dismantling these criminal operations and agreed to enhance coordination in the future. They emphasized the importance of promoting legal migration channels as a practical alternative to irregular routes. In this regard, the two sides decided to increase the issuance of work visas to facilitate orderly and legal mobility for Pakistani workers seeking opportunities in Greece. The ministers also reached consensus on finalizing a migration cooperation agreement that has remained pending for the past two years, paving

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Briefs

IMF mission opens talks

DNA

ISLAMABAD: An International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission led by Iva Petrova on Wednesday began technical-level discussions with the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) in Karachi for the third review of the \$7bn Extended Financing Facility (EFF) and the second review of the \$1.1bn Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF). The mission will remain in Karachi this week and begin policy discussions with the federal and provincial governments on Monday, with the customary opening roundup with Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb. The minister on Wednesday said the government was well-positioned for a successful review of its loan programmes. Talking briefly to journalists after a parliamentary committee meeting.

'Pakistan wary of militants attack'

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has boosted security and arrested dozens of suspects as it fears a rising wave of militant attacks following its air strikes in Afghanistan, Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry said on Wednesday. "Our forces are on high-alert to combat any attacks," Chaudhry told Reuters. "You know the militants always react whenever we go after their hideouts in Afghanistan." Pakistan carried out air strikes on targets in Afghanistan over the weekend on what it said were militant targets responsible for a spate of recent suicide bombings on Pakistani soil. Islamabad blames Kabul for allowing the fighters to use Afghanistan as a safe haven. Kabul denies the charges, saying the militancy is Pakistan's internal problem.

PTI moves SC for Imran Khan treatment at hospital

The plea requested the SC that Imran be "immediately shifted to Shifa International Hospital, Islamabad for proper treatment of his eyes from [a] retina specialist"

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The PTI on Wednesday approached the Supreme Court seeking the medical treatment of jailed party founder Imran Khan at a hospital of his choice, along with access to his personal physicians. The application, filed by PTI lawyer Sardar Latif Khosa under Order XXXV Rule 6 of the Supreme Court Rules 2025, comes after Imran underwent a government-facilitated follow-up treatment for his eye ailment. The application was filed on behalf of Imran and named the Islamabad district election commissioner as the respondent, as it invoked the Toshakhana case in which the PTI founder was first arrested on Aug 5, 2023. The plea requested the SC that Imran be "immediately shifted to Shifa International Hospital, Islamabad for proper treatment of his

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Imran Khan's sisters slam PTI leadership for 'complete silence'

Sisters question missing lawyers, health decisions and contacts with Mohsin Naqvi

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The sisters of incarcerated former prime minister Imran Khan on Wednesday strongly criticised the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leadership for what they described as "complete

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Iran rejects US claims on missile programme

Iran foreign ministry's spox calls US claims regarding nuclear programme, ballistic missiles "big lies"

NEWS DESK

TEHRAN: Iran's foreign ministry on Wednesday dismissed US claims about its missile programme as "big lies", after President Donald Trump claimed Tehran was developing missiles that can strike the United States. "Whatever they're alleging in regards to Iran's nuclear programme, Iran's ballistic missiles, and the number of casualties during January's unrest, is simply the repetition of 'big lies'," ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said on X. Baqaei did not specify exactly which claims he was responding to, but hours earlier Trump had said Iran was seeking missiles that could reach American soil. In an interview with Al Jazeera in February, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Tehran lacked the capability to target the US but would attack American bases in the Middle East if Washington launched a strike. During his State of the Union speech,

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OIC, Europe, Arab nations condemn Israeli actions

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Ministers of Islamic and Arab countries, and European countries have expressed their strong condemnation of Israeli illegal activities in the Occupied Palestinian territories. In a joint statement the foreign ministers of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Federative Republic of Brazil, the French Republic, the Kingdom of Denmark, the Republic of Finland, the Republic of Iceland, the Republic of Indonesia, Ireland, the Arab Republic of

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PTA launches digital assistant to facilitate telecom consumers

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) has launched the "PTA Digital Assistant" to provide ease and facilitation to telecom consumers with general guidance on telecom services and complaint procedures. The deployed "PTA Digital Assistant" is available on WhatsApp (03150055055), offering menu-driven options that provide relevant information quickly. The solution responds to selected commands, ensuring efficient interaction, said a news release. PTA aims to enhance consumer facilitation, improve regulatory information access, and reduce query response time, showcasing its commitment to digital facilitation through innovative technology solutions. The deployed solution is available on WhatsApp and accessible online.—APP

Expired beverages, substandard meat seized

PESHAWAR: A joint operation by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority and the district administration was carried out in Matta, Swat, resulting in the seizure of a large quantity of substandard and expired food items. According to officials, the inspection teams confiscated more than 350 litres of expired beverages and 50 kilograms of substandard minced meat during checks of food outlets and retail points in the area. The seized items were taken into custody for safe disposal in accordance with food safety regulations. Officials said the operation was conducted as part of ongoing efforts to ensure the availability of safe and hygienic food for consumers and to curb the sale of adulterated and expired products. Legal action was also initiated against those found violating food safety laws. The Food Safety Authority and district administration reiterated their commitment to continuing such operations across Swat to protect public health and warned food business operators to strictly comply with established standards.—APP

135 Indus dolphins confirmed in DI Khan GIS Survey

DERA ISMAIL KHAN: A Geographic Information System (GIS)-based survey has confirmed the presence of 135 Indus River dolphins in the Dera Ismail Khan stretch of the Indus River, marking a significant development in ongoing conservation efforts. The survey was conducted by the Wildlife Division Dera Ismail Khan under the supervision of Divisional Forest Officer Khan Malook Khan and Sub-Divisional Wildlife Officer Malik Saqib. It was carried out under the "Conservation and Management of Indus River Dolphin in D.I. Khan" project. The fieldwork began on February 18, 2026, and concluded on February 24, 2026. APP



ISLAMABAD: H.E. Dr. rfan Neziro lu, Ambassador of the Republic of Türkiye - Senator Mr. Shaheen Khalid Butt, Managing Director, Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal and The Head of the T KA Islamabad Office Mme Saliha TUNA distributing Ramadan relief package among the needy. DNA

Transformational governance key to be \$1t economy by 2035: Ahsan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Wednesday stressed the need to embrace transformational governance and foster collective national synergy to achieve the goal of becoming a \$1 trillion economy by 2035, instead of settling for "business as usual. Addressing the inaugural session of the two-day Pakistan Governance Forum-2026, themed "Reimagining Governance for URAAN Pakistan", which was formally inaugurated by Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, the minister said governance was the decisive factor in determining whether the country reached a \$600 billion or a \$1 trillion economy by 2035. "We have two paths before us. If we continue with business as

usual, Pakistan will become a \$600 billion economy by 2035. But if we move forward with transformational reforms and positive synergy, we can achieve the \$1 trillion target." He stressed that governance was not about speeches but about actionable outcomes. "Good governance is the ability of a system to achieve its targets in a merit-based, transparent, accountable and citizen-focused manner so that it improves the lives of the people," he added. The minister said the forum was designed as a platform for debate and diverse viewpoints to generate actionable recommendations under the government's URAAN Pakistan agenda, structured around the 5Es - Equity, Exports, Energy, Environment and E-Pakistan. Highlighting the centrality of governance in the reform agenda, he said

the government, through structural reforms over the past two years, had steered the country away from the brink of default and restored international confidence. Ahsan Iqbal said Pakistan's economic sovereignty would depend on boosting exports beyond \$100 billion by 2035. "Exports are the lifeline of our future. Without achieving this scale, we cannot ensure economic independence," he remarked. He pointed out that while around nine million overseas Pakistanis were contributing \$40 billion in foreign exchange, 240 million people at home were generating exports of only \$40 billion. "If nine million Pakistanis can earn \$40 billion abroad, then 240 million citizens should be able to generate at least \$400 billion. This gap is a governance challenge," he observed.

Deadline set for green tractors Phase III allotment letters

MULTAN: The agriculture department Punjab has issued an important advisory for farmers declared successful under the Chief Minister Punjab Green Tractors Programme Phase III. According to the department's spokesperson, March 6, 2026 has been fixed as the final date for receiving allotment letters and depositing the farmers' share of payment. All successful applicants have been directed to collect their allotment letters and submit the required amount within the stipulated deadline. Failure to deposit the payment by the due date will result in cancellation of allotment, and an opportunity will be extended to farmers placed on the waiting list. For further guidance, farmers may contact the relevant offices of the Agriculture (Extension) Department Punjab or call the Agriculture Helpline at 0800-17000.—APP

Anti-litter awareness walk held

WAH CANTT: An anti-litter awareness walk was held in Taxila on Wednesday as part of the Punjab government's "Suthra Punjab" initiative, aimed at promoting cleanliness and civic responsibility across the province. The campaign, launched under the vision of Punjab Chief Minister, Maryam Nawaz Sharif, was organized through collaboration between the Suthra Punjab Authority and the Local Government Department Punjab. Chief Officer Municipal Committee Taxila, Gulshan Noreen led the walk which started from the Assistant Commissioner (AC) Office and proceeded through key city roads before concluding at Khatm-e-Nabuwat Chowk.—APP

Minister visits Gurdwara Fateh Bhindar in Daska

He reaffirmed that Pakistan is a country where minorities live together in peace, harmony, and mutual respect

SIALKOT: Punjab Minister for Minority Affairs Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora visited a dilapidated Gurdwara Fateh Bhindar in Daska, along with Syeda Nosheen Iftikhar, Chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee on Culture and Heritage, and Qamar-uz-Zaman, Chairman of the Evacuee Trust Property Board, on Wednesday. They were accompanied by Additional Secretary Shrines Nasir Mushtaq, Assistant Commissioner Sadia Jaffer, and Deputy Administrator Sialkot Sheikh Aamir Raheem. Ramesh Arora said Guru Nanak Dev Ji had stayed at that

sacred site upon his return from Babe Di Beri in Sialkot. He said that the gurdwara had remained closed for nearly 80 years, resulting in severe neglect and lack of attention. The minister announced that under a special programme of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, 50 gurdwaras would be restored over the next three years. In the first phase, restoration work on 17 Nasir Mushtaq, Assistant Commissioner Sadia Jaffer, and Deputy Administrator Sialkot Sheikh Aamir Raheem. Ramesh Arora said Guru Nanak Dev Ji had stayed at that

janwala, Sialkot, and Narowal were historically significant districts where Maharaja Ranjit Singh ruled for nearly 40 years. He remarked that the bond between Sikhs and Muslims, and between Sikhs and Pakistan, is inseparable, saying that Sikh history would be incomplete without Pakistan. The provincial minister concluded by stating that Sikh pilgrims visiting Pakistan feel reassured knowing their sacred sites were safe and protected. He reaffirmed that Pakistan is a country where minorities live together in peace, harmony, and mutual respect.—APP

NAB recovers Railway land worth Rs. 9.67b

ISLAMABAD: The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Karachi has marked a significant victory in its mission to protect state assets by successfully retrieving 43.11 acres of prime land worth Rs 9.671 billion belonging to Pakistan Railways. The recovered property situated at Survey Numbers 48, 49, 50, and 51 in Deh Khanto Juma Goth Karachi is valued Rs 9.671 billion. The recovery is the culmination of a persistent investigative process that originally began on July 13, 2019. Initial allegations suggested that government land had been encroached upon by private textile mills. Although the inquiry was temporarily closed following a Supreme Court decision, it was formally rescheduled in 2025 at the request of Pakistan Railways. The renewed investigation was specifically focused on officials from the Railway and Revenue Departments and others, involved in ongoing encroachment. While Pakistan Railways held the stance that possession had been secured in 2021 pursuant to the Honorable Supreme Court's orders, NAB's investigative findings revealed that private textile mills remained in actual possession of the site. Through the dedicated efforts of NAB officers, the inquiry was finalized, leading to the successful retrieval of the land. The 43.11 acres have now been officially acknowledged and handed back to the physical possession of Pakistan Railways. This retrieval represents a major success story for the Bureau, showcasing the devotion and excellence of its officers in fulfilling their official obligations. By restoring high-value state land to the public sector, NAB has further strengthened its integrity and image as a frontline institution in the fight against the illegal occupation of government property.—APP

Roots achieves over 1,400 Cambridge climate certifications

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Roots International Education Network has set an unprecedented milestone, becoming the only school in Pakistan to have over 1,400 students successfully complete the Cambridge Climate Quest Certification, a globally recognised climate literacy programme developed by Cambridge University Press & Assessment in collaboration with Cambridge Zero. This remarkable achievement highlights the school's commitment to climate education, global citizenship, and nurturing future changemakers. The Prize Distribution Ceremony was honoured



by the presence of distinguished national and international leaders, including: Syed Yusuf Raza

Gilani - Chairman Senate of Pakistan. Uzma Yusuf - Country Director, Cambridge Examination. Us-

man Shaukat - President, RCCI. Sheikh Atif Ikram - President, FPCCI. Syeda Amnah Batool - Member

National Assembly & Focal Person, Prime Minister's Youth Programme. Misbah Khar - Member Senate of Pakistan. Sarbjit Singh - Second Secretary, Climate & Economic Affairs British High Commission. Walid Mushtaq, CEO of Roots International Education Network, highlighted that empowering students with globally recognised climate certification demonstrates the school's dedication to developing informed, responsible, and action-oriented leaders for the future. Roots International continues to stand at the forefront of educational innovation in Pakistan, inspiring young learners to lead meaningful change on a global scale.

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

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



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RGH.....9290301-7
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Polyclinic.....9218300-09
Shifa International 4603666



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RDA.....5555864
TMA.....5770886
Cantonment Board 9270151-3



Islamabad Metropolitan

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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Serena Hotels celebrates the Spirit of Ramadan



ISLAMABAD: Serena Hotels marked the holy month of Ramadan with its Annual Corporate Iftar Dinner, a distinguished evening celebrating togetherness, reflection, and hospitality. Hosted under the gracious hospitality of the CEO of Serena Hotels, Mr. Aziz Boolani, and Mrs. Wiqar Boolani, the event continued a cherished tradition that brings esteemed guests together in the spirit of unity.

The evening welcomed a gathering of Government Officials, senior members of the Armed Forces, Diplomats, Heads of International Organizations, Corporate Leaders, and representatives from the media personnel. Guests were treated to an extensive and thoughtfully curated culinary experience,



featuring traditional Pakistani cuisine from each province alongside Middle Eastern specialties, East Asian selections, and classic continental offerings. The ambiance of the evening was further enhanced by soulful live folk music, adding a cultural impact to the celebration and creating a warm, memorable environment. As the event unfolded, it highlighted Serena Hotels legacy of impeccable service and commitment to excellence, reaffirming its role as a leader in hospitality.

Serena Hotels continues to create meaningful experiences that unite people, foster lasting connections, and offer a warm and inviting environment for its esteemed guests.—DNA

Two Afghan dacoits in handcuffs after police encounter

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police thwarted a gun attack by accomplices of an Afghan dacoit gang, leaving two arrested accused injured during an exchange of fire in Shalimar police station jurisdiction.

An official told APP on Wednesday that the Shalimar police team was taking arrested suspects, identified as Malyar and Adil, for the recovery of stolen property based on their disclosure and pointing out.

He said that during transit, four accomplices riding two motorcycles opened direct fire on the police team in an attempt to free their associates. The official said police officers remained safe due to bulletproof jackets and other protective measures. However, the arrested suspects, Malyar and Adil, sustained injuries from the firing by their own accomplices. He said the injured suspects were shifted to hospital for medical treatment. Police also recovered snatched valuable mobile phones and a motorcycle from the possession of the accused.—APP

‘No child left behind’ to bring every child into school

DNA

ISLAMABAD: In a landmark step toward strengthening access to education in the Federal Capital, Federal Minister for Education & Professional Training, Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, has officially launched the ICT-Level “No Child Left Behind” Campaign — a focused and time-bound initiative aimed at enrolling every out-of-school child in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) and ensuring sustainable, quality learning opportunities for all. The campaign, spearheaded by the Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training, reflects the Government’s strong commitment to fulfilling its constitutional responsibility under Article 25-A, which guarantees free and compulsory education

to every child. Describing the initiative as “a mission of inclusion and accountability,” the Minister emphasized that the Government will mobilize maximum resources, strengthen institutional coordination, and implement innovative strategies to ensure that no child in ICT remains out of school due to poverty, social barriers, disability, or other challenges. We have planned to identify and bring back maximum children to school within three years. Under the Federal Action Plan for Out-of-School Children (2025–2030), the ICT-level drive will: Conduct comprehensive household-level identification and mapping across Union Councils to accurately register out-of-school children. Expand second shifts, Accelerated Learning Programs (ALPs), and alternative education pathways to increase school ab-

sorption capacity. Deploy digital dashboards and real-time monitoring systems to ensure transparency, accountability, and measurable progress. Mobilize parents, community leaders, civil society, and development partners to create shared ownership of this critical initiative. “This is not merely an announcement — it is an operational and measurable commitment,” the Minister stated. “We will ensure maximum enrollment, sustained retention, and quality learning outcomes. Our goal is clear — maximum exclusion in ICT.” The Ministry calls upon all stakeholders, including education officials, teachers, media representatives, and community members, to actively support this transformative effort and help secure a brighter future for every child in Islamabad.

10,000 govt officials receiving training in AI skills

It will help make better decisions using data analytics, automate routine tasks, and improve accuracy in various sectors

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Information Technology and Telecom (MoITT) has launched training of 10,000 government officials in artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance digital literacy across the public sector institutions. According to official documents available with Wealth Pakistan, the initiative is a key component of the capacity-building drive for relevant government employees under the National AI Policy. It further states that the MoITT, in collaboration with leading industry partners, is organizing specialized AI workshops for various government institutions to equip officials with practical and future-ready skills. Under this program, the MoITT has also initiated work on revising the student curriculum in partnership with the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) to align academic content with the requirements of the AI era. In addition, training of more than 350 educators has been included in this capacity-building scheme under the National AI Policy, while another 650 teachers will be trained through the “training of trainers” model to ensure wider and sustainable outreach. Under the AI policy, a digital skill expansion program will be launched under which 25 new courses on prompt engineering and AI tools will be started. It also includes training of 7,500 individuals for cod4AI programme, which will focus on full-stack AI and deep learning. Upskilling of 2,000 professionals by 2028 is part of this scheme. The ministry will also get assistance from international partners such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Meta, the UN, and Huawei and ZTE for such training programs. China will grant scholarships at top 25 Chinese universities through Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. The initiative aims to improve decision-making, service delivery, and data management in government departments through the effective use of emerging technologies. By integrating AI skills into the public sector, the ministry seeks to promote innovation, efficiency, and transparency in governance. Officials familiar with AI tools will be better able to automate routine processes, analyse large datasets, and develop citizen-centric digital solutions. The program will create a strong coordination mechanism among the academia, the industry, and the government by ensuring long-term institutional readiness for the rapidly evolving technological landscape, and help Pakistan move towards a knowledge-based digital economy. It will help make better decisions using data analytics, automate routine tasks, and improve accuracy in various sectors.—APP

Facilities at RIC reviewed, strict duty compliance ordered

RAWALPINDI: Commissioner Rawalpindi Engineer Amir Khattak visited the Rawalpindi Institute of Cardiology (RIC) and conducted a detailed inspection of various departments to review service delivery and administrative arrangements. During the visit, the commissioner checked the attendance of doctors, nursing staff and other personnel, and directed that strict compliance with the duty roster be ensured. He emphasised that complete availability of emergency staff must be maintained, particularly during Sehri and Iftar hours, to avoid any inconvenience to patients. He visited the Emergency Ward, ICU and other critical departments, reviewing the availability of medical facilities and patient care arrangements. The commissioner stressed that timely medical treatment must be ensured in all emergency situations and that no obstruction in patient care would be tolerated. Engineer Amir Khattak also inspected the overall cleanliness of the hospital. He directed the administration to further improve hygiene standards in wards, corridors, washrooms and waiting areas to ensure a clean and safe environment for patients and attendants. Medical equipment and machinery were checked to assess their working condition. The commissioner instructed that all machinery must be maintained properly and repaired promptly to avoid disruption in treatment services.—APP

Capital’s silent digital bazaar revolution

ISLAMABAD: The steady move towards online shopping in the federal capital, which gained pace after the Covid pandemic, has become even more pronounced ahead of Eid ul Fitr, a time when shopping becomes unavoidable for nearly every household. With long fasting hours, daily prayers, Quran recitation and work commitments filling the Ramazan schedule, residents across Islamabad are increasingly opting for digital marketplaces to manage Eid preparations with ease. Urban observers say the trend reflects changing priorities during the holy month. Visiting crowded bazaars after a full day of fasting is physically demanding, while online shopping allows people to place orders late at night after iftar or sehri, without disrupting religious routines. Reduced travel has also meant savings in fuel, time and energy, making digital

shopping attractive for all genders and age groups. Those who have embraced online shopping describe it as a practical solution rather than a luxury. A middle aged office worker Adnan Ali from Sector 18 told APP that balancing work and worship leaves little room for long market visits. “After fasting all day, going shop to shop is exhausting. Online shopping helps us focus on ibadat while still preparing for Eid,” he said. For many shoppers, digital platforms have also solved the problem of limited availability. Nazia, a resident of G-13, told APP that she recently ordered a mobile phone cover online after failing to find it in physical markets. “When I received the parcel, I was surprised to see that the seller’s address was from a mobile shop in G-9 Markaz,” she said. “I had searched for this cover everywhere but couldn’t find it. Online shopping saved

me from roaming market to market and brought the exact item to my doorstep.” As demand grows, more people are also stepping into the role of online sellers. Women, in particular, are opening small digital stores from their homes, selling stitched clothes, accessories, perfumes and gift items through social media and messaging apps. Irum, a working professional told she runs online businesses after office hours to supplement household income and cope with rising living expenses, especially during the Eid season. Traditional traders, too, are adapting to the shift. Shopkeepers in markets and shopping malls say many physical stores now operate parallel online pages. Customers visiting shops are encouraged to follow digital catalogues and place orders online if a size, colour or design is unavailable.—APP

Prayer ceremony held at NPC for the late father of T.M Awan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A prayer ceremony was held at the National Press Club Islamabad for the late Muhammad Latif, father of senior journalist, columnist, and member of the National Press Club T.M. Awan. A large number of people from various walks of life attended the ceremony to offer prayers for the departed soul. Among those who attended the ceremony were Director General of the Press Information Department Ayesha Tseddaq, Director Shahid Ranjha, President of the National Press Club Azhar Jatoi, former President of the Rawalpindi-Islamabad Union of Journalists (RIUJ) Tariq Virk, President Pakistan Federal Union of Journalist (Workers) Dr Sadia Kamal, Senior Journalist Javid Malik, Director General at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ahmed Ali Sehrohi, Minister Counsellor for Public Diplomacy at the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia Mr. Rahmat Hindiarta, Head of the Department of Social Sciences at ZABIST University Dr. Tariq Waheed, representative of the Department of Public Policy at Riphah University Kashif Zaheer Kamboh, Civil Judge Mian Azhar Nadeem, Professor Wasim Anwar of the Urdu Department at Punjab Colleges, Director News ABN News Mohsin Nawaz, Director Chinese News Service at Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) Rab Nawaz Bajwa, Editor-in-Chief of Daily Islamabad Post Ansar Ali Bhatti, Chief Editor of Daily Shehr Nama Raja Javed, Editor Friday News Sabir Ali Baloch, President of Pakistan Awami Tehreek North Punjab Qazi Shafiq, and Media Coordinator Ghulam Ali, along with journalists, writers, intellectuals, government officials, diplomats, lawyers, teachers, and representatives of political and social organizations. Addressing the gathering, Maulana Abu Bakar Madani said that death is an inevitable reality from which no one can escape. He stated that this world is temporary while the Hereafter is eternal, therefore every individual must continuously prepare for life after death. He empha-

sized the importance of preparing for the grave through righteous deeds, particularly by adopting good character. He noted that honesty, integrity, truthfulness, and fulfilling the rights of others are the true measures of success in both this world and the Hereafter. At the conclusion of the ceremony, collective prayers were offered for the forgiveness and elevation of the late Muhammad Latif’s ranks

in Jannat-ul-Firdous. Prayers were also offered for patience and strength for the bereaved family. Speaking on the occasion, T.M. Awan thanked all participants for their presence and support. He said that the passing of his father was a profound personal loss, but the solidarity, prayers, and encouragement from friends and the journalistic community had given him strength during this difficult time.



Briefs

President greets Kuwaiti leadership

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari on Wednesday conveyed his heartfelt felicitations to the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and the people of Kuwait on the joyous occasion of the National Day and the Hala February festivities. The president, in a letter to the Kuwaiti Amir, said that the national day celebrations and Hala February festivities reflected the resilience, unity and steady progress of the Kuwaiti nation under his wise leadership. The president highlighted the deep-rooted historical ties founded on mutual trust, shared values and a common commitment to regional peace and prosperity, noting that the fraternal relations continued to expand across key sectors, including trade, investment, information technology, defence cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges.—APP

Chinese-led JV tops N-5 climate consultancy bid evaluation in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's National Highway Authority (NHA) has named a Chinese-led joint venture as the top-ranked bidder for a climate risk assessment consultancy linked to the reconstruction of National Highway N-5, according to a final evaluation report published by the authority. The report said NAREE International Ltd. and Beijing-based Youdi Tiacheng Planning & Design, working with Systems Engineering Associate as a sub-consultant, received the highest combined score and was declared the most advantageous bidder. Sino Carbon Innovation and Investment Co., partnering Warm Waters Advisory Group and Jiangsu Easttrans Intelligent Control Technology Group, ranked second, it said, according to Gwadar Pro. The report put the agreed consultancy cost at 53,290,800 Pakistani rupees, including applicable taxes.—APP

More than 10 Gwadar projects proposed for PSDP 2026-27

ISLAMABAD: More than 10 development projects for Gwadar have been proposed for inclusion in the federal and provincial public sector development programmes for fiscal year 2026-27, a Gwadar Development Authority (GDA) official said. The proposed list includes feasibility work and construction related to drainage, sewerage and roads in several parts of Gwadar city, upgrades to Pishukan and Surbandar jetties, coastal tourism and beach development, public parks and spaces, housing for doctors at GDA Hospital, and expansion of Gwadar Cricket Stadium, the official told Gwadar Pro. The official said the proposals were reviewed at a GDA meeting chaired by Director General Moin ur Rehman Khan on Tuesday and would be forwarded to the federal and provincial governments for approval.—APP

ADCG visits Pakistan Town Ramazan bazaar

ISLAMABAD: Additional Deputy Commissioner General (ADCG) Sahibzada Muhammad Yousaf on Wednesday visited the Ramazan Facilitation Bazaar set up in Pakistan Town to review arrangements for shoppers. During the visit, he inspected the availability of food items, stock levels, and compliance with the official price list. He also examined cleanliness and security measures to ensure a smooth shopping environment for citizens. Officials stated that vendors at the Ramazan bazaars are strictly bound to sell items according to the government rate list. The inspection focused on confirming that prices displayed at stalls matched the officially notified rates and that no unapproved charges were being taken from buyers. The administration said regular checks are being carried out to maintain uniform

Al-Shifa intervention prevents blindness in premature twins

According to the Department of Paediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus, improving neonatal survival rates has increased the number of infants vulnerable to ROP

DNA

RAWALPIND: Around every year, one million babies are born prematurely in Pakistan, with up to 45 percent at risk of developing Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP), a retinal disorder that can lead to permanent blindness if not treated within weeks of birth, said the Al-Shifa Trust on Wednesday. Since launching a dedicated ROP programme in March 2013, the Al-Shifa Trust Eye Hospital has treated around 19,000 premature infants, offering specialised expertise and equipment to manage the condition. According to the Department of Paediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus, improving neonatal survival rates has increased the number of infants vulnerable to ROP. Retinal blood vessels start forming about three months after conception and complete development at full-term birth. Premature delivery disrupts this process, potentially triggering abnormal vessel growth that can damage the retina. Dr Amjad, a paediatric ophthalmology expert, stated that infants weighing less than 1.5 kilograms at birth are at the highest risk. Lowering oxygen saturation levels in premature babies can reduce the risk of advanced ROP. Recently, seven-month-old twins Ibrahim and Ismail, born prematurely, were diagnosed with ROP. Doctors commenced immediate treatment, managing the disease before it could cause irreversible damage. Their condition has improved, and their mother expressed that early intervention prevented potential blindness and provided reassurance during a stressful period. The twins now undergo regular follow-ups



and are recovering well. The trust has arrangements with multiple hospitals to facilitate screening, transportation, and surgery for high-risk newborns. Tele-oph-

thalmology services connect remote units, including some abroad, to enable early diagnosis and guidance at no cost. Dr Amjad called on health authorities to

make retinal screening mandatory for all preterm infants and to expand ROP-capable facilities beyond the currently limited number of centres.

Senate sub-committee seeks five-year record from NAVTTC

ISLAMABAD – A Senate sub-committee on Wednesday directed the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTC) to submit a complete record of its financial management, institutional partnerships, and performance outcomes following a comprehensive review of the national technical and vocational education and training framework. The meeting of the Sub-Committee of the Senate Standing Committee on Federal Education and Professional Training was held at Parliament House Presided over by Senator Kamran Murtaza. Initiated on the agenda of Senator Rana Mahmood-ul-Hassan, the review examined NAVTTC's governance arrangements, funding mechanisms, partner selection processes, and employment outcomes over the past five years. In a brief overview, NAVTTC stated that it functions as the apex national body for policy formulation, regulation, and strategic oversight of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training sector, operating under the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training. The Commission reported that partner institutions are selected through publicly advertised processes, programmes are monitored through independent evaluations, and funds are released in phases against verified enrolments and performance benchmarks. The Committee reviewed tracer study findings under the Skills for All initiative and the Prime Minister's Youth Skill Development Programme. According to data presented, 53 percent of trainees were employed at the time of survey, while 47 percent remained unemployed. Among those employed, 38 percent reported monthly earnings exceeding PKR 50,000, and 18 percent earned between PKR 31,000 and PKR 50,000. Members emphasised the need to strengthen post-training employment linkages and improve outcome-tracking mechanisms to enhance placement rates. During deliberations, Senator Sarmad Ali raised concerns regarding the concentration of a Huawei-supported training initiative for 2,000 trainees in Lahore, underscoring the importance of equitable provincial representation. NAVTTC clarified that training locations are determined by the corporate partner, while the Commission prioritises achieving a minimum employment rate of 60 percent in such collaborations. Future programmes, officials noted, are anticipated in Karachi.—APP

Pak's non-Bank financial sector records strong growth

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's non-bank financial sector maintained strong growth momentum during the second half of 2025, with total assets rising to Rs. 6.84 trillion as of December 31, 2025, compared to Rs. 5.635 trillion on June 30, 2025—an increase of 21 percent over six months. According to the latest report issued by the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP), the industry experienced robust expansion across both fund management and lending segments, reflecting growing investor confidence and continued progress toward financial inclusion, said a release issued here on Wednesday. The fund management sector recorded solid growth of 17 percent during the period. Mutual funds remained the largest sub-sector, managing assets of Rs. 4.5 trillion, which accounts for 66.3 percent of total industry assets. The number of funds and plans increased from 369 to 409. Mutual fund investments remained

well diversified, with 44 percent allocated to money market funds, 23 percent to income funds, and 14 percent to equity funds. Investor participation also expanded significantly, with the number of mutual fund investor accounts reaching 845,000 as of December 31, 2025, representing an 8 percent increase since June 2025. Notably, the number of investor accounts has doubled since December 2022, indicating growing retail engagement in capital market instruments. Participation in voluntary pension schemes also surged, with participant accounts rising to 143,154 by December 31, 2025, reflecting 30 percent growth since June 2025 and an impressive 170 percent increase since December 2022. The lending segment of non-bank financial companies (NBFCs) recorded particularly strong performance, with assets increasing by 65 percent over six months to reach Rs. 824 billion.—APP

Ramazan anti-begging drive

ISLAMABAD: During the holy month of Ramazan, the district administration has intensified its anti-begging campaign in the federal capital. In the last 24 hours, 42 beggars were taken into custody as part of continued operations aimed at controlling begging at public places. The action was carried out across all major roads, traffic signals, and markets of Islamabad, with support from surveillance systems to ensure coverage and monitoring. According to official details, the special drive against beggars is being conducted throughout Ramazan to address the growing presence of professional beggars at busy locations. Teams from the district administration carried out operations at main intersections, commercial centers, and crowded markets where begging activities usually increase during the fasting month. Authorities confirmed that Safe City cameras were also used to identify and track beggars at different points in the city. Footage from surveillance cameras helped teams locate individuals involved in begging and allowed officers to respond quickly at multiple locations. Officials said this approach has improved coordination and helped ensure that no area is left unchecked. In this regard, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad Irfan Nawaz Memon stated that the anti-begging campaign will continue without interruption during Ramazan. He directed all assistant commissioners and magistrates to remain active in the field and ensure daily enforcement of the campaign.—APP

NPO to organize webinar on operation

ISLAMABAD: The National Productivity Organization (NPO) is going to organize a webinar on "Operation and Production Management" on February 26 (Thursday) tomorrow. The course will focus on how organizations design, plan, and control processes to deliver goods and services efficiently, said NPO document shared here on Wednesday. Participants will learn about productivity, quality, capacity planning, inventory management, and continuous improvement to support effective and competitive operations. The workshop will provide information about role of production and operations, organizational performance, understand basic concepts such as productivity, quality, and efficiency, describe key processes including planning, scheduling, and process design, recognize the importance of inventory, capacity, and supply chain coordination and apply basic tools for improvement and problem-solving in operations.—APP

Pakistan, China expand agricultural cooperation

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and China expanded academic and agricultural cooperation after the Islamia University of Bahawalpur (IUB) signed a memorandum of understanding with the Institute of Urban Agriculture under the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS) to promote collaboration in sustainable and urban agriculture, according to an IUB announcement. The agreement was signed in Chengdu by Dr. Muhammad Shahzad of IUB's Department of Agricultural Extension Education and Prof. Zhang Dequan, director of the Institute of Urban Agriculture, CAAS, the university said, according to a report carried by Gwadar Pro on Wednesday. The MoU covers joint research and project development in agronomy, plant breeding, horticulture, soil sciences, agricultural extension, food science and technology, ecology, environmental sciences and intercropping, according to the announcement. It also provides for academic exchange and mobility programmes for faculty members, researchers, postdoctoral fellows.—APP

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Daesh after America: What happens when the last troops leave

HASSAN AL-MUSTAFA

BETWEEN Jan. 27 and Feb. 2, US forces struck Daesh targets in Syria five times. Days later, US Central Command issued a statement pledging “sustained pressure” alongside local partners. These operations coincided with a confluence of significant political and security developments: a phased withdrawal of American forces from their bases on Syrian soil; the transfer of several thousand Daesh prisoners from detention facilities in northeastern Syria to Iraq ahead of trial; and the release of thousands of individuals and their families from Al-Hol camp – which had housed the families of Daesh fighters – leaving them free to move about inside Syria unchecked. These shifts on the ground have serious implications. Daesh remains one of the most violently extreme organizations in the world and fears are mounting over its potential resurgence across the vast terrain straddling Iraq and Syria. The group’s ability to blend into hostile local environments and sympathetic villages, regroup and reconstitute its forces raises the specter of a renewed bid to establish a “caliphate” – something many experts consider difficult but not impossible. Fears are mounting over Daesh’s potential resurgence across the vast terrain straddling Iraq and Syria. The more immediate threat, however, is a return to terrorist operations targeting civilians, military personnel and security forces in both Iraq and Syria, along with infiltration into Lebanon and Jordan. All this is unfolding against a volatile regional backdrop, with the world watching US-Iranian negotiations and the risk that tensions between Washington and Tehran could erupt into open military conflict involving the US and Israel on one side and Iran and its proxy forces on the other. According to US Central Command, more than 5,700 adult Daesh fighters were transferred to Iraqi detention facilities over a 23-day operation. CENTCOM commander Adm. Brad Cooper said: “Job well done to the entire joint force team who executed this exceptionally challenging mission on the ground and in the air with great focus, professionalism and collaboration with our regional partners,” while commending “Iraq’s leadership and recognition that transferring the detainees is essential to regional security.” The move caught many off guard and sparked concern within Iraq over hosting such a large number of trained extremist fighters. Baghdad has since moved to tighten security protocols at detention centers, intensify surveillance and prepare for trials – proceedings that are likely to ignite legal and humanitarian controversies, particularly among those who may seek to exploit them for

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ideological purposes. Iraqi politicians also fear that Daesh sleeper cells could strike inside Iraq in retaliation for the detention of the group’s members. That said, some analysts argue that transferring Daesh detainees to Iraq is ultimately safer for both countries. The detention infrastructure in northern Syria has long been inadequate, escape attempts have been frequent and American financial and logistical support to the Syrian Democratic Forces has been dwindling – all against the backdrop of Washington’s military drawdown from Syria, which is now underway. The financial and security burden on Iraq will be considerable. Yet regional intelligence cooperation with neighboring states, the US and Europe is likely to follow, given that no Arab country – including Syria’s new government – has any interest in seeing Daesh revive or in further stoking the instability that has gripped the region since Oct. 7, 2023 – instability that Israel has sought to leverage for its own political and security gains. The most complex challenge, however, may prove to be the fate of Daesh families who have left Al-Hol camp. Reports indicate that thousands of women, children and teenagers have departed for unknown destinations or through unspecified transfer arrangements. Some analysts argue that transferring Daesh detainees to Iraq is ultimately safer for both countries. The UN Refugee Agency said it had observed a “sharp drop” in the camp’s population in recent weeks and that authorities had informed it of a plan to relocate remaining residents to the Akhtarain camp in Aleppo governorate, requesting logistical support. A Wall Street Journal report suggested that between 15,000 and 20,000 people are now “unaccounted for” and “likely at large,” following what the paper described as a “collapse of the detention system within the camp amid the change of control.” If accurate, these figures dramatically raise the stakes, transforming an already serious problem into a full-blown regional security challenge. The risk lies in the potential reintegration of radicalized family members into local communities, the spread of extremist narratives and cross-border smuggling and infiltration across Syria and Iraq’s expansive frontiers – all of which could translate into renewed recruitment drives, fresh financial and logistical networks and a gradual return to violence. Particularly alarming is the situation of children who spent years inside the camp and are now teenagers or young adults. Having grown up in harsh, dehumanizing conditions, many harbor deep resentment and a closed-off worldview – making them prime targets for radicalization. All this is unfolding as the US begins pulling its forces out of Syria in what officials have described as a “deliberate and conditions-based transition.” The Wall Street Journal reported that the withdrawal involves the full pullout of approximately 1,000 troops. This American withdrawal – which more closely resembles a repositioning than a full retreat – cannot be separated from the broader reconfiguration of the Daesh file across the Middle East. Continued airstrikes, prison management and cross-border infiltration monitoring may yet limit its impact on Iraq and Syria, provided there is a sufficiently high level of joint coordination and regular intelligence sharing among all parties involved.

SCO Council on Sustainable Development

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



The SCO’s Year of Sustainable Development, designated for 2025, reflects the Organisation’s intent to mainstream sustainability across its agenda. Under this banner, member states have intensified cooperation in sectors that directly affect peoples’ livelihoods and ecological resilience. For instance, initiatives in agricultural technology exchanges, climate smart farming practices, and public health coordination have been pursued with renewed focus. Aggregate efforts also include enhancing renewable energy capacities and promoting green industrial cooperation

THE Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) has increasingly moved beyond its early identity as a security centric forum into a broader platform for regional cooperation that now places sustainable development at the heart of its agenda. With an expanding membership that includes some of the world’s most populous and resource rich countries, the SCO’s evolving focus on sustainable development reflects both the changing needs of its members and the shifting contours of global geopolitics. The establishment of the SCO Council on Sustainable Development and the related initiatives now underway mark a significant chapter in the Organisation’s 25 year history, with implications for regional cooperation, economic integration, environmental governance and the realisation of global development goals. The SCO was founded in 2001 by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan with the core objective of fostering mutual trust, regional security and cooperation among member states. Over the years, its membership expanded to include India and Pakistan in 2017, Iran in 2023, and Belarus recently, demonstrating the Organisation’s growing relevance across Eurasia. Today, with an extensive dialogue partner network and observer states, the SCO represents a significant geopolitical and economic bloc. The idea of a dedicated focus on sustainable development within the SCO has emerged as a response to the multifaceted challenges that confront the region – from climate change and environmental degradation to food and energy insecurity, public health deficits and the structural inequities that hamper comprehensive human development. In declarations and summit communiqués, SCO member states have reaffirmed their commitment to implementing the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, emphasising the need for inclusive economic growth, social equity and environmental stewardship. This strategic alignment with the universal Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) signals a maturation of the Organisation’s priorities. In a recent high level forum held in Islamabad, SCO Secretary General Nurlan Yermekbayev underscored sustainable development as one of the central pillars of the SCO’s work. He highlighted the adoption of key policy statements at summits and the elevation of sustainable development as the thematic focus of consecutive SCO chairmanships, demonstrating a sustained and collective will to act.

One of the most visible manifestations of this strategic shift has been the establishment of the SCO Council on Sustainable Development, an institutional mechanism designed to coordinate policy responses, mobilise resources and foster cooperation across member states in areas such as poverty alleviation, food and energy security, healthcare, environmental protection, climate adaptation, digital economy and infrastructure development. The Council is expected to serve as a crucial platform for aligning national development plans with regional objectives, leveraging shared expertise and exploring synergies among participating countries. The SCO’s Year of Sustainable Development, designated for 2025, reflects the Organisation’s intent to mainstream sustainability across its agenda. Under this banner, member states have intensified cooperation in sectors that directly affect peoples’ livelihoods and ecological resilience. For instance, initiatives in agricultural technology exchanges, climate smart farming practices, and public health coordination have been pursued with renewed focus. Aggregate efforts also include enhancing renewable energy capacities and promoting green industrial cooperation. One noteworthy example is the SCO Demonstration Base for Agricultural Technology Exchange and Training. This initiative has sought to close gaps in agricultural productivity and rural development through knowledge transfer, technical training and deployment of high yield crop varieties across member states. Such cooperative frameworks bring tangible benefits to agrarian communities and advance food security, a cornerstone of sustainable development. Furthermore, the SCO is cultivating partnerships with global institutions such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). By formalising collaboration on food security and sustainability, the Organisation acknowledges that transnational challenges demand multilateral responses that extend beyond regional borders. These partnerships facilitate the exchange of research, policy insights and operational frameworks essential for tackling hunger, malnutrition and resource management. Critics of the SCO’s sustainability endeavour argue that the Organisation’s consensus based approach, while valuable in preserving unity, can dilute the pace of decision making and the ambition of joint action. Indeed, in any forum where diverse economic interests and political systems

converge, forging substantive agreements requires patience and diplomacy. Yet, the SCO’s emphasis on dialogue, mutual respect and incremental cooperation – often referred to as the Shanghai Spirit – ensures that member states remain committed to collective progress without imposing unilateral prescriptions. For countries like Pakistan, which became a full SCO member in 2017, active engagement in the Council on Sustainable Development offers strategic opportunities. Pakistan’s geographic location at the crossroads of South and Central Asia positions it as a bridge for regional connectivity and economic linkages. Participation in SCO initiatives on infrastructure, energy corridors, agricultural innovation and digital integration aligns with Pakistan’s own development priorities. At a time when the country grapples with socio economic vulnerabilities, regional cooperation can supplement national efforts with technology transfer, investment inflows and market access. Yet, the success of the SCO Council on Sustainable Development will ultimately hinge on translating high level commitments into measurable outcomes. This entails setting clear benchmarks, mobilising financial resources, and harnessing private sector participation alongside public sector coordination. It also requires sustained political will to address deep rooted structural issues such as income inequality, environmental degradation and institutional capacity deficits. The SCO’s focus on sustainable development must therefore be seen as both a strategic necessity and a moral imperative. In a global context marked by existential threats from climate change and widening socio economic disparities, cooperative frameworks like the SCO provide avenues for shared solutions. Their value lies not only in policy pronouncements but in their capacity to generate concrete improvements in the lives of ordinary citizens across the region. In the final analysis, the SCO Council on Sustainable Development encapsulates the Organisation’s evolution into a platform capable of addressing the complex interplay between economic growth, social equity and environmental sustainability. It reflects a recognition that in an interconnected world, no single country can achieve sustainable development in isolation. What matters now is not just the articulation of lofty goals, but the implementation of practical, inclusive and accountable policies that leave no one behind.

No Aggression, Only Protection: Pakistan’s Strategic Clarity

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



The events of May 2025 offered a contemporary illustration. Following provocations and threats to its security, Pakistan responded with precision and caution, ensuring that civilian life and religious sanctities were respected. It is worth recalling that during armed conflict, the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) strictly forbade harm to non-combatants and destruction of places of worship

SINCE its emergence upon the map of the world on 14 August 1947, Pakistan has consistently adhered to a policy of restraint rather than aggression. In a region long marked by rivalries and unresolved disputes, it has neither pursued expansionist designs nor sought entanglement beyond the imperatives of its security. History bears witness that whenever Pakistan has taken up arms, it has done so in response to external aggression or in defence of its sovereignty and people. From the wars of 1948, 1965 and 1971 to the recent standoff with India in May 2025, its actions have been reactive, measured and proportionate. This posture is not merely strategic; it is moral. The Holy Qur’an lays down a principle that has guided Muslim conduct in conflict: “Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not love the transgressors” (Al-Baqarah 2:190). The command is clear—defence is permitted, aggression is forbidden. Likewise, the Qur’an instructs, “And if they incline to peace, then incline to it [also] and rely upon Allah” (Al-Anfal 8:61). These verses establish a balance between vigilance and reconciliation, between preparedness and peace. Pakistan’s security doctrine has consistently reflected this equilibrium. The events of May 2025 offered a contemporary illustration. Following provocations and threats to its security, Pakistan responded with precision and caution, ensuring that civilian life and religious sanctities were respected. It is worth recalling that during armed conflict, the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) strictly forbade harm to non-combatants and destruction of places of worship. In an authentic Hadith, he instructed armies: “Do not kill women, children, the elderly, or monks in their monasteries.” This Prophetic guidance remains a moral compass, rejecting indiscriminate violence and upholding the sanctity of life. Pakistan’s western frontier presents a more complex and painful narrative. Since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, Pakistan has borne immense burdens, hosting millions of Afghan refugees and extending humanitarian assistance in times of famine, conflict and displacement. From providing flour and essential supplies during economic crises

to offering shelter and opportunity, Pakistan acted in the spirit of the Qur’anic injunction: “And cooperate in righteousness and piety” (Al-Ma’idah 5:2). It sought fraternity, not friction. Yet goodwill cannot substitute for security. In recent years, sanctuaries for the group identified by Pakistan as Fitna al Khawarij (FAK), along with affiliates and ISKP elements, have operated from across the border, orchestrating attacks against civilians, mosques, imambargahs and security forces within Pakistan. The Qur’an unequivocally condemns such violence: “Whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for corruption [done] in the land—it is as if he had slain mankind entirely” (Al-Ma’idah 5:32). Those who target innocents in markets, places of worship, and public spaces violate the core principles of Islam they falsely claim to uphold. After repeated warnings and the sharing of verifiable intelligence with Afghan authorities, Pakistan conducted intelligence-based, selective precision engagements against identified terrorist camps and hideouts. These operations were narrowly focused on terrorist leadership and infrastructure directly linked to cross-border attacks. They were not directed against Afghanistan as a state, its civilians, or its security forces. Claims alleging deliberate targeting of civilians or sacred places are malicious distortions designed to obscure the misuse of religious cover by extremist elements. The abuse of mosques and madrassahs as operational hubs is itself a desecration. The Qur’an condemns those who exploit sacred institutions for corruption: “And who are more unjust than those who prevent the name of Allah from being mentioned in His mosques and strive toward their destruction?” (Al-Baqarah 2:114). When terrorists convert places of worship into marakiz—centres for indoctrination, planning and launching attacks—they betray both faith and humanity. Pakistan’s response has been limited and proportionate, consistent with the international law principle of self-defence and the Qur’anic injunction: “Permission [to fight] has been given to those who are being fought, because they were wronged” (Al-Hajj 22:39). Sovereignty cannot be invoked as a shield for cross-border terrorism. Denying sanctuar-

ies to violent non-state actors is the minimum obligation of responsible statehood. At the same time, Pakistan has not externalized responsibility. In 2025 alone, it conducted 75,175 intelligence-based operations nationwide—an average of 206 per day—eliminating 2,597 terrorists. Hundreds of civilians and security personnel embraced martyrdom in defence of the homeland. These figures reflect a sustained and comprehensive internal counterterrorism effort. The cross-border dimension is an additional factor, not an excuse. Pakistan has repeatedly sought negotiated and verifiable arrangements through diplomatic channels, including mediation facilitated by brotherly countries. The Qur’an provides guidance in cases of discord between Muslim parties: “If two groups among the believers fight, make peace between them... and act justly; indeed, Allah loves those who act justly” (Al-Hujurat 49:9). Pakistan has fulfilled this injunction—seeking dialogue, offering evidence, and inviting cooperation. Yet justice also requires firmness when aggression persists. The clarity shown politically and militarily within Pakistan, supported by religious scholars who have declared these terrorists to be outside the bounds of Islamic conduct, must be matched by corresponding resolve across the border. A lack of decisive action benefits only spoilers who thrive on discord between neighbours. Pakistan’s actions were directed at terrorists operating from sanctuaries, not at Afghanistan as a sovereign state. Nevertheless, any actor that enables or protects such elements will be viewed as abetting terrorism. The immediate path to de-escalation remains clear: dismantle terrorist camps, disrupt facilitation networks, and cooperate in transparent verification mechanisms. Throughout its history, Pakistan has neither coveted territory nor pursued confrontation. Its record affirms a consistent principle rooted both in statecraft and in faith: peace is preferred, reconciliation is desirable, and brotherhood is honoured—but the protection of life, dignity and sovereignty is a sacred trust. In upholding that trust, Pakistan acts not in defiance of Islamic teaching, but in faithful adherence to it.

Briefs

34 terrorists killed in separate...

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Fitna Al Hindustan were successfully neutralised," it said. "Weapons and ammunition were also recovered from Indian sponsored killed khwaraj and terrorists, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area," it said. "The security forces of Pakistan remain resolute and unwavering in their commitment to defend the nation's frontiers," the statement said, adding that sanitisation operations were being conducted to eliminate other terrorists. The statement concluded that security forces and law enforcement agencies would continue to act against terrorism at full pace.

Six killed after...

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along with 22 security and law enforcement personnel. Meanwhile, the security forces eliminated 216 terrorists in separate engagements and clearance operations in what Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) termed "Operation Raddul Fitna 1". Expanding on the counterterror operations, the military's media wing said that operations were initiated in Panjgur and the outskirts of Harnai district after credible and verified intelligence confirmed the presence of terrorist elements posing an imminent threat to the local public and as a result 41 terrorists affiliated with Indian proxy networks were eliminated.

Iran rejects US claims...

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Trump also reiterated that Iran would never be allowed to build a nuclear weapon, saying that Tehran's leaders were "at this moment again pursuing their sinister nuclear ambitions". Iran has repeatedly denied it is seeking a nuclear weapon but insists it has the right to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. The US president also claimed that Iranian authorities killed 32,000 people during a wave of protests that started in December and peaked on January 8 and 9.

OIC, Europe, Arab...

FROM PAGE 01
Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the Kingdom of Norway, the State of Palestine, the Portuguese Republic, the State of Qatar, the Republic of Slovenia, the Kingdom of Spain, the Kingdom of Sweden, the Republic of Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates and the Secretaries General of the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, condemned in the strongest terms a series of recent Israeli decisions that introduce sweeping extensions to unlawful Israeli control over the West Bank.

Pakistani visitors...

FROM PAGE 01
eVisas provide a more secure way to manage immigration status and reduce the risk of lost or damaged documents. Applicants can generate a share code to prove their visa status at borders and elsewhere. There is no change to visa processing times, eligibility criteria or conditions. British High Commissioner, Jane Marriott CMG OBE, said:

Earthquake jolts...

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There were no immediate reports of casualties or property damage. The latest tremors come just days after a quake of similar magnitude struck parts of KP and Punjab. On February 20, the seismological centre reported a 5.6-magnitude earthquake that jolted both provinces, with tremors felt across several cities, including Peshawar and Islamabad. The epicentre was located in Afghanistan's Hindu Kush region at a depth of 73 kilometres, according to officials.



ISLAMABAD: Players of Rising Stars Hockey Club posing for a group photo with High Commissioner of Brunei on the occasion of the 42nd National Day of Brunei. — DNA

PSL franchise Sialkot Stallionz owner denies bankruptcy rumors

Hamza Majeed Denies Bankruptcy Rumours, Confirms Tim Paine as Head Coach for Sialkot Stallionz Ahead of PSL 11 Debut, Vows Financial Stability, Strategic Partnership, and Long-Term Commitment to League

LAHORE: Hamza Majeed, the owner of Pakistan Super League (PSL) franchise Sialkot Stallionz, has firmly rejected bankruptcy claims and confirmed the appointment of the team's coaching staff. Speaking at a press conference at Gaddafi Stadium on Tuesday, The News reported, Majeed addressed rumours of financial trouble and alleged share transfers. He maintained that the franchise is financially stable and fully prepared for its debut campaign in the eleventh edition of the marquee league. The press conference came amid wider instability at the Stallionz, following the resignation of senior management figure Kamil Khan and confirmation from Wasim Akram that he is no longer serving as franchise president. Majeed categorically denied rumours of bankruptcy, stating that the first year's franchise fee had already been submitted to the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) in January, backed by a three-year corporate guarantee. He described the controversy as stemming from a "fake receipt" provided by a potential partner, whom he accused of misusing his trust. Legal pro-

ceedings and defamation notices have been initiated against those spreading what he called "baseless" allegations. On ownership, Majeed rejected claims that

98% of the franchise had been sold. He acknowledged that equity dilution is under discussion but emphasised that any development remains subject to PCB approval.

He confirmed that a non-disclosure agreement has been signed with a prospective strategic partner, with formal announcements expected within two to three days. Turning to cricketing matters, Majeed unveiled a heavyweight coaching panel for the Stallionz' debut season. Former Australia captain Tim Paine has been appointed head coach, supported by Mike Smith as assistant coach, Rana Naved-ul-Hasan as bowling coach, Sohail Maqsood as batting coach, and Qaiser Abbas as technical advisor. Australian physio Brandon Wilson will oversee player fitness. Majeed also confirmed that star batter Steve Smith remains committed to the squad and will feature in the playing XI. He thanked the PCB for its support, noting that the board had given him space to resolve the crisis. "If there was even a 1% doubt about my credibility, the PCB would have exited me from the league already," he said. Looking ahead, Majeed promised long-term commitment, declaring: "You will see this face in the PSL for at least the next 10 years, Insha'Allah." — APP



Kylian Mbappe doubtful for Real Madrid against SL Benfica due to fitness issue

MADRID: Kylian Mbappe is in a race against time to demonstrate that he is fit before Real Madrid plays an important second leg of the play-off to the UEFA Champions League with SL Benfica on Wednesday. The French international has been experiencing chronic pain in his left knee, and is still a big question mark in the crucial encounter in Madrid. Mbappe was absent recently on 14 February in a LaLiga match against Real Sociedad and again felt pain in training earlier this week. Even though the medical staff of Madrid does not think that the problem would aggravate in case he plays, it is known that the forward is playing at 60 to 70 per cent of his capacity. It is indicated that, in case he plays against Benfica, he might have to have a 10-day rest after that in order to cope with the issue. In the first leg at Lisbon, an encounter that saw Mbappe play the entire 90 minutes, Real has a narrow 1-0 lead. His movement, though, seemed limited during the 2-1 defeat in the league against Osasuna on Saturday, and it brought up more questions regarding how sharp he is. Head coach Alvaro Arbeloa remained cautiously optimistic. "Kylian is prepared to play tomorrow, which is the most important thing right now," he said. "He's trying to help us on the pitch. He's a decisive player and he can decide a game in any moment." Mbappe has had a prolific season, with 23 goals in the league and 13 in Europe, which highlights how big of a choice Madrid will have. — Agencies

Olympian Khawaja Junaid appointed head coach of national hockey team

LAHORE: The Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) has announced a new management structure for the national hockey team, appointing Olympic medalist Khawaja Junaid as the head coach. In a meeting with players, team management, and heads of development committees, PHF's ad hoc president, Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani, extended his support to the team and encouraged the players to focus solely on their performance to bring glory to the nation. He assured that all necessary facilities and resources would be provided to the players, while the federation would handle all administrative matters. — APP

'No longer player of T20': Babar Azam's form again under experts' scrutiny

LAHORE: Widely regarded as Pakistan's star batter, Babar Azam's struggles in the ongoing ICC Men's T20 World Cup have once again sparked debate about his effectiveness in the shortest format, with former cricketers pointing to concerns over his strike rate, tempo and ability to adapt. Pakistan lost to two-time champions England in the high-stakes Super Eights match of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium on Tuesday. Babar scored just 25 runs off 24 balls at a strike rate of 104 before being bowled by Jamie Overton. Speaking on Geo News' show "Harna Mana Hai", former Pakistan cricketer Rashid Latif said bluntly that Babar is "no longer a player of this format", questioning why he was brought back after being dropped over strike-rate concerns six months ago. Latif recalled that team management had earlier stated Babar would return once his scoring rate improved. "Where did it improve? Why did you bring him back?" he asked, calling the decision an injustice by

the board and coaching staff. He also criticised Pakistan's batting tempo, saying modern T20 cricket demands players who can shift gears and control the chase. According to him, when a batter consumes 20-25 balls without accelerating, pressure builds on the other end and forces incoming players into risky shots. He added that set batters must take responsibility and bat deep when partners struggle to score. Host Tabish Hashmi remarked that the team had discussed a plan three years ago on how to dismiss Babar, yet he continues to fall in a similar fashion, raising questions about whether the fault lies with the player, coaching staff or the system. Latif compared Pakistan's approach with opposing batters who keep scoreboards moving under pressure, noting that successful players "play from both ends" and maintain control of the chase. He suggested Pakistan's batters often fail to shift gears when acceleration is required, allowing pressure to mount. — Agencies

Bublik, Medvedev progress to second round of Dubai Tennis Championships

Struff found his serve in the second set, hitting six aces of his own, but Bublik was not for budging and took his tally to 12 overall. With the set going with serve, the Kazakh eventually got the all-important break in the 10th to take the set 6-4 and seal comfortable passage to the second round

DUBAI: Under the afternoon sun, the seeds blossomed. Day 2 of ATP 500 week at the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships started with Daniil Medvedev showing clinical efficiency to dispatch China's Junheng Shang in little more than an hour. The Russian, seeded third this week and champion here in 2023, moved through the match with confidence to seal a 6-1, 6-3 win and set-up a last-16 tie with Stan Wawrinka. Shang, the 21-year-old ranked World No. 262, has offered flashes of promise in recent months despite the inevitable growing pains of a young professional. In early January, he reached the quarterfinals in Hong Kong, a result that hinted at an upward trajectory, but consistency has since proved elusive and he had lost three of his previous four matches, including a 4-6, 2-6 defeat to Medvedev last week in Doha. The rematch provided little reversal of fortune as Medvedev struck 20 winners and 10 aces, dictating play from the baseline and rarely allowing rallies to drift beyond his control. On serve, the World No. 11 was especially untouchable, capturing 81

percent of his first-serve points over the course of the contest to condemn Shang to consecutive defeats in subsequent weeks. "Of course, I tried to play the same tactic (as last week) because if it works, you need to stick to it," Medvedev said. "I knew he would of course try to adapt some things, so I tried to adapt to his adaptations and did that quite well. I saw he was struggling a bit at the end, but until then, I thought it was a fair match, and we were playing some pretty good points." For all the scoreboard's lopsided tilt, there were moments of resistance. Early in the first set, the pair engaged in a bruising 34-shot rally — one of the longest exchanges of the tournament to date — that drew murmurs from the appreciative crowd. It was Medvedev, the former world No. 1, who ultimately claimed the point. Asked where he feels the level of his game is coming into a tournament that features four other former Dubai champions as well as eight of the world's top 20, Medvedev suggested he is more content than confident. "Actually, I shouldn't judge myself too much just now," he said. "I lost a couple

of matches lately and whenever you do it, you always feel like you are playing worse. I should try to pump myself up instead. I won 6-1, 6-3, so if we don't put every point under the microscope, it was a good level in general, I look forward to the next match and raising my level even more." Medvedev had barely finished his post-match media duties when Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik, the world No. 10 and this week's No. 2 seed, strolled onto the 5,000-capacity Centre Court to open his own campaign. Facing a "lucky loser" in Jan-Lennard Struff, Bublik was a picture of composure despite entering the tie on the wrong side of a 3-2 head-to-head record and having required three sets to get past the same opponent only a couple of weeks ago in Rotterdam. Bublik, breaking his German opponent's serve at the first opportunity, took an early 3-1 lead and refused to relinquish it, hitting six aces as well as saving three breakpoints. Battling throughout, Struff — ranked 70 places below his opponent in the world rankings — showed fight but could not level the tie. When his own

service game was broken again in the ninth game, the first set went to Bublik 6-3. Struff found his serve in the second set, hitting six aces of his own, but Bublik was not for budging and took his tally to 12 overall. With the set going with serve, the Kazakh eventually got the all-important break in the 10th to take the set 6-4 and seal comfortable passage to the second round. "I think I played a solid match," said Bublik, who lost in the Dubai final two years ago. "I mean, it's never easy to face Jan. I'm trailing a bit in the head-to-head, but I knew what I had to do. I knew what shots I have to execute to get more chances to win easily, and I think I did well in more important moments." Bublik is enjoying a career-high ranking of No. 10, but insisted he prefers to focus on his game, knowing the two factors are not mutually exclusive. "It's just a number and if you play well, you're going to have a better ranking," he said. "If you start losing matches, the ranking is going to go down very quickly if everyone else plays well. So, for me, it's more about keeping my game and enjoying the moment." — APP

PTI moves SC for...

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eyes from [a] retina specialist". It may be mentioned that Shifa International Hospital — where Imran's family and personal doctors want him to be taken — is in Islamabad, whereas Al-Shifa Trust Eye Hospital, a doctor of which was involved in Tuesday's treatment, is located in Rawalpindi. The plea also sought Imran's access to his personal physicians Dr Faisal Sultan and Dr Aasim Yusuf, "who may be associated with all the procedures of examination and treatment". "It is also prayed that the petitioner's family members be duly informed and grant reasonable access to them during his medical check-up and treatment," the application added.

Imran Khan's...

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silence", absence from the political and legal battlefield and failure to take any meaningful steps for their brother's release. "Where are Barrister Gohar Ali Khan, Latif Khosa and Barrister Ali Zafar missing and why are they not pursuing cases?" Al-eema Khan said while speaking to journalists outside the Islamabad High Court (IHC), along with Uzma Khan and Noreen Khanum. Imran's sisters reached the IHC to inquire about the cases regarding the PTI founder. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi also reached the high court and tried to meet Chief Justice Sarfaraz Dogar.

PM Shehbaz hints at...

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The galloping inflation, which was hovering around 35% at that time, had been capped under 7%, the policy rate was brought to 10.5%, he said, adding that they had to further increase their exports in a gradual manner, as it had immense capacity to excel. The prime minister said that certain reforms introduced by the government were home grown and the IMF had no role in it as it was their requirement and need of the time to avert the boom and bust cycle. He further said in the power sector, the price of power per unit had been slashed by Rs9 while the solar investment was protected and commended the minister for power and his team for making efforts in this regard.

Mohsin Naqvi in...

FROM PAGE 01
the way for formalized collaboration. To ensure sustained dialogue and implementation, both parties agreed to establish a Joint Working Group dedicated to migration-related matters between Pakistan and Greece. Minister Plevris commended Pakistan's ongoing crackdown on human smuggling syndicates and illegal migration attempts, highlighting the effectiveness of measures taken by Pakistani authorities. Minister Naqvi, in turn, welcomed Greece's readiness to support capacity-building initiatives for Pakistan's police and paramilitary forces, including professional training and technology-driven operations to better secure borders and disrupt smuggling networks.

Briefs

Zimbabwe pulls out of US health aid talks

HARARE: Zimbabwe has pulled out of negotiations with the United States on a new health deal intended to replace the aid program disbanded by President Donald Trump, the US embassy in Harare has said. The US has been striking new health aid agreements across Africa after Trump tore down the long-standing USAID agency and curtailed the role of NGOs. But critics say the deals give Washington broad access to health data and risk shifting control of disease response systems away from national authorities. The embassy confirmed in a statement on Tuesday that Zimbabwe had ended the talks. "We believe this collaboration would have delivered extraordinary benefits for Zimbabwean communities especially the 1.2 million men, women and children currently receiving HIV treatment through US-supported programs," ambassador Pamela Tremont was quoted as saying. "We will now turn to the difficult and regrettable task of winding down our health assistance in Zimbabwe."

The deal would have provided \$367 million in funding over five years, according to the statement.—APP

Iran close to get China supersonic anti-ship cruise missiles

LONDON: Iran is close to a deal with China to purchase supersonic anti-ship cruise missiles, as the US deploys a vast naval force near the Iranian coast ahead of possible strikes. The CM-302 missiles have a range of about 290 kilometers and are designed to evade shipborne defenses by flying low and fast. Their deployment would significantly enhance Iran's strike capabilities and pose a threat to US naval forces in the region, two weapons experts said. "It's a complete gamechanger if Iran has supersonic capability to attack ships in the area," said Danny Citrinowicz, a former Israeli intelligence officer and now senior Iran researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies, a think tank in Israel. "These missiles are very difficult to intercept." It is not known how many missiles are involved in the potential deal, how much Iran has agreed to pay, or whether China would go through with the agreement given heightened tensions in the region. "Iran has military and security agreements with its allies, and now is an appropriate time to make use of these agreements," an Iranian foreign ministry official said. Meanwhile the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford, the world's largest warship, has reached the US naval base of Souda Bay on the Mediterranean island of Crete en route to the Middle East.—APP

Turkish F-16 jet crash kills pilot

ISTANBUL: A Turkish fighter jet crashed shortly after takeoff early Wednesday, killing the pilot, state media reported, citing the defense ministry. Radio and tracking information with the aircraft, which took off from Balıkesir at 12:56 a.m. (2156 GMT Tuesday), was lost soon after departure, the ministry said according to the official Anadolu Agency. A search and rescue operation was launched and the wreckage was located. "Our pilot was martyred. The cause of the accident will be determined following an investigation by the crash examination team," the ministry said, offering condolences to the pilot's family. In November, Türkiye suspended flights by its C-130 cargo planes after one crashed in neighboring Georgia while returning from Azerbaijan, killing all 20 people aboard. Other F-16s, manufactured by US firm Lockheed Martin, have crashed in recent months. In January, a Taiwanese F-16 crashed into the sea during a routine mission. Its pilot, who ejected offshore, was reported missing.—APP

Silent Expressions II
Special students showcase talent at PNCA exhibition

Highlighting the government's commitment to Special Education, she stated that Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif takes a keen interest in the promotion and development of Special Education

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Directorate General of Special Education, under the Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training, organized the inaugural session of the three day Art and Craft Exhibition titled "Silent Expressions II - Dream, Feel & Create" at the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA), F-5/1, Islamabad. The ceremony was held under the patronage of Mr. Nadeem Mahbub, Federal Secretary, Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training, Ms. Wajiha Qamar, Minister of State for Federal Education & Professional Training, graced the occasion as Chief Guest.

In her address, the Minister of State highly appreciated the exceptional talent, creativity, and resilience demonstrated by students with special needs. She commended the dedicated efforts of Capt. (Retd.) Asif Iqbal Asif, Director General Special Education, for his holistic approach in nurturing and refining the abilities of these students and for providing them with meaningful platforms to express themselves.

Highlighting the government's commitment to Special Education, she stated that Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif takes a keen interest in the promotion and development of Special Education. Referring to the establishment of the Center of Excellence for Autism, she shared that despite financial constraints, the Prime Minister has directed that the project be completed on priority to ensure the timely provision of quality facilities and services for children with



autism spectrum disorder. She further noted that Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Federal Minister for Federal Education & Professional Training, has prioritized the revamping of Special Education in the Islamabad Capital Territory as part of the Government's broader vision for inclusive and equitable education. Earlier, in his opening remarks, Capt. (Retd.) Asif Iqbal Asif highlighted the wide range of services and facilities being provided by the Directorate General of Special Education for children with special needs. He elaborated on ongoing

development projects and new initiatives aimed at strengthening professional training, skill development, and rehabilitation services. He emphasized that the primary objective of the Directorate is to equip special children with professional and vocational skills, enabling them to become self-reliant and economically independent members of society.

The three day exhibition, which will continue until Friday, features a diverse collection of paintings, handicrafts, and creative artworks prepared by students from various special education institu-

tions. A key highlight of the exhibition is the display of 59 exclusive thematic paintings created by deaf and hearing impaired female students. These remarkable artworks beautifully reflect the theme "Dream, Feel & Create," portraying imagination, emotion, and artistic excellence. The Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training reaffirmed its strong commitment to promoting inclusive education and to providing meaningful platforms that celebrate the abilities, creativity, and immense potential of every child.

US military plane hits road barrier during Philippine training

MANILA: A United States military plane hit a concrete barrier while attempting to take off from a road during contingency training in the Philippines, injuring all five American personnel aboard, Philippine officials said Wednesday. The pilot and two other American personnel were brought to a hospital for treatment after Tuesday afternoon's incident in a concrete bypass road in Laoac town in the northern Pangasinan province. Two other injured personnel were treated at the site and the US Air Force transport plane was damaged, police said in a report. US military officials did not immediately respond to an Associated Press request for more details about the incident, including the condition of the injured personnel. The training, involving the plane landing on and taking off from an "alternate landing zone," was planned and fully coordinated with Philippine civilian, police and military authorities, three Philippine officials said. The training was meant to prepare military forces for contingencies, such as when regular airports and runways become inaccessible during typhoons and earthquakes. The three officials, who spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the accident publicly, said the cause of the accident was under investigation. The aircraft managed to land during the "supervised activity," but swerved during takeoff, one of the three officials said. The US military had deployed aircraft and personnel in the past to help deliver food, medicine and other humanitarian aid to Philippine provinces devastated by typhoons and other natural disasters. US forces are allowed to conduct training with Filipino counterparts in the Philippines under a 1999 Visiting Forces Agreement. Large-scale joint combat training drills in recent years have focused on helping the Philippines defend its territorial interests and promote freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea, which lies west of Pangasinan.—APP

No-shows by Trump's envoy to France increase diplomatic friction

PARIS: Charles Kushner shows no interest in learning French, pays little heed to the strict codes of Parisian bureaucracy and causes consternation in the nation that shaped modern diplomacy. Since arriving in Paris last summer, President Donald Trump's top emissary to France has upended French expectations of how a US ambassador should behave, underlining a brass new breed of America-first diplomacy across Europe. The choice of Kushner for a job once held by Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson has long raised eyebrows in Paris. A property mogul with no previous diplomatic experience, Kushner served a federal US jail sentence for illegal campaign contributions and tax evasion, but was pardoned by Trump in 2020. His son Jared is married to Trump's daughter Ivanka. Kushner landed with a bang in Paris, writing an open letter to President Emmanuel Macron weeks after his arrival in which he accused France of not doing enough to tackle antisemitism. Macron called Kushner's comments an "unacceptable statement for somebody who is supposed to be a diplomat," and the envoy was summoned to the foreign ministry, but did not show up. Kushner, 71, also failed to appear on Monday when summoned after the embassy re-posted on X comments by the US State Department's Counterterrorism bureau following the killing of a French far-right activist. A French diplomatic source said Kushner would be barred from meeting government officials after Monday's no-show. Kushner called Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot, a source close to Barrot said on Tuesday, and "expressed his desire not to interfere in our public debate." They agreed to meet in the coming days, the source added. The US Embassy in Paris said in a statement that Kushner and Barrot "spoke today in a frank and amicable call, reaffirming their shared commitment to working together, along with all other Ministers and French officials, on the many issues that impact the United States and France, particularly as the two countries celebrate 250 years of rich diplomatic relations." Julien Jeanneney, a French public law professor and expert on the US Supreme Court, said Kushner and France's foreign ministry had been locked in a "power struggle" since Kushner's letter on antisemitism was published. "The function of a diplomat is not to lecture the country where he is posted, at least not publicly," Jeanneney said. "Publishing such a letter goes against basic diplomatic customs. And not responding to the summons from the foreign minister is... a sign of defiance." Trump-appointed ambassadors have been causing a stir across Europe, which the president's administration says risks "civilisational erasure." In Poland, US Ambassador Tom Rose broke ties with the speaker of parliament after he declined to support Trump's Nobel Peace Prize ambitions.—DNA

ICCI President, Sri Lankan envoy explore bilateral investment avenues

Highlighting Sri Lanka's strategic advantages, he stated that the island nation's geographic position at the crossroads of major maritime trade routes connecting the Far East, Middle East, Africa, Europe, Australia, and America provides unmatched global connectivity

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Rear Admiral Fred Senevirathne (Retd.), High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to Pakistan, visited the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) along with Deputy Head of Mission Mr. Christy Ruban and Minister Counsellor Mrs. K.H.C. Sankpal to explore new avenues for strengthening bilateral trade and investment cooperation. Addressing the business community, the High Commissioner underscored that Sri Lanka and Pakistan share a longstanding friendship rooted in trust, mutual understanding, and regional cooperation. He described ICCI as a premier business platform committed to advancing trade, industry, and services, and expressed the Sri Lankan High Commissioner's keen interest in building a close, structured, and result-oriented partnership with the Chamber. Highlighting Sri Lanka's strategic advantages, he stated that the island nation's geographic position at the crossroads of major maritime trade routes connecting the Far East, Middle East, Africa, Europe, Australia, and America provides unmatched global connectivity. He noted that the Port of Colombo serves as a major container transshipment hub in the Indian Ocean with modern terminals and advanced infrastructure, while Hambantota International Port, Galle Port, and Trincomalee Port further enhance maritime capacity. He also emphasized Sri Lanka's strong air connectivity and improving economic outlook, particularly mentioning the 12 Export Processing Zones operating under the Board of Investment, offering dedicated facilities and attractive incentives for export-oriented industries. The High Commissioner shared that Sri Lanka has regained macroeconomic stability under the



guidance of the IMF, with stabilized exchange rates, improved foreign reserves, and rising export earnings. Inviting Pakistani investors, he identified priority sectors including textiles and apparel, electronics, pharmaceuticals, IT and IT-enabled services, tourism, agriculture and food processing, construction and infrastructure, as well as automobile and light engineering, encouraging investment through independent ventures and joint collaborations. Earlier, in his welcome address, Sardar Tahir Mehmood, President ICCI, stated that Pakistan and Sri Lanka enjoy cordial and brotherly relations founded on mutual respect and shared regional aspirations. He observed that the existing bilateral trade volume of approximately USD 400-500 million does not reflect

the true potential between the two friendly nations and stressed the need to diversify export portfolios, enhance market access, and promote stronger investment linkages. He highlighted Pakistan's competitive strengths in textiles and garments, pharmaceuticals, surgical instruments, sports goods, rice, cement, and IT services, while acknowledging Sri Lanka's global recognition in tea, rubber and rubber-based products, coconut products, gems and jewelry, tourism, and maritime services. By leveraging these complementarities, he said, both countries can substantially expand two-way trade and develop sustainable joint ventures. The ICCI President emphasized that regular exchange of trade delegations, single-country exhibitions.

Qatar reaffirms support for Syria

GENEVA: Minister of State for International Cooperation of Qatar, Mariam bint Ali bin Nasser Al Misnad reaffirmed her country's support for Syria and its people, welcoming the Syrian government's engagement with United Nations mechanisms, including the establishment of national committees on transitional justice and missing persons.

Speaking at a session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, the minister said these steps contribute to accountability, justice, and national reconciliation. She also welcomed the ceasefire agreement and the full integration between the Syrian government and the SDF, describing it as an important step toward strengthening security and stability while preserving Syria's sovereignty and territorial unity. She stressed the urgent humanitarian needs of civilians in Gaza Strip, calling for full adherence to the ceasefire, unhindered delivery of aid, and the sustained opening of all crossings.

The Qatari minister also expressed deep concern over the continued fighting in Sudan, warning of an escalating humanitarian crisis and serious violations of international humanitarian law, and urged all parties to prioritize national interests and work toward a lasting peace.—APP

The remarks were delivered

TOKYO: The Nikkei stock index rose sharply to mark a record intraday high on Wednesday morning, boosted by firm technology issues following advances by their U.S. counterparts.

The 225-issue Nikkei Stock Average rose 823.99 points, or 1.44 percent, from Tuesday to 58,145.08. The broader Topix index was up 12.45 points, or 0.33 percent, at 3,828.43.

The U.S. dollar briefly rose close to the 156 yen line in Tokyo after a report Tuesday that Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi expressed reluctance about further interest rate hikes by the Bank of Japan at a meeting earlier this month with its chief Kazuo Ueda, dealers said.

At noon, the dollar fetched 155.46-47 yen compared with 155.85-95 yen in New York and 156.10-11 yen in Tokyo at 5 p.m. Tuesday. The euro was quoted at \$1.1791-1794 and 183.30-36 yen against \$1.1769-1779 and 183.49-59 yen in New York and \$1.1779-1780 and 183.88-92 yen in Tokyo late Tuesday afternoon. The Nikkei stock index surpassed the 58,000 line to renew an intraday record for the first time since Feb. 12, buoyed by heavyweight technology shares as software-related issues climbed on the U.S. market. Meanwhile, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and Kawasaki Heavy Industries fell after their subsidiaries were listed as among 20 defense-related entities subject to China's export ban for dual-use items amid a diplomatic row.—APP

Poland charges six smuggling sanctioned equipment to Russia

WARSAW: Four Belarusians and two Poles were detained and charged with attempting to smuggle to Russia devices used to automate the production of integrated circuits, used, among others, in the assembly of combat drones, Polish prosecutors said. Warsaw has been warning of Russian and Belarusian attempts to destabilize countries backing Ukraine after Russia invaded the country on February 24, 2022. On Wednesday, Polish prosecutors said the suspects were detained on February 18 and charged with attempting to smuggle through Belarus strategically significant equipment, which is under sanctions and which could be used in the production of military technology. "Violation of the provisions of the sanctions act is classified as a crime, punishable by imprisonment for a period of no less than three years," prosecutors said in a statement. Three suspects were placed in pretrial detention for a period of three months, while the remaining three were placed under police supervision, bail, and a ban on leaving the country.—APP

Briefs

KP CM says 'Imran release force' will mobilise hundreds of thousands

BUREAU REPORT

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister (CM) Sohail Afridi on Tuesday said that a "release force" comprising hundreds of thousands of people would be formed to free Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan from prison. The KP CM, a Khan loyalist, last week announced the formation of the release force, saying that the incarcerated PTI founder had assigned him the responsibility of leading a "street movement".

The cricketer-turned-politician, 73, has been in jail since August 2023, convicted in a string of cases that he claims were politically driven following his ouster in a 2022 parliamentary vote. Talking to the media on Tuesday, he said the proposed force would include all wings of the party, including lawyers and Insaf Youth. "We are going to bring the youth together on one platform. We want all young people to be prepared whenever the founder gives the call," he maintained.

Afridi said that forces exist in various forms, including relief forces, tiger forces and task forces. Taking a jibe at the ruling alliance, KP CM said that none of those involved in "stealing our mandate" on February 8 could be considered their benefactors.

Israel committed record press killings

TEL AVIV: A record 129 journalists and media workers were killed worldwide in 2025, the Committee to Protect Journalists said on Wednesday, blaming Israel for two-thirds of the deaths. It was the second consecutive annual record for press deaths and the deadliest year since the CPJ began collecting data more than three decades ago.

"Journalists are being killed in record numbers at a time when access to information is more important than ever," CEO Jodie Ginsberg said in a statement.

"We are all at risk when journalists are killed for reporting the news." Over three-quarters of all the fatalities in 2025 were in conflict settings, the CPJ said in its report. More than 60 per cent of the 86 members of the press killed by Israeli fire in 2025 were Palestinians reporting from Gaza, it added.

The Israeli military claims that it never "deliberately targets" journalists. The number of journalists killed in Ukraine and Sudan also increased in 2025 compared to the year before. - APP

US raises pressure on Cuba

NEWS DESK

BASSETTERRE: US Secretary of State Marco Rubio will seek to address Caribbean leaders' concerns about Cuba at a summit on Wednesday, as Washington ramps up pressure on the communist island fresh after removing Venezuela's president. Rubio, a Cuban-American who has spent his political career hoping to topple Havana's government, is also looking for sustained cooperation on Venezuela and troubled Haiti as he takes part in the summit of the Caribbean Community, or CARICOM, which does not include Cuba.

After attending President Donald Trump's State of the Union address to Congress, Rubio flew overnight to join the summit in Saint Kitts and Nevis, a sun-kissed former British colony of fewer than 50,000 people. Rubio became the highest-ranking US official ever to visit the tiny country, the birthplace of one of the United States' founding fathers, Alexander Hamilton.

MALAYSIAN IFTAR DINNER



ISLAMABAD: Malaysian Ambassador Azhar bin Mazlan hosted an Iftar dinner at the Embassy, attended by the Heads of Missions of Thailand, Brunei, Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar, Indonesia, former Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, and Chairman of the Pakistan ASEAN Friendship Association Zafar Bakhtawari. - DNA

Modi in Israel for talks

NEWS DESK

NEW DELHI: India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi flew to Israel on Wednesday for a two-day visit to deepen ties with a key trade and defence partner, stirring criticism at home. "Our nations share a robust and multifaceted strategic partnership," Modi said in a departure statement, saying he will meet his counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu and address the Knesset, Israel's parliament. "Ties have significantly strengthened in the last few years." New Delhi has steadily expanded co-operation with Israel across the defence, agriculture, technology and cyber-security sectors while balancing diplomatic interests in the Middle East.

17 deaths reported during Basant

LAHORE: The Punjab home department submitted a report to the Lahore High Court (LHC) on Wednesday stating that 17 people died during the recent Basant festival in Lahore.

The three-day Basant festival was held in Lahore from February 6-8, following the Punjab government's decision to lift a ban on the historic event after 18 years, with strict regulations.

However, despite the government's emphasis on safety measures, over 100 accidents were reported in connection with the festival. The petition, heard by Justice Owais Khalid, sought the details of deaths and injuries during Basant. According to the report, three people died of electrocution during the festival, and two died after falling from trees. - APP

Trump lays out case for possible attack on Iran

US president touts economic record amid low approval ratings, seeks reset ahead of midterms

DNA

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump briefly laid out his case for a possible attack on Iran in his State of the Union speech to Congress on Tuesday, saying he would not allow the world's biggest sponsor of terrorism to have a nuclear weapon. Even while assembling a massive military force in the Middle East, Trump has done little to explain to the American public why he might be leading the US into its most aggressive action against the Islamic Republic since its 1979 revolution.

In his longest State of the Union address in history on Tuesday, Trump pointed to Tehran's support for militant groups, its killing of protesters and the country's missile and nuclear programs as threats to the region and the United States. "The (Iranian) regime and its murderous proxies have spread nothing but terrorism and death and hate," the Republican president said about 90 minutes into his annual address to a joint session of the Senate and House of Representatives. He accused Iran of restarting its nuclear program, working to build missiles that "soon" would be capable of reaching the United States and of being responsible for roadside bombings that have killed US service mem-

bers and civilians. Iranian state media have claimed that Tehran is developing a missile capable of reaching North America. The run-up to Trump's address was overshadowed by the buildup of US military forces in the Middle East and preparations for a possible conflict with Iran that could last for weeks if Tehran does not reach a deal to solve a longstanding dispute over its nuclear program.

Trump has repeatedly expressed frustration with negotiators' failure to reach an agreement. "They want to make a deal, but we haven't heard those secret words, 'We will never have a nuclear weapon,'" Trump said in his speech. Iran says its nuclear research is for civilian energy production. Trump also faulted the government in Tehran for the deaths of thousands of protesters during recent anti-government demonstrations, although the specific figure he cited - that 32,000 people had been killed - is much higher than most public estimates. Trump and his fellow Republicans rose to the top of US politics with the passionate support of a political base that embraces his "America First" policies and vow to end an era of "forever wars" like the long conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. But opinion polls show the party will struggle to keep control of Congress in November's midterm election. Polls also show Americans wary of foreign conflicts. A Reuters/Ipsos poll from January showed 69% of Americans agreed with a statement the US should only use its military when facing a direct and imminent threat, while 18% disagreed and the rest weren't sure or didn't answer the question.

Trump ordered strikes on Iran last year, claiming in July that they had "obliterated" the country's nuclear facilities. His aides have claimed more recently that Iran is very close to having the ability to make nuclear bombs. Trump addressed the issue in Tuesday's speech, say-

ing, "They (Iran's leaders) want to start all over again, and are, at this moment again pursuing their sinister ambitions." Trump said he preferred to make peace, listing a range of worldwide conflicts he takes credit for ending, or easing. "As president, I will make peace wherever I can, but I will never hesitate to confront threats to America wherever we must," Trump said.

Italy wants promote legal migration from Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Italian Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi reiterated a decision made last year to issue visas to over 10,000 skilled Pakistani workers, saying that it was aimed at promoting "legal migration". Italy would issue 10,500 work visas for Pakistan's skilled workers to promote "legal migration", he said during a meeting with Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi in Rome, according to a statement issued by the interior ministry. In December last year, an agreement was reached between Pakistan and Italy, under which the latter had allocated a labour quota for the former. According to the agreement, 10,500 Pakistani workers will be provided employment in various sectors in Italy, including ship breaking, hospitality, healthcare and agriculture. Each year, 3,500 Pakistani workers will secure overseas jobs under seasonal and non-seasonal quotas, as per the agreement. Visa-free entry for diplomatic passport holders During the meeting, it was also decided that Pakistani diplomatic passport holders would be allowed visa-free entry to Italy. This decision, the statement said, was taken at Naqvi's request. It added that the Italian minister recalled that his Pakistani counterpart had raised this matter at a previous meeting. Discussion on illegal immigration: Moreover, the two sides reviewed internal security cooperation between Pakistan and Italy, as well as measures to curb illegal immigration during the meeting, the statement said. The two ministers also discussed enhancing cooperation in combating narcotics trafficking, human smuggling, and terrorism, it said, adding that both sides appreciated the ongoing measures to prevent illegal immigration and human smuggling. - DNA

Aurangzeb, WB discuss development cooperation



SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Country Director of the World Bank (WB) for Pakistan, Ms Bolormaa Amgaabazar, on Wednesday called on the Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb and discussed strengthening cooperation under the World Bank's Country Partnership Framework (CPF) and advancing key reform priorities of the Government of Pakistan.

Discussions covered broad areas including population and human capital development, climate resilience, agriculture sector reforms, energy sector sustainability, and overall portfolio performance, said a news release. The minister emphasized the importance of effective operationalization of the CPF, particularly in priority areas such as population management and climate change. He underscored the need for strong coordination between federal and provincial governments to ensure coherence in policy design and implementation.

The minister highlighted that while implementation largely rests with the provinces, relevant federal ministries must remain fully engaged in planning, oversight, and monitoring processes to ensure national alignment and ownership. Both sides exchanged views on enhancing institutional coordination, improving transparency in project design and target-setting, and strengthening monitoring mechanisms to achieve intended development outcomes. The World Bank Country Director reaffirmed the Bank's

commitment to working closely with both federal and provincial stakeholders and further enhancing information sharing and collaboration.

The meeting also reviewed progress in the agriculture sector, with particular emphasis on reforms aimed at improving productivity, value chains, access to finance, and private sector participation.

The minister stressed the importance of aligning provincial initiatives with broader national reform efforts to promote sustainable growth and job creation.

The World Bank expressed its readiness to continue supporting agricultural transformation efforts in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including the International Finance Corporation (IFC).

Energy sector reforms and financial sustainability were also discussed, including options for strengthening the sector's long-term viability. Both sides agreed to continue technical-level engagements to explore feasible solutions in line with Pakistan's reform agenda and fiscal framework. The Country Director briefed the minister on overall portfolio performance and ongoing development operations, reaffirming the World Bank's continued support for Pakistan's economic stabilization, climate resilience, and human capital development objectives.

The minister appreciated the World Bank's partnership and reiterated the government's commitment to advancing structural reforms, improving governance frameworks, and ensuring that development programs deliver tangible and sustainable benefits for the people of Pakistan.

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