



Chasiv Yar Falls to Russian Forces After Nearly a Year of Intense Fighting

MOSCOW (Agencies): The key eastern Ukrainian stronghold of Chasiv Yar has fallen to advancing Russian forces, five Ukrainian and European military and government sources have independently confirmed to The Moscow Times. While neither the Ukrainian nor Russian militaries have confirmed the city's capture, The Moscow Times' sources on the ground report that Ukrainian forces have been pushed to the outskirts, marking a significant shift in the battle that has raged since April 2024. Chasiv Yar, a strategically important hilltop city in the Donetsk region, had been under relentless Russian assault for nearly a year. Despite being well-entrenched, Ukrainian forces faced mounting challenges in holding their positions as manpower shortages and dwindling Western military aid took a toll. By late 2024, Russian forces had gained the upper hand, systematically tightening their grip on



the city. One Ukrainian military source confirmed the city's fall, saying: "Yes, that's how it is." "All supply roads in and out of the city are being heavily bombed," another source said, referring to intensified Russian strikes on the western approaches to Chasiv Yar. Russian forces launched their first direct assault on the city in April 2024. By April 21, they had captured the nearby town of Bohdanivka, strengthening their position for the push into Chasiv

Yar. By mid-October, Moscow's troops had breached Ukrainian defensive lines and advanced into southeastern parts of the city, establishing footholds along its canal network. Russian forces reached the city center by mid-November, escalating the intensity of urban combat. Despite determined Ukrainian counterattacks, Russian troops continued to make gains, particularly in the north, by late December. Heavy fighting in the west of the city was reported on Monday. Chasiv Yar was the last major Ukrainian defensive position standing between Russian forces and the larger urban centers of Kostyantynivka, Kratomorsk and Sloviansk — key targets for Moscow in its broader war effort to control all of the Donetsk region. "The Russians are in the city center; any Ukrainians still in the city are the last holdouts on the outskirts," a third source citing multiple military contacts said of the situation on the ground.

US Federal Reserve Holds Rates Steady, Sees Inflation as 'Elevated'

WASHINGTON (Agencies): The Federal Reserve left its benchmark interest rate unchanged on Wednesday after cutting it three times in a row last year. This decision reflects a more cautious approach as the Fed seeks to gauge where inflation is headed and what policies President Donald Trump may pursue. In a statement, the Fed noted that the job market is "solid" and that the unemployment rate "has stabilized at a low level in recent months." The Fed also toughened its assessment of inflation, stating that it "remains somewhat elevated." A healthier job market and more stubborn inflation typically imply fewer Fed rate cuts in the coming months. During a news conference, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell largely deflected questions about recent comments from Trump, including one from last week when the president said he would lower oil prices and then "demand" lower rates. Powell stated, "I'm not going to have any

response or comment on whatever the president said." When asked if Trump had communicated his desire for lower rates directly to Powell, the Fed chair said he had "no contact." Powell conveyed a more deliberate approach regarding the Fed's key rate, noting that the economy is mostly healthy, with an unemployment rate of 4.1% and growth topping 3% at an annual rate in the fall. "With the economy remaining strong, we do not need to be in a hurry to adjust our policy stance," Powell said. When asked about the potential impact of the sharp policy changes Trump has proposed regarding tariffs, immigration, tax cuts, and deregulation, Powell said Fed policymakers are "waiting to see which policies are enacted." He added, "We don't know what will happen. We need to let those policies be articulated before we can even begin to make a plausible assessment of what their implications for the economy will be."

Coca-Cola Issues Recall for Canned and Bottled Beverages in Europe Due to High Chlorate Levels

Ghent, Belgium (Agencies): Coca-Cola has initiated a recall for several of its canned and bottled beverages across Europe due to the detection of high levels of chlorate, a chemical compound that can pose serious health risks. The recall affects products in Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and a small number of products shipped to the UK. The affected drinks include popular brands

such as Coke, Fanta, Sprite, Tropicana, and Minute Maid. Chlorate can form when chlorine-based disinfectants are used in water treatment and food processing. Although the risk to consumers is considered low, health experts have raised concerns about potential health issues, especially for children and infants. Coca-Cola discovered the issue during routine testing at its production facility in Ghent, Belgium.

The company has advised customers to return the affected products to the point of sale for a refund. The European Food Safety Authority has highlighted that long-term exposure to chlorate can interfere with thyroid function, particularly in children with iodine deficiency. Acute exposure can also lead to symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and impaired oxygen absorption.

Russian lab touts mRNA cancer vaccine by end of year



MOSCOW (Agencies): A breakthrough personalized cancer vaccine developed by Russia's Gamaleya Research Institute could receive regulatory approval as early as this summer, potentially allowing patients to begin treatment in September, the institute's director Alexander Gintsburg has told RIA Novosti. "According to the roadmap plan that we submitted to the Ministry of Health, although it has not yet been finally approved, we will likely receive permission at the end of August so that we can begin treating people in

September," Gintsburg told the news agency. The Gamaleya Research Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology had previously developed Sputnik V, world's first registered Covid-19 vaccine. In 2022, the center applied mRNA technology, the basis for other Covid vaccines, to develop a new type of cancer drug. In an interview with RT last month, the Gamaleya chief explained that the new drug is a therapeutic vaccine designed to be administered to those already diagnosed with cancer. It causes the patient's immune system to start destroying malignant cells. The shot enables Cytotoxic lymphocytes, or white blood cells, that appear in the body of a vaccinated person to recognize foreign proteins (antigens) on the surface of tumor cells. Cytotoxic lymphocytes then find foreign, metastasizing cells and destroy them throughout the body.

Trump Announces Four New Executive Orders, Including 'Iron Dome' Construction



MIAMI (Agencies): United States President Donald Trump has announced a series of executive orders aimed at bolstering the nation's military capabilities and reshaping its policies. Speaking at a retreat for Republican lawmakers at his south Florida golf resort, the Trump National Doral Miami, Trump pledged to sign four new executive orders later in the evening. "We have to have a strong, strong defence," Trump declared from the podium. "And in a little while, I'll be signing four new executive orders." The first order calls for the immediate construction of a state-of-the-art "Iron Dome" missile

defence shield, designed to protect Americans from aerial threats. This initiative mirrors Israel's renowned Iron Dome system, which has been instrumental in intercepting rockets and missiles. Two additional orders target military diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, as well as transgender service members. Trump emphasized the need to remove "transgender ideology" from the military, framing these actions as essential for maintaining the most lethal fighting force in the world. The fourth executive order will reinstate service members who were discharged for refusing to comply with COVID-19 vaccine mandates. Approximately 8,000 members were discharged between August 2021 and January 2023 for this reason. Trump's latest executive actions underscore his commitment to strengthening U.S. military assets and addressing contentious social issues within the armed forces.

No Survivors After Collision Between Passenger Jet and Army Helicopter in Washington DC

WASHINGTON, DC (Agencies): A midair collision occurred near Reagan National Airport on Wednesday night, involving American Airlines Flight 5342 and a US Army Black Hawk helicopter. The crash resulted in no survivors, with 28 bodies recovered so far. The jet, carrying 60 passengers and four crew members, and the helicopter, with three soldiers on board, both crashed into the Potomac River. President Donald Trump expressed his condolences and questioned the circumstances of the crash, while the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has launched an investigation. The incident has halted all takeoffs and landings at the airport, and emergency response teams continue their recovery efforts. Among the passengers were several members of the figure skating community, including former world champions Evgenia Shishkova and Vadim Naumov. The crash marks the first major commercial airline accident in the United States since 2009. Eyewitnesses reported hearing unusual bangs and seeing an explosion mid-air, with some capturing video of the moment of impact. Multiple agencies, including the Metropolitan Police Department and the District of Columbia Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department, are involved in the search-and-rescue operation. DC Mayor Muriel Bowser offered prayers to everyone involved and assured the public that updates would be provided as more information becomes available. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and NTSB are investigating the incident. The aircraft, a Bombardier CRJ700 regional jet, was flying from Wichita, Kansas, to Reagan National Airport. The helicopter, a UH-60 Black Hawk, was on a training flight from Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

Foreigners Can Now Invest in Makkah and Madinah Property via Listed Companies

RIYADH (Agencies): The Saudi Capital Market Authority (CMA) has announced that foreigners can now invest in Saudi-listed companies owning real estate in Makkah and Madinah. This landmark decision, effective immediately, aligns with Vision 2030's goal of boosting economic diversification and enhancing the capital market's global appeal. While direct foreign ownership of real estate in the holy cities remains restricted to Saudi nationals, the new rules allow non-Saudis to invest through shares or convertible debt instruments of listed companies. Foreign ownership is capped at 49 percent of a company's shares, and strategic foreign investors are excluded from holding stakes. "This decision aims to attract foreign capital, enhance market competitiveness, and provide liquidity for developmental projects in Makkah and



Madinah," the CMA stated. The reform supports Saudi Arabia's goal of attracting \$100 billion in foreign direct investment (FDI) by 2030. Alongside this initiative, the CMA has introduced several measures to improve market access for non-Saudis, such as allowing foreign residents to directly invest in the stock market and enabling qualified foreign institutions to invest in listed securities. This development also bolsters the real estate sector, a critical component of Vision 2030's strategy to reduce reliance on oil revenues and drive economic growth.

DeepSeek faces surging cyberattacks, US IPs among thousands targeting Chinese AI start-up

BEIJING (Agencies): Chinese AI start-up DeepSeek has been subjected to a series of sophisticated and large-scale cyberattacks over the past month, according to XLab, a Chinese cybersecurity firm. The attacks, which began in early January, have escalated significantly in both scale and complexity, posing unprecedented challenges to DeepSeek's operations and data security, experts from the XLab told the Global Times on Wednesday and warned that the attacks are expected to continue in the future. The lab told the media on Wednesday that there are still HTTP proxy attacks targeting DeepSeek. The monitored source IPs range from hundreds to thousands, most of which are located in the US, Singapore, the Netherlands, Germany, and domestically, according to XLab. DeepSeek on Tuesday launched a new open-source mul-

timodal model Janus-Pro, an upgraded version of its earlier Janus model, which significantly enhances multimodal understanding and visual generation capabilities. Earlier in January the company released the latest open-source model DeepSeek-R1, which has achieved an important technological breakthrough - using pure deep learning methods to allow AI to spontaneously emerge with reasoning capabilities. In her first press briefing on Tuesday (local time), US Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt while talking about DeepSeek, a Chinese artificial intelligence company that develops open-source large language models, said that as per US President Trump, this is a wake up call for American AI. DeepSeek reportedly released an announcement on Tuesday saying that its online services had recently been subjected to large-scale malicious attacks.

Quran burner shot dead in Sweden

STOCKHOLM (Agencies): The Iraqi refugee was killed in his apartment during a TikTok live stream. An Iraqi refugee known for publicly burning copies of the Quran, has been shot dead in his apartment in Sodertalje, Sweden, reportedly while making a live stream on social media, local news outlets have reported. The killing of Salwan Momika is said to have taken place on Wednesday, one day before he was scheduled to appear in court on hate speech charges. Momika, a Syrian

Catholic who came to Sweden in 2018, gained international attention by staging several Quran-burning demonstrations in the Nordic country, sparking protests in a number of Muslim-majority nations. His protests, which began in 2023, sparked diplomatic tension between Sweden and muslim countries. The Iraqi government had demanded his extradition, and Swedish authorities had begun deportation proceedings against him in 2023. Police arrested five people in connection with the killing.

About Khyber Mail The Khyber mail was first published in Peshawar, Pakistan in 1932. A newspaper in English by the eminent journalist Sheikh Sana Ullah. From 1932 to 1989 it has survived as leading English newspaper in the region by the sons of Sana Ullah i.e. Sheikh Zaka Ullah, Sheikh Inayat Ullah and Sheikh Saleem Ullah. The publication was shut down in 1989 due to various reasons. The current owner Rizwan Inayat son of Sheikh Inayat Ullah and grandson of Sheikh Sana Ullah, has restarted the family heritage but meeting with the requirement of the century, by giving the readers current happenings around the world with one touch anywhere any time and updating the reader to pace up with the world.

IHC stops trial of Director Anti-Corruption KP

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday stopped the trial of Director Anti-Corruption KP Sadiqui Anjum on alleged social media campaign against Additional Sessions Judge Hamayun Dilawar. IHC's Justice Babar Sattar issued the written order regarding last day's hearing. It said that the high court expects that trial against the anti-corruption official wouldn't be proceeded further until the final

judgment of this court. The court also sought case record and details from Director General FIA and stated that in prima-facio, the FIA had misused its powers. The order said that as per the lawyer, the case was registered against Judge Hamayun Dilawar on the instruction of petitioner. The FIA's case against the petitioner was a counter of that FIR, it said. The court adjourned further hearing till February 10.

Section 144 imposed in Peshawar

PESHAWAR (Agencies): The Peshawar district administration has imposed section 144 for one month, banning the display of weapons, use of tinted windows and employment of il-

legal security guards. Authorities have warned that strict action will be taken against violators. The administration stated that displaying or transporting weapons could disrupt law and order.

Second mpox case detected at Peshawar airport

PESHAWAR (Agencies): The second mpox case of the year was detected on Thursday when a five-month-old infant with the disease arrived in Peshawar from Qatar, health authorities said. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Health Adviser Ehtesham Ali confirmed that the case was detected at Peshawar's Bacha Khan International Airport, bringing the province's total to 11 since 2022. "The Public Health Reference Lab has confirmed the presence of the mpox virus in a five-month-old in-

fant. The child had recently arrived in Pakistan at Peshawar Airport with her parents from Qatar," the health adviser said as he provided details of the case. Following the confirmation of the case, the health department initiated screening for the infant's parents to ensure their health and safety. Furthermore, a letter has been sent to the airport authorities, requesting passenger details for those who traveled near the patient to ensure comprehensive surveillance.

GOLD PRICE IN PAK

Gold Rate	24K Gold	22K Gold	21K Gold	18K Gold
Per Tola Gold	Rs. 287,900	Rs. 263,908	Rs. 251,912	Rs. 215,925
Per 10 Gram	Rs. 246,830	Rs. 226,260	Rs. 215,976	Rs. 185,122
Per Gram Gold	Rs. 24,683	Rs. 22,626	Rs. 21,597	Rs. 18,512
Per Ounce	Rs. 699,597	Rs. 641,297	Rs. 612,147	Rs. 524,697

FOREX RATES

Currency	Buying	Selling
US Dollar	279.50	281.00
China Yuan	37.59	37.99
Japanese Yen	1.81	1.87
Saudi Riyal	74.20	74.55
U.A.E Dirham	75.85	76.50
UK Pound	347.50	351
Euro	291.25	294.00
Australian Dollar	175.25	177.50
Canadian Dollar	194.10	196.50

Organization	Phone No
Rescue 1122 HQrs	091-2264224-25
Rescue 1122 Mardan	0937-9230770
Fire Brigade Cantt:	091-9212534
Fire Brigade City	091-2566666
Police Emergency	091-9212222
Edhi Ambulance	091-2214575
Red Crescent Ambulance	091-2210836
Emergency Ambulance	091-2590846
Civil Defence, Peshawar	091-9212176
Lady Reading Hospital	091-9211430
HMC Peshawar	091-9217140-46
KTH Peshawar	091-9216340-8
Irnam Hospital	091-9216115
Mission Hospital	091-2212371
Al-Khidmat Hospital	091-2215945
Fauji Foundation Hospital	091-9212771-4
Frontier Foundation Blood Services	091-5703463
Hamza Foundation, Peshawar	091-5841632
Sui Gas, Peshawar	091-9213016
Wapda Complaint Peshawar	091-9212041
PIA, Peshawar	091-9213351
Airport Inquiry	114
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KP registers 49% increase in revenue

PESHAWAR (Agencies): Advisor to the Chief Minister Muzammil Aslam has said that the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa government has achieved a 49 per cent increase in revenue collection compared to the previous financial year. In the first half of the current financial year, the provincial government collected Rs42,397 million in tax and non-tax revenue, up from Rs28,435 million during the same period last year. Muzammil Aslam chaired a high level meeting at the Finance Department to discuss tax and non-tax revenue of all departments of the government. He said that the government had set a target of collecting Rs93,500 million in revenue.

UNHCR donates a state-of-the-art CT Scan machine to the Institute of Kidney Diseases Peshawar

PESHAWAR (Staff Report): UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency has donated a state-of-the-art CT Scan machine to the Institute of Kidney Diseases (IKD) in Peshawar - bringing relief for patients in the city. The hospital was in need of better diagnostic tools to serve its community more effectively, and this life-saving machine is already making a difference in patients' lives. Providing medical practitioners with advanced coloured imagery, the CT machine has improved the visualization of the affected area, making it easier to detect the patient's medical issue, and improve diagnosis for better surgical planning and/or treatment. Patients at IKD Peshawar no longer need to travel to expensive private laboratories where an advanced CT

Modern Online Examination Center Established at GKMC-MTI, Swabi

Swabi (Staff Report): Gajju Khan Medical College (GKMC), Swabi, has established a state-of-the-art online examination center for Khyber Medical University (KMU) MBBS professional exams, aligning with modern educational standards. The facility was formally inaugurated by KMU Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Zia-Ul-Haq. In line with KMU's directive to conduct MBBS exams online, GKMC has set up this center, which is fully equipped with modern facilities and can accommodate over 80 students simultaneously. The inauguration ceremony was attended by KMU's Controller of Examinations, Dean & CEO GKMC Prof. Dr. Shams Ur Rehman, and senior faculty members. Prof. Dr. Zia-Ul-Haq emphasized that the online examination system will enhance efficiency, save time, and promote a paperless environment. He commended GKMC's achievements and congratulated the team for implementing this modern system. The center will also serve as a regional hub for KMU in Swabi, facilitating online exams for other affiliat-



ed colleges. Dean GKMC highlighted the importance of adapting to modern examination systems, noting that the new facility is equipped with 80-plus computer systems, high-speed internet, a digital library, and advanced research tools, providing students with a

high-quality academic environment. A mock examination was conducted to test the functionality of the new center, and the upcoming MBBS professional examination, scheduled for February 2025, will also be conducted online at this newly established center.

Services Club to be Established on Reclaimed Land in Peshawar

PESHAWAR (Agencies): A new Services Club, modeled after the Peshawar Club, will be established on 34 kanals of reclaimed land at the intersection of Ring Road and Hayatabad as part of the Peshawar Uplift Programme Phase II. The initiative, approved by Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, aims to provide modern recreational facilities for the city's residents. Commissioner

Peshawar Division, Riaz Khan Mahsud, is overseeing the project. The reclaimed land, previously occupied by encroachers, will be transformed into a family park, restaurant, jogging track, restrooms, tennis court, swimming pool, and other amenities. The commissioner has instructed the project engineer to prepare the PC-1 and submit a de-

tailed report without delay. Riaz Khan Mahsud highlighted the significance of the project, reflecting the provincial government's commitment to the "Clean and Green Peshawar" campaign. He stressed the importance of creating spaces that promote healthy activities and announced plans to identify and utilize more suitable locations for similar projects across Peshawar.

UAP Inaugurates Solar System at AMK Campus Mardan

PESHAWAR (Agencies): The University of Agriculture Peshawar (UAP), under the leadership of Vice-Chancellor Professor Jehan Bakht, has inaugurated a 10 KW solar system at the Amir Muhammad Khan (AMK) Campus in Mardan. Funded by the Higher Education Commission (HEC), this initiative marks a significant step towards sustainable energy. The inauguration ceremony was led by Prof. Jehan Bakht, who unveiled the solar system plaque and activated the system. The event was

attended by Director AMK Campus Dr. Muhammad Israr, Deputy Director Fazal Munsif, Co-DT Dr. Shaista Naz, Dr. Shehzad Ahmed, Dr. Amjad Ali Shah Bacha, and Dr. Hajira Bibi, Assistant Professor at Khyber Medical University Peshawar. Dr. Muhammad Israr explained that the solar system, costing approximately 1.5 million rupees, has a power production capacity of 10 KW and is expected to significantly reduce the campus's electricity expenses. Vice-Chancellor Jehan Bakht praised

the efforts of the campus administration, the Solarization Committee, and the Director of Works, emphasizing the long-term benefits of the project, including uninterrupted electricity supply and environmental sustainability. UAP is pioneering the Green Energy Initiative, becoming the first university to take this step towards environmental sustainability. Another solar project is underway, reinforcing the university's commitment to clean energy and sustainability.



scans can cost up to 10,000 Pakistani rupees. In addition to the financial implications, it often took days to get results, delaying diagnosis and

costing patients precious time until their treatment could get underway. Now, patients receive faster, more accurate diagnoses within the hospital's grounds for about a third of the price, while those in financial need can be treated for free, regardless of their status. The intervention is part of a dedicated effort by UNHCR to strengthen public services for all in refugee hosting areas. The support to IKD Peshawar was made possible thanks to a contribution from Global Affairs Canada, in solidarity for the continued generosity of the Pakistani people. The hospital is now better equipped to serve its patients more effectively, ensuring better treatment, and continue on its mission to provide quality kidney care to everyone.

Chinese New Year Celebrated in Peshawar



A cake-cutting ceremony further enhanced the festive atmosphere. In his address, Chief Secretary Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Inspector General Police Akhtar Hayat Khan, who were the chief guests. The attendees also included former world squash champion Qamar Zaman, prominent businessman Imtiaz Ahmed, and a large gathering of individuals from diverse backgrounds.

ple-to-people connections between the two nations, citing the active participation of Pakistanis and Chinese in each other's cultural events as a testament to their camaraderie. On behalf of the people of Peshawar and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, he extended heartfelt New Year wishes to the Chinese community, expressing optimism about the continued strengthening of Pak-China relations. IG Police Akhtar Hayat

Khan underscored the significance of sharing celebrations to foster the long-standing friendship between the two nations. He praised China's substantial contributions to Pakistan's economic development, particularly through the transformative China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is driving progress and prosperity in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He assured Chinese investors of unwavering security measures, reaffirming the provincial police's commitment to maintaining peace and ensuring their safety. Former squash champion Qamar Zaman also conveyed his well wishes to the Chinese community, expressing hopes for continued prosperity and development in China. Businessman Imtiaz Ahmed echoed similar sentiments, emphasizing the importance of cultural exchange in deepening mutual understanding. Earlier in the day, the ceremony was formally inaugurated by Chief Secretary Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry, IG Police Akhtar Hayat Khan, Qamar Zaman, and Imtiaz Ahmed.



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AI: The New Front Line Between China and the US

The intensifying competition between the United States and China over artificial intelligence (AI) is not merely an extension of their long-standing trade disputes; it is a critical battle that could reshape global power dynamics. Both nations have recognized AI's potential to revolutionize nearly every aspect of economic and social life, from healthcare and education to national security and military applications. China has set an ambitious goal to become the world's primary AI innovation center by 2030. The Chinese government is investing heavily in AI infrastructure, including data centers, advanced chips, and supercomputers. This centralized approach, backed by substantial state funding, aims to leapfrog the US in AI capabilities. On the other hand, the US has traditionally relied on private enterprises to drive AI advancements. Companies like OpenAI and Google have been at the forefront of AI research, often utilizing open-source models and benefiting from a robust ecosystem of academic institutions and tech firms. However, recent geopolitical tensions have led to increased government involvement, including export controls on high-end chips to limit China's access to critical technologies. The stakes of this AI race are incredibly high. AI-enhanced drones and autonomous weapons systems have already demonstrated their potential in modern warfare, as seen in the war in Ukraine. The ability to develop and control advanced AI technologies could provide a significant strategic advantage in future conflicts. Despite the current US lead in generative AI, experts caution that this dominance may not be permanent. China's long-term strategic planning and substantial investments could enable it to close the gap and possibly surpass the US in AI capabilities. This rivalry underscores the need for both nations to collaborate on establishing global AI safety standards and governance frameworks to mitigate the risks of AI misuse by bad actors and rogue groups. In conclusion, the AI competition between China and the US is a defining feature of the 21st century. The outcome of this race will not only determine technological supremacy but also shape the future of global power dynamics and international relations. As the world watches this unfolding drama, the hope is that both nations can find common ground to ensure that AI benefits humanity as a whole.

The Hands Deserve The Books

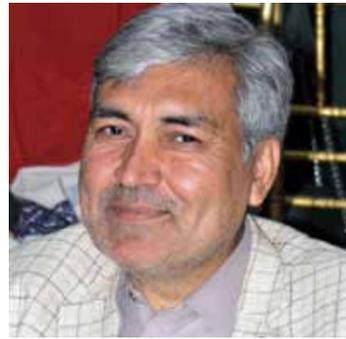
— By Zeenat Iqbal Hakimjee

Child Labour is a crime against humanity. At this juncture I am reminded of a very moving story about one of the world's greatest humanitarians Abraham Lincoln. The time, at which this episode took place, Lincoln was a candidate for a congress seat. And on that day, he had an important election speech to deliver. But he also had a far greater task to perform. A noble cause to fight for. He cancelled his election speech and entered the jam-packed court, which was already in session. Unnoticed, he sat down in the last row. The case being ended, the District Attorney rose and moved the trial of John Wilson for murder. There was a stir through the courtroom. In the doorway appeared the Sheriff, leading a childish figure, a boy of ten, dressed in poor homemade clothes. He was pale and desperately frightened. The judge faced the criminal, paused pityingly and steadied himself. "Have you a lawyer?" He asked. The lad shook his unkempt yellow head. "No, I dunno anybody. I ain't got- Money- to pay". The boy was in tears, his widowed mother was sobbing near him. "Do you wish the court to assign you a counsel?" In the stillness a boot scraped the floor. The man in the back seat rose, "May it please your honour" he said. "I am a lawyer. I should be glad to act as a Counsel for the Defense". The Judge looked for a moment at the loose-hung, towering figure. "What is your name?" He asked. The man answered quietly "Abraham Lincoln". Lincoln, who gave his life to abolish slavery, had come that day to re-pay a debt. Years back, when he was a struggling non-entity, the family of the then well to do little boy, then a baby, had given Lincoln solace and succor. Subsequently, the boy's father died and the family was in a miserable state of abject poverty. The boy, John had to work due to force of circumstances, in a farm of one heartless man who was Shaughnessy by name. He was a cruel tormentor. One day, he started beating the boy so mercilessly that the desperate defenseless boy struck his tormentor's head with a pitchfork. The man died after some time. The boy was charged for murder. This was the story. It was commonly said that the boy was doomed; No lawyer, even a smart one could get him off after some seemingly convincing evidence. But in the courtroom that day was no ordinary man. It was the great Lincoln, the unique humanist, who had come, jeopardizing his future career by canceling his election speech, for a great cause- even greater than his own magnificence. "Gentlemen of the jury," began Abraham Lincoln. I am going to try this case in a manner not customary in courts. I shall not call witnesses; the little prisoner over there is all the witness I want. I shall not argue. You know that at an age when this boy's hands should have held schoolbooks or a fishing rod, they held the man's tool that was his undoing; you know how a grown man

goaded the child till in desperation he used the tool at hand. All I ask is that you deal with the little fellow, as you would have other men deal in such a case with little fellow's of your own at home. Before the verdict, for a second, perhaps, no one breathed in that packed mass. 'Not guilty' was the verdict. It was a momentous Victory for a great cause. The cause of tormented and exploited 'Johns' of America. My story is an inspiration from the former. It is about the 'Asims' of Pakistan. A familiar figure in the homes of Pakistan. The not so lucky ones in the houses. I differentiate because cold callous concrete houses consist of ruthlessness. For one such house Asim worked. His mother was a widow and she washed dishes and clothes for her 'Begum Sahiba' who had suggested this couple for Asim's employment. Asim had formerly tried his hand as a motor mechanic, but as circumstances would have it his boss had closed his workshop because of lack of funds. After getting the job, Asim worked for Amina and Aslam where he was required to do all the dirty and hard jobs. To clean the bathrooms, to sweep outdoors in the harsh summer sun of Karachi. On the face of it everything seemed fine. His masters bullied him sometimes. They would feed him with leftovers and not give him new clothes to wear, although he tore his own clothes doing the dirty work. Maybe, it was because poor Asim had not experienced the luxury of life. He could not tell that he was being dealt with severely. Amina was a frustrated woman. Aslam had two wives and she hated sharing him with his other wife. Maybe this was the reason for her being so cruel. One ill-fated day, Amina entered the house and heard a noise in the kitchen. A glass had slipped from Asim's hands and was in splinters. In a rage, she ignited a matchstick and placed it on Asim's hands. Singed he ran out, followed by Amina who seemed in a frenzy. Luckily, for him, she was heavy and could not move as fast as he. In his mother's embrace he told his story, to his mother's mistress who listened patiently. She could not even think that Amina could do this to Asim. She was determined to amend the wrong done to him. She went to Amina's house, but Amina completely denied that she had been cruel. She knew Amina was scared of being blamed publicly. So Asim's mother's mistress threatened Amina to compensate Asim for her ill-doings or she would go to the Police. Amina was asked to pay a handsome amount to Asim for a life-time in lieu of her attempt to burn Asim's hand, which escaped several burns because of him not loosening his senses and wrapping up his hand tightly so that no air was left to blow the flame. Asim's mother's won the money and with that money Asim joined school with zeal to become something, and look after his mother.

Reform or Abolish: The sorry state of universities in Pakistan

— By Dr Imtiaz Ahmad



Pakistan's higher education sector is facing an existential crisis. The Higher Education Commission's (HEC) drive to increase the number of universities has compromised education standards, perpetuated favoritism and nepotism, and deprived employees of their fundamental rights. Since 2002, the number of universities in Pakistan has mushroomed, with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) witnessing a staggering increase from 5 to 34 institutions and from 40 to 147 in the country. However, this expansion has come at a steep cost. The standard of higher education has plummeted, and the lack of a robust mechanism to run these institutions has led to chaos. The appointment of vice-chancellors (VCs) has become a challenging task for the government and HEC. The selection process is marred by favoritism and nepotism, with rules being changed daily to accommodate relatives or friends in key positions. This has resulted in many universities remaining without VCs for years. On the other hand, the situation within universities is dire. Education has taken a backseat, and the focus is solely on appointing "blue-eyed" individuals. Rules of appointment are flouted, violating the Constitution of Pakistan and establishment codes. Employees are deprived of their fundamental rights, including pensions, salaries, and benefits. Seniority rules are ignored, and promotions are granted based on favoritism and nepotism. The mantra of "you scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours" has become the norm. The provincial and federal governments have turned a blind eye to the plight

of these universities. Each province is increasing the number of universities without taking responsibility for funding them. As a result, employees are forced to stage strikes daily, demanding salaries and pensions. Teachers, who are supposed to be leaders of the nation, are often found protesting on the streets against discriminatory practices by the HEC/HED. It is time for the government to take drastic measures to reform the higher education sector. The HEC must be held accountable for its actions, and a robust mechanism must be put in place to ensure that universities are run efficiently and effectively. The odd practice of re-appointments has become a significant financial burden on universities. When eligible employees are due for promotion, universities advertise positions, only to change the promotion to a new appointment or a subsidiary role when other employees with higher qualifications apply. This not only discriminates against deserving employees but also results in a financial liability five times greater than a simple promotion. The continuous cycle of over-employment, daily advertisements, se-

lection boards, syndicates, and lawyer fees has financially weakened universities. This panic can be settled by implementing uniform rules for promoting deserving employees especially the BPS faculty without discrimination. This would stabilize universities, alleviate panic among students, teachers, and administrators, and potentially increase international rankings. By allowing deserving teachers to become professors, Pakistan can attract international students, standardize teaching, and increase revenue like advanced countries. Restoring the country's dignity in the international community is possible if we can attract people to choose Pakistan for higher education, as was the trend before the HEC.

A viable solution is to:

- Increase the number of professors in each university
- Offer scholarships for international students in each discipline at every university
- Attract the international community to seek admission in Pakistan
- Honor and trust university teachers and researchers
- Resolve legitimate issues of university teachers and invest in scholarships for international students

Instead of abolishing the system through odd and discriminatory practices, let's take the first step towards standardizing higher education in Pakistan.

- The writer is a PhD from the university of Essex UK, serving the university of Malakand as Associate Professor of Mathematics and is GS of the All Public University's BPS Teachers Association.

Silent Struggles, a Student's Battle with Society and Mental Health

— By Faiq Ali Shah



"When individuals feel disconnected from their social groups, leading to feelings of loneliness and meaninglessness, or when they are excessively integrated into a group and feel compelled to sacrifice themselves for its benefit, or when norms are disrupted, causing individuals to feel uncertain and purposeless, or when someone sees no escape from their situation, people resort to suicide", émile Durkheim's says. Emile Durkheim provides us with a sociological suicide concept that helps us understand an individual's suicide, so keeping this concept in mind will also help us understand the cause of Ziauddin's case. Ziauddin? A law student from Dir district, ended his life in the university hostel, Peshawar, sending deep shock and grief to his family, friends and community. Despite appearing happy and content, this young man was quietly struggling with personal struggles. His death, accompanied by a poignant letter to his parents, highlights the complex interplay of social and personal factors that can lead to such a devastating outcome. In the letter, he wrote, "Dad, I'm in a state where it's impossible to express. The heart is tired of this world. I love someone and there's no such thing. I just don't want to live this life. I can't live in this society, don't know why?" He also made it clear that his decision was not related to a failed love affair. Durkheim identified four types of suicide: egoistic, altruistic, anomic, and fatalistic. In this case, the student's despair seems to resonate most with egoistic and anomic suicide: Egoistic suicide occurs when individuals feel disconnected from society, lacking meaningful social bonds. The student's letter to his parents reveals a profound sense of isolation, even though he appeared happy to those around him. His statement, "I just don't want to live this life. I can't live in this society," underscores the disconnection he felt from those around him. This mirrors Durkheim's notion

of egoistic suicide, where insufficient social ties lead individuals to feel alone and unsupported in their struggles. This type of suicide highlights the dangers of emotional detachment and the absence of a supportive social network, which can lead to feelings of loneliness and despair. Anomic suicide, on the other hand, happens during periods of social or economic disruption, where established norms and values are in flux. The student's letter expresses his struggle with societal expectations and a sense of not fitting in, reflecting the disorientation characteristic of anomic suicide. The rapid changes and rigid norms within society may have left him feeling lost and without direction, contributing to his tragic decision. The student's reference to the societal pressures and his inability to cope within this environment aligns with Durkheim's concept of anomic suicide, where sudden or continuous societal changes disrupt an individual's sense of stability and purpose. The letter left by the student reveals his internal battle with societal expectations and personal struggles. He mentioned that his decision was not related to a failed love affair but rather to a profound dissatisfaction with life and societal norms. This suggests a mix of egoistic and anomic factors, where both isolation and societal pressures played roles. Young people today face immense pressure to excel academically, secure stable jobs, and conform to societal standards. These expectations can lead to feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness, especially when coupled with the stigma surrounding mental health. The student's inability

to express his struggles openly or seek help reflects the broader issue of mental health stigma, which often prevents individuals from reaching out for support. Durkheim's model helps us understand that suicide is not merely an individual act but is deeply influenced by social factors. The neoliberal system, with its emphasis on competition and individual success, can exacerbate feelings of isolation and failure among young people. Economic stress, academic pressures, and the lack of a supportive environment can create a sense of despair, as seen in the student's case. This tragic incident highlights the urgent need for mental health awareness and support within educational institutions and society at large. Schools and universities must establish counseling services that are easily accessible to students and Professors. There should be open discussions about mental health to reduce stigma and encourage individuals to seek help when needed. Creating a supportive environment is crucial. Families, friends, and communities must learn to listen without judgment and offer empathy to those struggling. Simple conversations and check-ins can make a significant difference in preventing feelings of isolation. Beyond individual support, there is a need for systemic changes to address mental health issues. The state must create an economic, social, and educational framework that alleviates mental distress. Support centers in educational institutions can help students manage stress related to fees, exams, and other pressures. This young student's death is a heartbreaking reminder of the hidden battles many people face. By promoting mental health awareness, reducing stigma, and building a compassionate society, we can help prevent such tragedies in the future. It is a collective responsibility to ensure that no one feels alone in their struggles.

Envoys of Angola, Jamaica, Luxembourg, Uruguay, Malta present credentials to President Zardari



ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The Non-Resident envoys of Angola, Jamaica, Luxembourg, Uruguay and Malta on Wednesday presented their diplomatic credentials to President Asif Ali Zardari during a ceremony held at Aiwan-e-Sadr. The president received credentials from Ambassador-designate of Angola Julio Belarmino Gomes Maiato; Ambassa-

dor-designate of Jamaica Arthur Williams; Ambassador-designate of Grand Duchy of Luxembourg Roland Reiland, Ambassador-designate of Oriental Republic of Uruguay Beraldo Roque Nicola Flaniguen and High Commissioner-designate of Republic of Malta Raymond Bondin, President Secretariat Press Wing said in a press release. The president congratulated

them on their appointments and expressed the hope that they would play their role in further strengthening bilateral relations with Pakistan in the areas of trade, economy, investment, culture, and people-to-people contacts. Earlier, the envoys were accorded a guard of honour by a contingent of the Pakistan Armed Forces upon their arrival at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

SCP Recommends Sabahat for Appointment as Secretary, Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan



ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The Chief Justice of Pakistan, Justice Yahya Afridi, has recommended Ms. Syeda

Tanzeela Sabahat for the role of Secretary, Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, on deputation for one year. This recommendation followed a thorough selection process by a committee headed by Justice Afridi, along with Justices Ayesha Malik and Shahid Waheed. Ms. Sabahat, currently the Secretary for Science, Technology, and Information Technology in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, brings extensive administrative experience to the role. This appointment underscores the Supreme Court's commitment to effective governance and transparency.

Shaban moon sighted, Islamic month to begin from Friday

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony on Thursday announced that the crescent for the Islamic month of Shaban 1446 AH has been sighted. According to an official notification, the decision was made based on the recommendations of the Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee. As a result, the first day of Shaban will fall on Friday, January 31, 2025. Shaban, the eighth month of the Islamic calendar, holds religious significance, particularly as it precedes the holy month of Ramazan. The



announcement has marked an important milestone for the Muslims as they prepare for upcoming religious observances.

Court Upholds Arrest Warrant for KP Chief Minister in Liquor, Arms Case

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The district and sessions court of Islamabad on Wednesday maintained the non-bailable arrest warrant for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur in a case related to liquor and arms recovery. Senior Civil Judge Mubashir Hassan Chishti presided over the hearing. During the proceedings, Gandapur's lawyer, Raja Zahoorul Hassan, appeared before the court, but the chief minister was absent. The court upheld the warrant due to his absence and questioned the claim that he would appear, stating that if he is law-abiding, he should



comply with the legal process. The lawyer informed the court that Gandapur is engaged in the Punjab Bar Council election campaign and requested a long adjournment. However, the court adjourned the hearing till February 25.

CSA and PIPS Sign MoU for Capacity-Building of Civil Servants and Parliamentary Staff

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The Civil Services Academy (CSA), Lahore, and the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to foster cooperation in training, research, and capacity-building for civil servants, parliamentary staff, and government officials. The MoU aims to promote mutual growth and institutional development. The MoU was signed by CSA Director-General Farhan Aziz Khawaja and PIPS' Executive Director Asim Khan Goraya at the PIPS Campus in Islamabad. Under the agreement, both parties will deliver customized training

sessions, refresher courses, and develop innovative learning modules. They will also organize educational events and facilitate joint research initiatives. Director-General CSA Farhan Aziz Khawaja emphasized the importance of this partnership in promoting academic excellence and capacity building. Executive Director PIPS Asim Khan Goraya highlighted the benefits of combining resources and expertise to strengthen parliamentary capacity and governance. This collaboration sets a strong foundation for impactful initiatives, fostering institutional growth and improved service delivery.

PM Vows to Facilitate Foreign Investment in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has reaffirmed the government's unwavering commitment to facilitating foreign investors by ensuring a business-friendly environment, streamlined regulatory processes, and strong institutional support. Speaking to an international investors' delegation, led by prominent US investor Gentry Beach, in Islamabad, the prime minister highlighted Pakistan's strategic geographical location, skilled and youthful workforce, and rapidly

expanding consumer market. He emphasized the country's attractiveness as a global investment destination. Expressing gratitude for the delegation's interest in exploring business opportunities in Pakistan, Shehbaz Sharif assured them of the government's dedication to fostering an environment conducive to foreign investment. Gentry Beach, in turn, praised Pakistan's vast economic potential and conveyed his delegation's enthusiasm for investing in key sectors.

Twelve New Additional Judges Sworn Into Sindh High Court

KARACHI (Agencies): Twelve new additional judges took the oath of office at the Sindh High Court (SHC) in Karachi on Monday, bringing the total number of judges in the court to forty. Chief Justice Muhammad Shafi Siddiqui administered the oath to the newly appointed judges, who will serve a one-year term. The newly sworn-in judges include Ms. Tasneem Sultana, Mr. Khalid Hussain Shahani, Mr. Miran Muhammad Shah, Mr. Abdul Hamid Bhurgri, Mr. Ali Haider Ada, Mr. Jan Ali Junejo, Mr. Muhammad Hasan (Akber), Mr. Muhammad Jaffer Raza, Mr. Muhammad Osman Ali Hadi, Mr. Nisar Ahmed Bhanbhro, Mr. Riazat Ali Sahar, and Syed Fiaz ul Hassan Shah. The appointments, approved by the Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP), aim to strengthen the judiciary and improve the efficiency of legal proceedings. However, the commission missed the opportunity to appoint a judge from the minority community, as a nominee from this group narrowly failed to secure the required votes. Legal experts and stakeholders hope that the inclusion of these judges will help expedite pending cases and enhance the overall effectiveness of the Sindh High Court.

LUMS Develops Case Study on JazzCash's Remarkable Turnaround



LAHORE (Agencies): In a bid to foster academia-industry collaboration, the Suleman Dawood School of Business (SDSB) at LUMS has developed a new case study focused on the successful turnaround of JazzCash. This case study underscores the power of disruption and innovation in today's rapidly evolving business landscape. Authored by SDSB faculty Dr. M. Adeel Zaffar, Dr. Adnan Zahid, and Dr. M. Shehryar Shahid, the case titled "JazzCash: Successful Fintech in an Emerging Market" explores how the company navigated uncertainty and embraced disruption to become Pakistan's largest fintech platform. It highlights JazzCash's journey from significant challenges to becoming the country's first profitable fintech by 2023, focusing on adaptability, innovation, and resilience. JazzCash's evolution, from overcoming high attrition and operational hurdles to leading the digital loans market, QR payments network, and e-commerce payment solutions, serves as a model of strategic restructuring and customer-centric innovation. Murtaza Ali, President of JazzCash, expressed his appreciation for LUMS, stating that their transformation was fueled by a commitment to creating a sustainable business that offers real value to customers and society. Through this partnership with LUMS, they aim to inspire future leaders to pursue ambitious goals while balancing profitability with social impact. LUMS continues to enrich student learning by integrating impactful case studies that bridge theory and practice, furthering its dedication to advancing education and fostering meaningful industry partnerships.

Pakistani Exporters Secure \$3 Billion Orders at Heimtextil Germany

FRANKFURT (Agencies): Pakistani exporters have secured \$3 billion in export orders at Heimtextil, the world's largest textile trade fair held in Frankfurt, Germany. This significant achievement was announced by Imran Mehmood, Central Chairman of the All Pakistan Bed-sheets & Upholstery Manufacturers Association (APBUMA). Mehmood hailed the accomplishment as a vital boost to Pakistan's textile sector, emphasizing that Faisalabad's year-long textile operations depend heavily on orders secured during this event. He highlighted the government's ambitious plan to increase exports from \$30 billion to \$100 billion over the next five years, stressing the importance of immediate measures to support the sector. Stressing the critical role of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) as the "growth engine" of the economy, Mehmood called for low-interest loans to counter rising



input costs, including electricity, gas, and yarn. He suggested assigning the State Bank of Pakistan and APBUMA to oversee loan disbursements, ensuring effective utilization to maximize output and employment in the textile sector. The successful participation of Pakistani exporters at Heimtextil underscores the potential for growth and the importance of international trade fairs in securing key orders and boosting the country's economy.

NADRA Signs MoU with HEC to Foster Research in Identity and Registration Technologies

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) has signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with 15 leading Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across Pakistan to promote research, development, training, and innovation in identity and registration-related technologies. The ceremony, held at NADRA Headquarters, was attended by Chairman Higher Education Commission (HEC) Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed and key representatives from HEIs and NADRA. This initiative is aimed at enhancing NADRA's technological capabilities and developing innovative solutions in cybersecurity, data management, biometrics, and AI-based analytics. Under the partnership, NADRA will sponsor Graduate Training Programmes and research theses at partner HEIs, and offer internships through its Talent Hunt Programme.

Chairman NADRA emphasized the importance of collaboration between industry and academia to address real-world challenges in registration and identity management. The participating universities include Quaid-e-Azam University, Air University, International Islamic University, Bahria University, Ghulam Ishaq Khan Institute of Engineering and Technology, Riphah International University, FAST - National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences, University of Engineering & Technology Lahore, NED University of Engineering & Technology Karachi, Virtual University, Pak Austria Fachhochschule Institute of Applied Sciences and Technology, Capital University of Science and Technology, Sukkur IBA University, University of Balochistan, and Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering, and Management Sciences.

CDC share registrar launches industry-first WhatsApp E-voting solution

ISLAMABAD (APP): CDC Share Registrar Services Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Central Depository Company of Pakistan Limited launched its latest innovation: E-Voting through WhatsApp. This revolutionary feature is set to redefine the electronic voting process, making it more accessible, efficient, and user-friendly for shareholders/members. By seamlessly integrating WhatsApp with the E-voting platform, CDCSR aims to enhance participation while maintaining the highest security and transparency standards. Since its inception, CDCSR has been a pioneer in introducing various technology-based services, including the launch of its web-based system in 2017 according to a news release.

This platform, which allows shareholders/members to register and vote electronically, was widely appreciated across the industry. Over the years, CDCSR has continuously enhanced the system with value-added features to meet the evolving needs of its corporate clients. The WhatsApp E-Voting feature has already demonstrated success in recent polls conducted for esteemed clients and is gradually gaining widespread recognition. This innovation reinforces CDCSR's position as Pakistan's leading Share Registrar, consistently setting benchmarks in the Capital Market through its commitment to innovation. Shareholders/members can access the CDC WhatsApp chatbot through 0800-23275.

US weapons left behind in Afghanistan; an issue of profound concern: FO Spokesperson

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Wednesday reiterated that the presence of US advance weapons in Afghanistan, left behind in the aftermath of the withdrawal of its troops in August 2021, had been an issue of profound concern for the safety and security of Pakistan and its citizens. Responding to media queries regarding the US decision to

take back advance weapons left behind in Afghanistan, the spokesperson in a press statement said "These weapons have been used by terrorist organizations, including the TTP, to carry out terrorist attacks in Pakistan. We have been repeatedly calling upon the de facto authorities in Kabul to take all necessary measures to ensure that these weapons do not fall into the wrong hands."

Power Division Directs Distributors to Finalize Agreements with Industries

Islamabad (Agencies): The Power Division has directed all electricity distribution companies, including Karachi Electric, to execute exclusive service level agreements with industries that have captive power generation. The move aims to increase reliance on the national transmission system while ensuring a stable and high-quality electricity supply to industrial consumers. The agreements, initially set for a two-year period, will include provisions for resolving technical faults, dispute resolution mechanisms, and penalties for non-compliance by distribution companies. The directive also emphasizes that these agreements must align with existing regulations, including the Grid Code, Distribution Code, and Consumer Service Manual. Electricity distributors have been instructed to fulfill



all legal requirements and expedite the implementation of these agreements to enhance industrial power reliability.

ISSI hosts launch of HDF-HSF book on Post-Taliban Afghanistan



ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East and Africa (CAMEA) at the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI), hosted the launch of the book "Navigating Uncertainty: Perspectives on Post-Taliban Afghanistan and Geopolitical Footsteps," edited by Sheharyar Khan. The book was jointly published by the Hans Seidel Foundation (HSF) and the National Dialogue Forum (NDF). The event featured distinguished speakers, including Ambassador Sohail Mahmood, Director General ISSI; Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman BOG ISSI; Ms. Amina Khan, Director CAMEA, ISSI; Mr. Sheharyar Khan, Executive Director NDF; and experts like Ambassador Mansoor Ahmed Khan, Pakistan's former Ambassador to Afghanistan, and Dr. Hassan Abbas from the National Defense University, Washington D.C. The keynote address was delivered by former Foreign Minister Khurram Dastgir Khan, who served as the event's Chief Guest. In her opening remarks, Ms. Amina Khan highlighted the book's significance, emphasizing its intellectual contribution to understanding Afghanistan's post-Taliban

realities. She noted that the work offers authentic regional perspectives, countering narratives often shaped outside the region. DG ISSI Ambassador Sohail Mahmood provided a historical overview of Afghanistan's turbulent past, from the Soviet invasion to the Taliban's recent return to power. He described the book as an insightful exploration of Afghanistan's internal dynamics, geopolitical complexities, and potential pathways for stability. He stressed Pakistan's enduring interest in Afghanistan's peace and called for a collaborative approach to resolve cross-border terrorism and other shared challenges. Keynote speaker Mr. Khurram Dastgir Khan underscored Afghanistan's evolving situation, noting improvements in areas like narcotics reduction and primary education. However, he acknowledged ongoing challenges, such as terrorism, and emphasized Afghanistan's importance as a transit corridor connecting South Asia to Central Asia. Mr. Sheharyar Khan introduced the book as an effort to move beyond narratives of war, providing diverse perspectives on Afghanistan's political, economic, and social realities.

Experts Urge Strengthening Tech Policies and Tapping into Critical Mineral Wealth

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS) in Islamabad hosted a roundtable discussion titled 'Trump-Tech Nexus: Opportunities and Challenges Ahead,' focusing on the implications of US President Donald Trump's second term on global technology, Big Tech regulations, Artificial Intelligence, and cybersecurity. The event gathered leading experts to analyze how President Trump's policies and strategic collaborations with tech leaders could reshape the global technological landscape and its potential impact on Pakistan. CASS moderator Mustafa Bilal emphasized the significance of President Trump's second term for global technology policy, highlighting its geopolitical and economic ramifications. Ambassador Zamir Akram, Advisor at the Strategic Plans Division, GoP, provided a policy-focused assessment of the shifting geopolitical landscape in technology. He warned that generative AI could be as transformative as the industrial revolution or as dangerous as nuclear weapons. Akram emphasized that Pakistan must strategically navigate the geopolitical divide and attract foreign investment in critical minerals such as lithium and copper. Air Vice Marshal Soban Nazir Syed (Retd), DG of the National Aerospace

Science and Technology Park (NASTP), highlighted NASTP's role in fostering startups in technology, AI, and emerging technologies. He stressed the importance of public-private collaboration to ensure Pakistan remains competitive in the global technology and AI landscape. Founder & CEO of Algoryte, Talha Bin Afzal, noted that while support for Big Tech under President Trump seemed likely, regulatory and legal hurdles could delay innovation. He highlighted the challenges Pakistan faces, including slower innovation and limited access to advanced technologies due to export restrictions. Despite these challenges, Afzal was optimistic about Pakistan's opportunities in the global digital economy and stressed the need for a structured technology sector. Air Marshal Javaid Ahmed (Retd), President CASS, emphasized the importance of strengthening the regulatory framework, attracting foreign investment, and fostering local innovation. He stressed that Pakistan must strategically engage with global tech ecosystems and adapt to evolving global regulations. The roundtable concluded with an interactive question-and-answer session, where experts agreed that Pakistan must take proactive steps to secure its place in the global technology race.

Pakistan Urged to Raise Cross-Border Terrorism at SCO Summit



Islamabad (Staff Report): Former SCO Secretary General Ambassador Bolat Nurgaliyev has urged Pakistan to highlight cross-border terrorism at the upcoming Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit, stressing the threat posed by terrorist groups in Afghanistan, particularly the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK). Speaking at a conference hosted by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS), he noted the shared security concerns of Pakistan and Kazakhstan, warning that militant spillover remains a regional risk. Ambassador Jauhar Sal-

eem, President of IRS, supported a regional approach to counterterrorism and welcomed the proposal to address the issue at the summit. Ambassador Nurgaliyev acknowledged Pakistan's sacrifices in fighting terrorism and emphasized coordination with the Taliban government to curb infiltration. He expressed hope that the Taliban is working toward better regional engagement under the Doha agreement. The event, attended by diplomats, officials, and scholars, underscored the importance of collective efforts to enhance regional security.

QNET's Falah Strengthens Commitment to Health and Wellness as Gold Sponsor of Indus Hospital

KARACHI (Agencies): QNET, a global lifestyle and wellness-focused direct-selling company, along with its local partner Falah, has reaffirmed its dedication to healthcare and community welfare in Pakistan by becoming the Gold Sponsor of the Indus Hospital and Health Network. This partnership underscores QNET's belief in healthcare as a transformative force to uplift communities. By supporting the Indus Hospital, QNET aims to enhance healthcare infrastructure and accessibility, aligning with its broader mission of empowering individuals and improving lives. Tareq Abdul Hafeedh Yawar Al Yousefi, Chairman of QNET Middle East, expressed his enthusiasm for the collaboration, stating: "Our partnership with the Indus Hospital through Falah reflects our core belief in empowering communities. Through our high-quality products and direct-selling model, we offer people the chance to improve their lives while contributing to meaningful causes." QNET's commitment to



community development in Pakistan is evident through several impactful initiatives. In Azad Kashmir, the company funded a gravity flow water project, building a reservoir that provides clean water to over 1,500 residents. During Ramadan, QNET distributes thousands of Iftar meals to underserved communities, demonstrating its dedication to supporting those in need. Looking to the future, QNET plans to expand its product portfolio in Pakistan and the MENA region by 2025. Among the key offer-

ings are the Bernhard H. Mayer luxury watch and jewellery collections and the HomePure Nova water filtration system, reflecting QNET's focus on premium quality and innovation. Through its direct-selling model, QNET has empowered countless entrepreneurs in Pakistan to achieve financial independence and build sustainable businesses. This approach, combined with its dedication to community welfare, has positioned QNET as a trusted name in lifestyle and wellness.

President Zardari signs three bills into law

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): President Asif Ali Zardari on Wednesday gave his assent to three bills after their passage by the parliament. The president signed Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Bill 2025 (PECA) into law after it was passed by the National Assembly and Senate, according to a President House press release. He also signed the Digital Nation Pakistan Bill 2025 as well as National Commission on the Status of Women (Amendment) Bill 2025.

Pakistan Navy Holds COMKAR Command Annual Efficiency Awards Ceremony 2024

Karachi (Agencies): The Pakistan Navy COMKAR Command Annual Efficiency Awards Ceremony 2024 was held at PNS JAUHAR, Karachi, with Vice Chief of the Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Ovais Ahmed Bilgrami, as the Chief Guest. Upon arrival, he was received by Commander Karachi, Vice Admiral Muhammad Faisal Abbasi. In his address, Vice Admiral Bilgrami expressed satisfaction with COMKAR Command's performance and emphasized the importance of training in the evolving techno-strategic environment, particularly in Artificial Intelligence and Cyber Security. He praised the command's role in professional and academic training while congratulating award winners for their excellence. Vice Admiral Faisal Abbasi, in his welcome address, highlighted the significance of COMKAR Command units in technical and professional training. The ceremony concluded with Vice Admiral Bilgrami presenting efficiency awards and trophies to outstanding units and individuals.

NAB, OPF Sign MoU

Islamabad (Agencies): The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) and the Overseas Pakistanis Foundation (OPF) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish a collaborative framework for addressing complaints and challenges faced by overseas Pakistanis. The signing ceremony, held at NAB headquarters, marked a significant step towards resolving issues such as property disputes, financial fraud, and misuse of authority. Under the agreement, NAB and OPF will work together to address grievances related to fraudulent housing schemes, property disputes, and financial irregularities. A dedicated facilitation desk for overseas Pakistanis will be set up at NAB offices nationwide, along with a helpline to ensure seamless communication between the two organizations. The MoU was signed by OPF's Director General (Welfare & Services Division), Mrs. Laeeqa Ambreen, and NAB's Director General (A&P), Izhar Ahmed Awan. The ceremony was attended by senior officials from both organizations, including Prosecutor General Accountability, Syed Ihtesham Qadir Shah, and Chairman OPF Board of Governors, Syed Qamar Raza.

Government Vows to Address PIA Flight Suspension and ATR Aircraft Shortage

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): Minister for Defence Khawaja Muhammad Asif assured the Senate on Tuesday that the government is addressing operational challenges at Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), including the suspension of flights to Chitral and Larkana due to weather conditions and a shortage of ATR aircraft. Asif explained that PIA currently operates only three ATR aircraft, one of which is grounded. Efforts are underway to bring the grounded aircraft back into service, and discussions with private airlines are ongoing to improve connectivity to remote areas. The Minister also acknowledged challenges such as the suspension of flights to lucrative UK and European routes but expressed optimism that these would reopen soon, with audit teams evaluating operations. Asif emphasized the government's commitment to subsidizing flights to remote areas and improving



smaller airports, encouraging private airlines to operate from these locations. On PIA's broader restructuring, Asif mentioned revisiting privatization efforts to enhance efficiency. Senators raised concerns about spare parts for ATR aircraft and the timeline for resuming services, with Senator Shahzaib Durrani suggesting an upgrade to Chitral Airport to accommodate larger aircraft. Concluding, Asif reiterated the government's commitment to improving air travel connectivity and promised to revisit these issues in the next session with concrete solutions.

PAF Ranked Seventh Among World's Most Powerful Air Forces



ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The Pakistan Air Force (PAF) has achieved a significant milestone by securing the seventh position among the world's most powerful air forces, according to a recent ranking by globalfirepower.com. With a fleet of 1,434 aircraft, the PAF plays a crucial role in ensuring regional security and maintaining strategic dominance in South Asia. The ranking by Global Firepower is based on the number and types of aircraft, including fighter jets, helicopters, and support aircraft. The report highlights that the US Air Force leads the list with the largest and most advanced air force, boasting 5,737 helicopters, 1,854 fighter jets, and 3,722 support aircraft, along with an annual defense budget of \$800 billion. Russia and China follow in second and third positions, respectively. Despite the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, Russia remains a dominant force with significant air capabilities. China is rapidly modernizing its air force, incorporating advanced technologies like sixth-generation fighter jets and supersonic aircraft. The Pakistan Air Force holds great significance, both globally and in South Asia, and continues to enhance its capabilities to ensure strategic superiority in the region. The PAF's fleet includes a variety of aircraft, such as:

- JF-17 Thunder: A multirole fighter jet developed in collaboration with China.
- F-16 Fighting Falcon: A versatile multirole fighter jet from the United

States.

- Mirage III and Mirage 5: Multirole fighter jets from France.
- F-7: An interceptor jet from China.
- K-8: An intermediate jet trainer developed with China.
- T-37 Tweet: A basic jet trainer from the United States.
- MFI-17 Mushshak: A primary trainer aircraft developed with Sweden.
- Il-78: A strategic airlift and aerial refueling aircraft from Russia.
- C-130 Hercules: A tactical airlift transporter from the United States.
- ZDK-03 Karakoram Eagle: An airborne early warning and control system aircraft from China.
- Saab 2000 Erieye AEW&C: An advanced airborne early warning and control aircraft equipped with the Saab Erieye PS-890 radar, providing 360° coverage and a detection range of up to 450 km.

The Indian Air Force (IAF) is ranked fourth globally, with a diverse fleet including the Sukhoi Su-30MKI, Dassault Rafale, and the indigenous Tejas Light Combat Aircraft (LCA). The IAF continues to enhance its capabilities to maintain regional security and strategic dominance.

Other top air forces in the world include those of Egypt, Turkey, and France, which also feature in the top 10 rankings. The PAF's growing strength reflects its commitment to modern air defense and its role as a key player in the geopolitical landscape of South Asia.

Ronin Launches Pakistan's First Smart Wearables Manufacturing Plant in Karachi

KARACHI (Agencies): In a historic move, Pakistan has achieved a significant milestone with the launch of its first-ever smart wearables and tech accessories manufacturing and assembling industry by Ronin in Karachi. This groundbreaking development marks a major step forward in the country's journey towards industrial growth and self-reliance. Ronin, a homegrown brand, has been providing quality smart wearables and tech accessories to consumers in Pakistan. Before this industry was established, Pakistan relied entirely



on imports to meet the growing demand for these products, which often led to a trade deficit and the prevalence of low-quality items. With the new facility in Karachi, Ronin is now producing top-quality earbuds, smartwatches, headphones, neckbands, and other

tech products domestically. The facility ensures superior quality by implementing a rigorous 11-stage testing process, including raw material inspection, laboratory testing, process quality control, product inspection during manufacturing and assembling, and final product assurance. This commitment to quality ensures that consumers receive reliable products at accessible prices, addressing long-standing issues of trust and performance in the market. This achievement positions Pakistan as an emerging player in the global tech industry.

Russia bans meat imports from EU



MOSCOW (Agencies): Russia's food safety watchdog (Rosselkhoz nadzor) has banned imports of meat from the EU due to the risk of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD). In a statement released on Friday, the watchdog announced that imports and transit of the products through Russian territo-

ry to third countries will be prohibited starting January 20. The embargo comes after Germany reported its first outbreak of FMD in nearly 40 years last week, in a herd of water buffalo in the Brandenburg region near Berlin. Officials in Germany have since implemented a 3km exclusion zone and a 10km monitoring zone. FMD is a contagious viral disease of animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, and pigs. Symptoms include fever, sores, blisters, and reluctance to move or eat. The animals are often slaughtered to contain outbreaks. The detection of the outbreak has prompted German

meat import bans by multiple countries, including Australia, Argentina, South Korea, the UK, Canada, and Mexico. Within the EU, border control has been tightened by Belgium, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Poland. However, according to Rosselkhoz nadzor estimates, the measures taken by the European Commission to contain the spread of the disease are "insufficient." The Russian food safety watchdog said one of the reasons for the emergence of the disease in Germany was the "uncontrolled" movement of cattle and livestock products through Ukraine across the EU.

Trump says Microsoft is in talks to acquire TikTok



WASHINGTON (Agencies): US President Donald Trump told reporters on Monday that Microsoft is in talks to acquire TikTok and that

he would like to see a bidding war over the app. Microsoft and TikTok did not immediately respond to Reuters' requests for a comment outside regular business hours. Trump has previously said that he was in discussions with several parties about purchasing TikTok and expects to make a decision on the app's future within the next 30 days. The app, which has about 170 million American users, was briefly taken offline just before a law requiring ByteDance to either sell it on national security grounds or face a ban took effect on Jan. 19.

Dutch bank ING seals deal to exit Russia



THE HAGUE (Agencies): Dutch banking giant ING announced today a deal to sell its Russian business to a local company, taking a €700 million (US\$730 million) hit to end its presence in the country. ING is the latest in a long list of Western firms to leave Russia since Moscow launched an invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The bank said it agreed to sell its business in Russia to Global Development JSC, a local company "owned by a Moscow-based financial investor with a background in factoring services". "This transaction will effectively end ING's activities in the Russian market," the company said in a statement. The transaction is expected to be completed in the third quarter of this year. Global Development will acquire all shares of ING Bank (Eurasia) JSC, absorbing its Russian activities and staff in the country, the statement said. "Global Development intends to continue to serve customers in Russia under a new brand," it added.

White House pauses federal grants and loans

WASHINGTON (Agencies): US President Donald Trump has paused grants, loans and other federal assistance, according to a leaked government memo verified by the BBC's US partner, CBS News. In the memo, the acting head of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) calls on government agencies to ensure spending is consistent with Trump's priorities. The full impact of the pause is not yet clear, although the memo specifies that Medicaid and Social Security benefits are not affected. It comes days after the US halted nearly all foreign aid. The move has been criticised by members of the rival Democratic Party who warn of "devastating consequences" on programmes that people rely on. The move has been criticised by members of the rival Democratic Party who warn of "devastating consequences" on programmes that people rely on. Diane Yentel of the National Council of Nonprofits said the order could stop cancer research, food assistance and suicide hotlines. Given the spending that is now on hold was apportioned by Congress, it is likely this will face legal challenges about the scope of presidential power. The memo, signed by acting OMB chief Matthew Vaeth, calls on government agencies to temporarily pause their financial assistance programmes, so they can review spending that could be impacted by the various orders Trump has signed.

H&M's Q4 sales disappoint due to late Black Friday



STOCKHOLM (Agencies): Swedish fast-fashion retailer H&M reported weaker-than-expected fourth-quarter sales today due in part to a late Black Friday, but said sales were up 4% in December and January, indicating a better start to the new fiscal year. H&M's sales in the fourth quarter to Nov 30 were 62.19 billion Swedish crowns, up 3% in local currencies, a weaker performance than analysts' mean forecast of 63.48 billion Swedish crowns. H&M shares were down 3.6% at 9.23am. Black

Friday was on Nov 29 last year, and H&M said more of its sales around that key discounting day were reported as revenues in December, hitting quarterly sales by just under 1%. Operating profit margin for the quarter was 7.4%, up from 6.9% a year before, as CEO Daniel Erver, who took over a year ago, said investments in marketing were starting to pay off. "I'm pleased with the early progress, but I believe that there is more potential for us," Erver said in a press conference. H&M's first quarter marketing spending is expected to increase year on year, but be somewhat lower compared to the fourth quarter. H&M has been struggling to grow its sales as Chinese online retailer Shein attracts cash-strapped shoppers with ultra-low prices and Zara owner Inditex has managed to keep selling more clothes at higher prices.

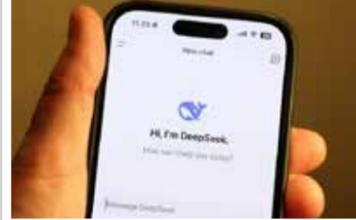
BlackRock boss predicts \$700,000 Bitcoin

WASHINGTON (Agencies): Bitcoin could reach an astonishing \$700,000 if institutional investors allocate between 2% and 5% of their portfolios to the cryptocurrency, Larry Fink, the head of BlackRock, the world's largest asset management firm, has predicted. The digital coin has seen a surge in its value in recent months. In 2024, its price jumped 121%, reaching the peak of \$108,135 in December. On Monday, following the inauguration of US President Donald Trump, Bitcoin hit a record \$109,225. Trump had previously announced plans to make the US the world's "crypto capital" and to set up a national Bitcoin reserve. Fink told an audience at a panel in Davos on Wednesday that he is "a big believer" in the world's largest cryptocurrency as an instrument, highlighting its potential as a finan-



cial hedge. "If you're frightened of the debasement of your currency, or you're frightened of the economic or political stability of your country, you can have an internationally based instrument called Bitcoin that will overcome those local fears," Fink said. Bitcoin 'has no intrinsic value' - JPMorgan boss READ MORE: Bitcoin 'has no intrinsic value' - JPMorgan boss The investor cited a momentum towards institutional adoption of the cryptocurrency.

China's DeepSeek AI Shakes U.S. Tech Industry, Sends Stocks Plunging



NEW YORK (Agencies): U.S. stocks tumbled Monday after China's AI startup, DeepSeek, unveiled a breakthrough that threatens America's tech dominance. The company, founded just a year ago, introduced its ChatGPT-like AI model, R1, which operates at a fraction of the cost of models from OpenAI, Google, or Meta. DeepSeek spent just \$5.6 million on computing power for its base model, far less than the hundreds of millions U.S. companies invest in their AI systems. The announcement sent shockwaves through the tech sector. The Nasdaq dropped 3.1%, and the S&P 500 fell 1.5%. Nvidia, a leading AI chipmaker, saw its stock fall nearly 17%, losing \$588.8 billion in market value,

marking the largest single-day stock loss ever. Other major tech companies, including Meta and Alphabet, also suffered sharp declines. The news is especially striking given the U.S. has restricted high-power AI chip supplies to China over national security concerns. DeepSeek's ability to develop an advanced, cost-effective AI model with underpowered chips has raised doubts about the U.S. tech sector's lead in AI. Analysts are now questioning whether U.S. tech companies' heavy spending on AI will generate profits or if they are overspending. The shift in investor sentiment has sparked renewed interest in undervalued Chinese AI firms, with DeepSeek's rise offering a potential growth alternative. The stock market's reaction has also led to a massive rotation out of AI-related investments, with energy stocks, which had benefited from powering AI data centers, also seeing significant losses. The market will be closely watching how U.S. tech firms respond to this development in the coming weeks.

Saudi Arabia's real GDP grows 4.4%: GASTAT

RIYADH (Agencies): Saudi Arabia's real gross domestic product saw an annual expansion of 4.4 percent in the fourth quarter of 2024, marking its highest growth in two years, official data showed. According to flash estimates from the General Authority for Statistics, the Kingdom's non-oil activities grew by 4.6 percent year on year in the three months to the end of December, reflecting ongoing efforts to diversify the economy. The report also noted that oil activities rose by 3.4 percent in the fourth quarter compared to the same period in 2023, while government activities expanded by 2.2 percent. Saudi Arabia's GDP growth aligns with the broader Middle East trend, where countries are steadily advancing economic diversification. The UAE's central bank projects 4 percent GDP



growth in 2024, while Bahrain and Qatar reported year-on-year expansions of 2.1 percent and 2 percent, respectively, in the third quarter. Qatar's full-year GDP grew by 1.7 percent, driven by a 1.9 percent rise in non-hydrocarbon activities. Reflection on the Saudi figures, GASTAT said: "The results also showed that seasonally adjusted real GDP increased by 0.3 percent in the fourth quarter of 2024 compared to the third quarter of the same year."

Sri Lanka in talks with Adani Group to lower wind power purchase costs



COLOMBO: The Sri Lankan government has started talks with India's Adani Group to lower the cost of power from two wind power projects the group will build in the island nation's northern province, the cabinet spokesman said today. Sri Lanka has been reviewing the group's local projects after US authorities in November accused billionaire founder Gautam Adani and other executives of being part of a scheme to pay bribes to secure Indian power supply contracts. Adani has denied the allegations. "The Sri Lankan government is of the stance that we want a lower price and discussions with Adani have already started," cabinet spokesman and health and media minister Nalinda Jayatissa said. "The government thinks it is possible to bring prices to about US\$0.06 per kWh or lower, below the earlier proposed price of

US\$0.08," he said. Adani did not respond immediately to a request for comment. Last week, Adani said that its power purchase deal with the Sri Lankan government was intact after the AFP news agency reported it had been revoked. Adani said the Sri Lankan cabinet's decision earlier this month to re-evaluate the tariff approved in May was a "standard review process" with a new government and that the group remains committed to investing US\$1 billion in Sri Lanka's green energy sector. Under the deal with Sri Lanka, Adani Green Energy would build two wind power stations with a total investment of US\$442 million. Cash-strapped Sri Lanka, which has suffered from power blackouts and fuel shortages, has been trying to speed up green power generation to hedge against surges in imported fuel costs. The US allegations raised concerns among some partners and investors of the group, with at least one Indian state reviewing its power deal with Adani and TotalEnergies halting further investments in the conglomerate. The Adani Group is also involved in building a US\$700 million terminal project at Sri Lanka's largest port in Colombo. (Agencies)

Mideast, North Africa tennis revolution is reshaping global game

ABU DHABI: The landscape of global tennis is shifting, and nowhere is this more evident than in the Middle East and North Africa region. Long known for its passion for sport, the region has in recent years rapidly evolved into a major player in world tennis, hosting marquee events, attracting top talent, and facilitating the evolution of the sport — particularly in the female game. As the Mubadala Abu Dhabi Open prepares for its third edition from Feb. 1 to 8 at the International Tennis Centre, Zayed Sports City, the tournament is not just another stop on the WTA calendar but a testament to the region's growing prominence in the sport. Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Doha, and now Riyadh, have become regular hosts of high-profile events, cul-



minating in Saudi Arabia's historic hosting of the WTA Finals in 2024. The WTA Finals' move to Riyadh from November last year represents a milestone moment, reflecting the growing investment and commitment to women's sports. The backing of such prestigious events signals a long-term vision to foster elite competition, nurture local talent, and make the region an integral part of the professional tennis circuit. (Agencies)

Surging Rockets beat the Celtics after knocking off the Cavaliers twice



BOSTON: The Houston Rockets have been one of the NBA's more surprising teams this season. After their past three games, they shouldn't shock anyone. The Rockets beat the Eastern Conference-leading Cleveland Cavaliers twice last week before traveling to Boston and pulling out a 114-112 victory over the defending champion Celtics on Monday night. "We're over

halfway through now and our record is what it is, so it's not just a fluke or anything," Houston coach Ime Udoka said. "People watch film and see the physicality and the way that we play, it's a little different than the rest of the league, maybe that catches people off guard initially, but I wouldn't say we're sneaking up on anybody anymore at this point in the season." Houston (31-14), which is second in the Western Conference, posted its ninth win in 11 games on Monday. Its record is a few percentage points better than that of the defending NBA champion Celtics (32-15). The Cavs and Celtics were a combined 104-28 (.788) entering their games against Houston. (Agencies)

Juventus bring in Chelsea defender Veiga on loan

MILAN: Juventus have signed Portugal defender Renato Veiga on loan from Chelsea until the end of the season, the Serie A club said on Monday. Veiga joined Chelsea from FC Basel on a seven-year deal in July for a reported €14 million but has started only one Premier League match this season. The versatile 21-year-old made his debut for Portugal in October last year against Poland in a Nations League game and has played in two more internationals. Veiga joins a Juve side fifth in Serie A, two points behind fourth-placed Lazio but 16 adrift of leaders Napoli. Veiga will hope for more opportunities at Juventus, who have



struggled with injuries in defence. Gleison Bremer and Juan Cabal are out with anterior cruciate ligament injuries, while Danilo left the club by mutual agreement on Monday.

DeChambeau hoping trip to International Series India inspires a nation

GURUGRAM: Bryson DeChambeau will break new ground this week when he competes in the International Series India presented by DLF, marking the first time he has visited the country. The long-awaited debut means huge crowds are expected and the reigning US Open champion is clearly ready for the occasion. "First off I want to say thank you to all of India for welcoming me so warmly," said the American. "I think the first time I started talking about [going to India] was last year and what the possibilities are here in India with the kids. The ability for golf, as really a young sport but changing from an



older sport into a young sport, is to showcase what [it] can mean for the future generations of India. That's always inspired me. My mission in the game of golf is to inspire, entertain, and a subtle part of it is educate as well." The 31-year-old, who also won the US Open in 2020, is part of

a star-studded field that includes Indian Anirban Lahiri and England's Paul Casey, who are part of his Crushers GC team on the LIV Golf League. "Educate, entertain, inspire are my main three principles of why I play the game of golf. I think this is an amazing opportunity for all of golf to come together and see what India can truly produce for the world. And it's a growing economy, it's a growing population that needs golf. There's a lot more to come, so that's why I'm here." Earlier in the week, DeChambeau took time out of his schedule to visit the Taj Mahal, which had a profound impact on him. (Agencies)

'No way back' for Rashford at Man Utd, says Ferdinand

MANCHESTER: Former Manchester United defender Rio Ferdinand believes Marcus Rashford has no future at the club after manager Ruben Amorim said he would rather have his goalkeeping coach in his match-day squad. Rashford has not played for United since Dec 12, with Amorim leaving him out of the squad for every game since apart from one, in which he was an unused substitute. When quizzed on why he had not included Rashford for Sunday's 1-0 at Fulham, Amorim pointed to the England in-



ternational's effort in training with a stinging reference to Jorge Vital, United's 63-year-old goalkeeping coach. "The reason is the training, what I think a footballer should do in train-

ing, in life and every day... I will put (in) Vital before I put (in) a player who doesn't give the maximum every day," said Amorim in the latest of a series of bombastic remarks since he took charge in November. Ferdinand, who won six Premier League titles and the Champions League during his decorated 12-year career at Old Trafford, said he would be embarrassed by such a statement. "If I was that player that the manager said that about... embarrassment," he said on the Rio Ferdinand Presents podcast. (Agencies)

Raducanu clings to positives after early Singapore Open exit

LONDON: Emma Raducanu refused to be too downcast after suffering an opening round exit at the Singapore Open when the British seventh seed lost 5-7 7-5 7-5 to the 101st-ranked Cristina Bucsa. Raducanu progressed to the third round of the recently concluded Australian Open for the first time in her career before losing to five-times Grand Slam champion and Polish second-seed Iga Swiatek in straight sets. Having dealt with a string of injuries since capturing



the 2021 U.S. Open, her only major, Raducanu went down in Singapore after a three-hour and three-minute battle against her Spanish opponent

on Monday. But the 22-year-old was happy with the way she handled herself following the end of her partnership with coach Nick Cavaday, who stepped back from the role last week to prioritise getting back to full health. "I have the positives (from) this week, coming here on my own with Yutaka and my mom, but I'm really proud of how I dealt and handled myself this week," Raducanu told ESPN after the match, referring to her fitness coach Yutaka Nakamura. (Agencies)

Wheelchair sports for UAE announced by Heroes of Hope and Dubai Sports Council



DUBAI: Heroes of Hope, in collaboration with the Dubai Sports Council, has launched an initiative to host wheelchair sports events in the UAE. The initiative, announced at a press conference at JA Lake View Hotel in Jebel Ali, aims to expand access to adaptive sports for People of Determination and foster discussions around disability. The event featured speakers Hollie Murphy, founder and CEO of Heroes of Hope, and Abdulla Alblooshi, the organization's co-founder. Murphy said: "Our activities, ranging from rugby to swimming, empower athletes of determination to feel included and thrive physically and socially. "The addition of wheelchairs will allow more PODs to access sports, while also giving able-bodied individuals a better understanding of the resilience and skill required by wheelchair users, both in and outside of sports. "It's a powerful step toward a more inclusive community." Sara Houston, an Australian national wheelchair basketball athlete, member of the International Wheelchair Basketball Association, and former Idol contestant, shared her remarkable journey of resilience and empowerment through sports. Houston, diagnosed with osteosarcoma, a rare and aggressive bone cancer, emphasized the importance of open conversations about disabilities to encourage innovation, acceptance, and inclusivity in sports. "Sport gave me a purpose when I thought all was lost," said Houston. "Wheelchair basketball introduced me to a community where I felt empowered, valued, and inspired. "My mission now is to encourage everyone, athletes, coaches, and spectators, to embrace inclusivity and create a world where sports truly belong to everyone." (Agencies)

A family that built a dynasty of sports excellence



PETALING JAYA: Here's a dreamy story about a family of five national football heroes, a hockey legend and an impressive lineage of athletes. They come from a line of 15 siblings whose belief that sports represent a significant aspect of Malaysian life pulled everyone together. Through familial bonds, one dream and hard work, they have created a dynasty of sports excellence. When you meet them, there's a bit of a "Sound of Music" vibe to the Lims, if the Van Tropp family had been filled with athletes rather than singers. If the movie shows how the power of music can unite a family, the Lim pedigree is a stirring example of how

shared passion can bring families together while inspiring communities to dream big. The youth of Malaysia traditionally look to athletes as heroes, and five brothers and their sister, from Melaka, took centre stage over four decades. The Lim brothers — football centre-back Seng Koon, midfielders Kim Chon and Teong Kim, and goalkeepers Chuan Chin and Hong Guan spiritedly took their place in Malaysian football. Their sister, Mary, was recently inducted into the Olympic Council of Malaysia Hall of Fame, along with her teammates from the bronze-winning women's hockey team in the 1982 Asian Games. (Agencies)

Extreme E reveals narrowing of gender performance gap

LONDON: Extreme E, an electric off-road race series using identical SUVs with a male and female driver in every team, published data on Tuesday showing women had narrowed the gender performance gap by almost 70% over the first four seasons. The series, launched in 2021 with a focus on green technology and races held in remote locations to raise awareness of climate change, is switching to hydrogen this season with a new Extreme H tag. Extreme E crunched the numbers from a timed section of each race where teams can secure two additional points if they are fastest. In season one, female drivers were on average 4.5 seconds slower than their male counterparts. By season four the gap had shrunk to 1.1 seconds, a 68.64% reduction. There was a 29.76% improvement in season two and a further 29.67% in season three. In season four, when only four of 10 scheduled rounds were held, the gender gap closed by



36.5% on the previous year's figures. "Extreme E's mixed-gender format is a game-changer, and this data proves just how powerful equal opportunity can be," said 2009 Formula One world champion and Extreme E team owner Jensen Button in a statement. Australian Molly Taylor, who races for the E.ON Next Veloce team and won the inaugural championship with Sweden's Johan Kristoffersson, said Extreme E had changed the course of her career. "What Extreme E has proven is that with the right opportunity, exposure, development and investment we can see women reach the top," she said. (Agencies)

DAILY HOROSCOPE: JANUARY 31, 2025



— It's a general reading which may differ from person to person because of time date and year.

— **ARIES:** Try not to involve yourself in anything too serious today, especially if it's legally binding! You need to keep yourself free of obligation as much as possible until you feel sure of the situation.

— **TAURUS:** You've got to team up with others today. There's no excuse for going it alone! If you can find a way to get your friends or coworkers to all rally under one flag, you should have a blast.

— **GEMINI:** You're used to seeing things pretty clearly, but on a day like today you should find that it's harder than usual to figure out what's really going on. Try to get a grip, but expect better info tomorrow.

— **CANCER:** Your brainpower is potent, and you should be able to get to the bottom of any big philosophical issue that's been on your mind. Indulge your friends who are going through spiritual crises.

— **LEO:** People are full of surprises today, not all of them welcome! You need to make sure that you're

ready for little explosions that keep bursting when your friends and colleagues lose their temper.

— **VIRGO:** You need to be a little more tolerant of oddball ideas today, especially those coming from your friends and family. If you at least hear them out, you should earn some serious cred with them.

— **LIBRA:** Try a little harder to stick with the jobs you've already got instead of going out and looking for more. You can start on new things soon, but you've got too many loose ends right now.

— **SCORPIO:** There's no use keeping your secret powers in reserve today. If you can't use them now, when can you use them? If you surprise anyone, you might just spontaneously convert them to your side.

— **SAGITTARIUS:** It's one of those days when you can tell that you really need to push yourself harder. It could be that your energy is stagnating in your current location, so it's time for a short-term move.

— **CAPRICORN:** You may not see yourself as artistic, but you've got depths that others rarely see. Now is a good time to show them off and see who's the most intrigued. Things can really change if you want.

— **ACQUARIUS:** It may feel selfish, but you've got to do what's best for you today. That could mean anything from taking the day off work to getting away by yourself and letting your responsibilities go for a bit.

— **PISCES:** Your generous nature isn't even tested today by all the requests for help and attention. You've got more than enough positive energy to make everyone's life at least a little better.

Al-Qassam Brigades announces group's General Commander Mohammad Deif killed



GAZA CITY (Agencies): Hamas' military wing, Al-Qassam Brigades, said Thursday that its General Commander, Mohammad Deif was killed, Anadolu Agency reports. The group's spokesperson, Abu Ubaida, said in a televised statement that six other members of the Al-Qassam Brigades' military council were killed alongside Deif. Among the dead are his deputy, Marwan Issa, and senior commanders Ghazi Abu Tamah, Raed Thabit, Rafi Salama, Ahmad Ghundour and Ayman Nofal. Abu Ubaida noted that the group had previously announced the deaths of Ahmad Ghundour, commander of the North Gaza Brigade and Ayman Nofal, commander of the Central Brigade, during Israel's genocide in the Gaza Strip. He added that the announcement came only after completing necessary procedures, addressing security concerns dictated by battlefield conditions and verifying details. The statement comes more than seven months after the Israeli army said it assassinated Deif in Gaza. Media outlets had reported Deif's death, but the announcement Thursday is the first official acknowledgment from Hamas of the senior leader's demise.

Iran's Shahed-149 Drone Ready for Combat After Successful Trial



Tehran (Agencies): Iran has officially operationalized its Shahed-149 "Gaza" unmanned combat aerial vehicle (UCAV), a high-altitude, long-endurance drone capable of striking targets up to 4,000 kilometers away. The announcement follows the successful deployment of the drone during the "Great Prophet 2025" military exercise, where it engaged multiple mock targets with high precision. According to a video published by Iran's National TV on January 26, 2025, the Shahed-149 is equipped with eight Sadid-345 guided glide bombs, underscoring its formidable strike capabilities. The Iranian-made Shahed-149 MALE (Medium-Altitude Long-Endurance) aerial drone was first introduced in 2021 and subsequently delivered to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Aerospace Force in 2022. With a wingspan of 21 meters, the Shahed-149 can carry a payload of 500 kg, consisting of various munitions, including precision-guided bombs and surveillance equipment. The drone operates with a cruising speed of 215 km/h, a flight endurance of 25 hours, and can reach altitudes of 10,668 m (35,000 feet), making it suitable for long-range reconnaissance and strike missions. The Shahed-149 features advanced avionics, including electro-optical/infrared (EO/IR) sensors, synthetic aperture radar (SAR), and satellite communication (SATCOM), allowing for beyond-line-of-sight (BLOS) operations and real-time targeting. The integration of these technologies positions the Shahed-149 as a critical asset for Iran's military, enhancing its ability to conduct long-endurance missions over hostile or contested environments. The Sadid-345 precision-guided glide bombs, which weigh approximately 34 kilograms and feature four fixed fins for stability along with four deflectable tail fins for guidance, ensure an accuracy of 2.5 to 5 meters circular error probable (CEP). The bomb has an estimated range of 6 kilometers, providing stand-off strike capabilities and reducing the drone's exposure to enemy air defenses. The Shahed-149 is a significant development in Iran's military capabilities, comparable to the American MQ-9 Reaper in design and function.

Hamas Releases Eight Hostages as Part of Ceasefire Deal

Gaza (Agencies): Hamas has released eight hostages, including three Israelis and five Thai nationals, as part of a ceasefire agreement, handing them over to the Red Cross. In return, Israel began releasing 110 Palestinian prisoners after a brief delay. Israel's military confirmed that the freed hostages, including 29-year-old Arbel Yehud and 80-year-old Gadi Moshe Mozes, had safely crossed into Israel. Earlier in the day, Hamas also released Israeli soldier Agam Berger, who had been held in Gaza since the October 7 attack. Thailand's Foreign Ministry announced that its freed citizens—Thaenna Pongsak, Sathian Suwannakhan, Sriaoun Watchara, Saethao Bannawat, and Rumnao Surasak—will return home



within 10 days. The exchange in Khan Younis sparked strong reactions in Israel, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu condemning chaotic scenes during the handover. Following tele-

vised footage of gunmen struggling to control crowds, Netanyahu briefly halted the release of Palestinian prisoners, demanding better security measures for future hostage transfers.

China and India to Resume Direct Flights, Strengthen Strategic Ties



BEIJING: China and India have agreed to resume direct flights between the two nations and enhance strategic communication and mutual political trust. The announcement came following the China-India Vice Foreign Minister-Foreign Secretary Dialogue held in Beijing on Monday, according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry. The dialogue, led by Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong and Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, aimed to advance the consensus reached by the leaders of both nations during their meeting in Kazan. The discussions focused on fostering cooperation and improving bilateral ties. Among the agreements reached, India expressed full support for China's rotating presidency of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and pledged active participa-

tion in SCO activities. The two sides also committed to commemorating the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2025 through media exchanges, think tank dialogues, and other people-to-people initiatives. The resumption of direct flights marks a significant step in facilitating personnel exchanges, including resident journalists and students. Indian pilgrims will also be allowed to visit Kailash Mansarovar in China's Xizang Autonomous Region in 2025, with arrangements to be finalized soon. Both countries agreed to enhance trans-border river cooperation and plan a new round of expert-level meetings to address related concerns. Experts believe the agreements signify a mutual effort to stabilize ties amidst challenges. Hu Zhiyong, a professor at Zhejiang International Studies University, noted that the two nations share common interests in maintaining stable relations despite past frictions. He highlighted that India's reliance on Chinese imports, with a trade deficit of \$85.1 billion in 2024, underscores the need for improved cooperation. (Agencies)

U.S. Space Force Breaks Ground on 'Space Campus' at Al Udeid Air Base Qatar

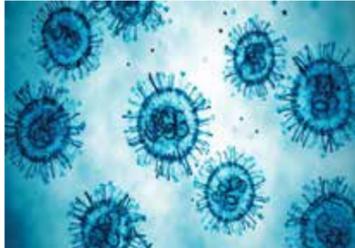
Qatar: The U.S. Space Force has begun constructing a new "Space Campus" at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar, to enhance space operations and regional stability. The project, launched on January 14, marks a significant milestone for Space Forces Central (SPACECENT). "This complex will soon become a beacon for the vital space systems that underpin U.S. CENTCOM's mission of stability and partnership across the region," said Col. Frank Brooks, deputy commander of SPACECENT. Since its establishment in 2022, SPACECENT has expanded from 30 to over 60 personnel, taking on critical roles like missile warning detection, space-based communications, and GPS support. It also oversees Joint Tactical Ground Station (JTAGS) missile warning systems at key locations, including Al Udeid. The new campus is part of a broad-



er modernization effort, following \$1.4 billion in completed projects under a 2040 Strategic Master Plan. The U.S. and Qatar recently extended the American military presence in the country for another decade. "This facility will stand as a testament to our shared vision for a safer, more secure world," Brooks added. The Space Campus will play a crucial role in integrating space capabilities into U.S. CENTCOM's mission, strengthening security and partnerships in the Middle East. (Agencies)

Ireland on Alert as Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) Cases Rise

Dublin, Ireland (Agencies): Ireland is on high alert as cases of Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) surge across the UK. The virus, which has also affected China, leading to emergency measures, is now spreading rapidly. Health officials are urging citizens to stay vigilant and take precautionary measures. Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) is a respiratory virus that was first identified in the Netherlands in 2001. It belongs to the pneumoviridae family, which also includes the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). HMPV typically causes cold-like symptoms and spreads through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. The symptoms of HMPV include cough, fever, runny or blocked nose, sore throat, wheezing, shortness of breath, and rash. While most cases are mild, the virus can cause more severe respiratory infections like pneumonia, bronchitis, and asthma flare-ups, particularly in vulnerable popu-



lations. High-risk groups include children, elderly individuals, people with weakened immune systems, and those with chronic respiratory conditions like asthma or COPD. To prevent the spread of HMPV, health officials recommend regular handwashing with soap and water, wearing masks in crowded places, avoiding touching eyes, nose, or mouth without cleaning hands first, improving ventilation in indoor spaces, and staying home when feeling unwell. It is crucial for high-risk individuals to seek medical attention if they experience severe symptoms such as persistent fever, difficulty breathing, or chest pain.

Philippines Acquires Pakistani VTOL Attack Drones



Manila (Agencies): The Philippines is reportedly acquiring Pakistani VTOL (Vertical Take-Off and Landing) attack drones through Thunder Defense, a Pak-Filipino company. This acquisition could include Pakistan's VTOL suicide drones, offering game-changing capabilities to the Philippine Marine Corps. The VTOL drones, known for their ability to take off and land vertically, are expected to significantly enhance the Philippines' military capabilities. These drones can be deployed in various terrains and are particularly effective for precision strikes on enemy targets, including tanks, helicopters, and installations. Thunder Defense, a company with a strong presence in both Pakistan and the Philippines, has been instrumental in facilitating this deal. The acquisition underscores the growing defense collaboration between the two countries, aiming to bolster the Philippines' defense infrastructure. The introduction of these advanced drones is anticipated to provide the Philippine Marine Corps with a strategic edge, enabling them to conduct more effective and efficient military operations. The VTOL suicide drones, capable of flying at altitudes of up to 6,000 feet and carrying precision-guided bombs, are designed to neutralize high-value targets while minimizing collateral damage. This development marks a significant milestone in the defense partnership between Pakistan and the Philippines, showcasing the potential for future collaborations in enhancing military capabilities and ensuring regional security.

Pilot Safe After F-35 Fighter Jet Crashes at Alaska Base

Anchorage (Agencies): A U.S. Air Force pilot safely ejected from an F-35 fighter jet before it crashed during a training exercise at Eielson Air Force Base in Alaska on Tuesday. Col. Paul Townsend, commander of the 354th Fighter Wing, stated that the pilot experienced an "inflight malfunction" and declared an emergency before ejecting. The aircraft crashed during the landing phase of the flight. The pilot was reported to be in stable condition and was taken to a medical facility for evaluation. The crash, which occurred early Tuesday afternoon, resulted in significant damage to the aircraft. The Air Force has launched an investigation to determine the cause of the incident and prevent future occurrences. Eielson Air Force Base, located about 25 miles (40 kilometers) south of Fairbanks, was chosen in 2016 to host 54 F-35s, leading to a half-billion-dollar expansion that included new infrastructure and an increase in personnel.

Qatari emir becomes 1st Arab leader to visit Syria since fall of Assad

Damascus (Agencies): The Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani arrived in Damascus on Thursday, becoming the first Arab leader to visit Syria since the collapse of Bashar Assad's regime. Ahmed Al-Sharaa, declared interim president of Syria during

a conference on Wednesday evening, welcomed Sheikh Tamim at Damascus International Airport on his arrival. Qatar supported Syrian opposition factions during the country's 13-year civil war before Assad fled Damascus for Moscow in early December.

Pakistan outlaws disinformation with 3-year jail term

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): Pakistan criminalized online disinformation on Tuesday, passing legislation that enshrines punishments of up to three years in prison, a decision journalists say is designed to crack down on disinformation. "I have heard more 'yes' than 'no', so the bill is approved," Syedaal Khan, deputy chair of Pakistan's Senate, said amid protest from the opposition and journalists, who walked out

of the gallery. The law targets anyone who "intentionally disseminates" information online that they have "reason to believe to be false or fake and likely to cause or create a sense of fear, panic or disorder or unrest." The law was rushed through the National Assembly with little warning last week before being presented to the Senate on Tuesday, and will now pass to the president to be rubber stamped.

New Zealand Requires Israelis to Provide Military Service Details as Condition of Entry

Wellington (Agencies): The New Zealand Immigration Authority has begun requiring Israelis applying for entry visas to disclose details of their military service. This measure follows the genocidal war waged by Israel, with American support, against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip between 7 October 2023 and 19 January 2025. According to The Times of Israel, Is-

raelis of reserve service age must report their service in the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and whether they are active reservists. They must complete detailed questionnaires about their military service, including dates, locations, units, and ranks, as well as their involvement in any violent or abusive activities. Those unable to provide this information are denied visas.

India Procures Long-Range Cameras and Thermal Sights for Army



Mumbai (Agencies): India's Ministry of Defence has awarded contracts worth INR1 billion (USD11.6 million) to Mumbai-based RRP S4E for long-range cameras and thermal sights. The Viraj 28-B camera, weighing under 9 kg, features full HD resolution and thermal sensors, while the PR82 thermal sight has high-resolution capabilities. Both will enhance the Indian Army's operational capabilities. Deliveries have already begun and are expected to be completed by April.

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