

NSC moot called today

ISLAMABAD (NNI): The National Security Committee (NSC), presided over by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will be held again on Monday to take decisive actions against terrorists. The National Security Committee (NSC) will meet tomorrow afternoon at the Prime Minister s House, and it is anticipated that significant decisions will be made regarding the proposals that were discussed in the meeting on Friday.



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PM reiterates his resolve to overcome current challenges

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday reiterated that in the new year, he would use his energy and time to get the people out of difficulties, rehabilitate flood victims and put Pakistan on the path to growth and stability.

On his Twitter handle, the prime minister, observed that 2022 was yet another tough year for Pakistan. The worst flooding in history aggravated the economic challenges.

In another related tweet, the prime minister gave a message to the resilient Pakistani nation by saying that together they would bounce back.

In 2022, he said, the one-third of Pakistan paid the heavy price due to climate change and for no fault of theirs.

PM takes up Punjab situation with Zardari, Fazl in phone calls

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday phoned former president Asif Ali Zardari and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman. The prime minister discussed with both the leaders the political situation prevailing in Punjab. The three leaders agreed to call a meeting of the coalition parties soon.

"To the resilient Pakistani nation. In 2022, the one-third of Pakistan paid the heavy price due to climate change and for no fault of theirs.

Together we will bounce back as a nation," the prime minister posted a tweet.

MPAs call on PM: Members of the Punjab Assembly (MPAs)

Chaudhary Ashraf Ali Ansari and Malik Ghulam Qasim Hunjra separately called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. During the meetings, the political situation in Punjab province was discussed, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

President returns ICT Local Government (Amendment) Bill unsigned

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Dr. Arif Alvi has returned the Islamabad Capital Territory Local Government (Amendment) Bill, 2022 unsigned in terms of clause (1) (b) of Article 75 of the Constitution.

The Bill was returned by observing that it would further delay the Local Government elections. "Actions of the Federal Government taken in hurry on resulted in delaying election process twice, which was anathema to democracy," President Secretariat

Press Wing in a press release on Sunday quoted the president as saying.

It was further stated, "elections could not be held in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) due to the following malafide actions of Federal Government.

After the completion of the delimitation of 50 Union Councils, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) announced elections for Local Government in ICT on 31st July 2022. Despite the announcement of the polling date, Federal Government increased the number of

Union Councils from 50 to 101, resulting in the postponement of elections. After the demarcation of 101 Union Councils, ECP decided to hold elections in ICT on 31st December 2022. ii) Section 2 of the current Bill provides for 125 Union Councils in the ICT. Therefore, elections scheduled for 31st December 2022 have been again postponed. iii) As per Section 3 of the current Bill, the mode of elections of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor has been changed after the announcement of the schedule of elections"

Making efforts to further broaden ties with friendly countries: FM

ISLAMABAD (APP): Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Sunday said that the coalition government was making efforts to broaden Pakistan's ties with the friendly countries, besides forging beneficial relations with other countries for the benefits of the people of Pakistan.

In a video message on the advent of new year, the foreign minister said that the government had focused to enhance its relationship with the old friends and forge new ties with others. He said "Whenever any allegations were levelled against Pakistan, they befittingly responded to them. In the UN, the Indian side was made to face the reality." The foreign minister said they knew how to represent Pakistan and defend it. The prime minister had undertaken different foreign visits to increase country's outreach in the world, he said, adding Pakistan chaired the G77 and succeeded in the inclusion of 'loss and damage' fund in the COP 27 agenda for the developing countries. It was not only a big achievement for Pakistan, but also for the developing world and those championing for the cause of climate.

Highlighting the efforts of the ministry of foreign affairs, the foreign minister said due to their efforts, Pakistan successfully met the action plans of Financial Action Task Force (FATF) ahead of time and had been the only country to be removed from its grey list.

Foreign Minister Bilawal said in the year 2023, they aimed to improve bilateral and multilateral ties at all regional and global fora and organizations and would pursue the agenda of economic diplomacy.



LAHORE: Member of the Punjab Assembly Chaudhary Ashraf Ali Ansari calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

Will have to approach IMF again to subside default risk: Imran

LAHORE (NNI): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan said on Sunday the country will have to approach the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to subside the default risk.

Addressing his workers through a video link, Mr Khan made it clear that the country had no other option, but to approach the International Monetary Fund (IMF), warning the nation to get ready for more inflation in the coming days.

Mr Khan said that the only solution to all the problems was the unity of the people, urging the nation to struggle for the establishment of system of justice.

Underscoring the PTI's role in flood relief, the deposed premier said, "When the country was facing the unprecedented floods, we collected money for the relief and rehabilitation of the flood-stricken people."

Earlier, the PTI chief claimed that the establishment asked three lawmakers from his party to remain neutral in the matter of Punjab Chief Minister Parvez Elahi's vote of confidence.

Speaking to journalists, Mr Khan claimed that General Bajwa hired

Hussain Haqqani in America for lobbying, and that Donald Lu was taught a lesson from Pakistan. He further said that Hussain Haqqani continued to campaign against him and promote General Bajwa.

Mr Khan said that the Trump administration gave him a historic welcome during his visit to the United States as Prime Minister.

Speaking on his last meeting with Qamar Javed Bajwa, Mr. Khan said, "General (Retd) Bajwa called me a playboy, and in reply I said to him that yes, I had been a playboy. Qamar was stabbing us in the back and also showing sympathy."

Mr Khan claimed the setup of General (Retd) Bajwa was still working in the establishment. He also claimed that the MQM's various factions were coming together in Karachi, and that the BAP was joining the Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

Mr Khan slammed Najam Sethi, saying he didn't even know the basics of cricket, and that the PCB's constitution was changed to accommodate Sethi's appointment.

On the other hand, PTI Chairman and former prime minister Imran Khan has said he is hoped the party will win 2023 elections

despite disappointing [political] situation of the country.

"The country reign was handed over to criminals after dethroning the best performing government [of the PTI] through a conspiracy," he said in a tweet on the eve of the New Year.

"Year 2022: it was the best of times and it was the worst of times. A govt with one of the best econ performances was removed through a conspiracy triggered by supreme self-interest and Pakistan was handed over to a bunch of criminals. They ran economy to the ground and gave themselves NRO-2," Khan said in the tweet.

The PTI stalwart said a massive public support helped the PTI win 75 per cent of by-elections and that the party established itself as a truly national party.

"Despite the gloom right now, especially of a possible default, I have faith in Almighty Allah and confidence in our people that without any doubt in 2023 through elections the PTI will form strong government and bring about substantive structural reforms to get Pakistan out of the crisis the imported government and its backers have plunged the country into."

Pakistan, India swap lists of nuclear installations, prisoners

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Pakistan and India have exchanged lists of nuclear installations and facilities in their countries and have also handed over lists of prisoners in each other's custody in pursuance of agreements signed between the two countries.

The Foreign Office statement issued on Sunday stated: "The Agreement on Prohibition of Attacks against Nuclear Installations and Facilities between Pakistan and India was signed on 31st December 1988 and ratified on 27th January 1991. The Agreement, inter alia, provides that both countries shall inform each other of their nuclear installations and facilities, falling within its definition, on 1st January of each calendar year.

"Pursuant to the agreement, the list of nuclear installations and

facilities in Pakistan was officially handed over to a representative of the Indian High Commission in Islamabad at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs today. Simultaneously, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs also handed over the list of India's nuclear installations and facilities to a representative of the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi."

The FO also stated that Pakistan and India exchanged the lists of prisoners in each other's custody through diplomatic channels.

The simultaneous exchange of lists took place in pursuance of the Consular Access Agreement of 2008. Under the agreement, both countries are required to exchange the lists of prisoners in each other's custody on 1st January and 1st July, every year.

The Government of Pakistan shared with the Indian High Commission in Islamabad a list of 705 Indian prisoners detained in Pakistan, including 51 civilian prisoners and 654 fishermen.

The Indian Government also shared with the High Commission for Pakistan in New Delhi a list of 434 Pakistani prisoners in India, including 339 civilian prisoners and 95 fishermen. Separately, Pakistan has requested for early release and repatriation of its 51 civilian prisoners and 94 fishermen, who have completed their respective sentence and their national status stands confirmed. Furthermore, a request for grant of consular access to missing defence personnel of 1965 and 1971 wars, and special consular access to 56 civil prisoners has also been made, the FO concluded.

PML-N to mediate between MQM, PPP

KARACHI (NNI): The ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has decided to mediate between Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) over the delimitation issue, citing sources. Sources privy to the development stated that MQM-Pakistan has expressed serious concerns over the non-implementation of the agreement signed with the Centre and the Sindh government.

MQM-P has cleared PML-N that holding local body elections without new delimitations in Karachi would be meaningless. The party also complained that the PPP-led Sindh government had not amended the Local Government Act. Sources revealed that senior leaders from PML-N have contacted PPP co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari to convey him the reservations of MQM-P over delimitations.

France starts testing Chinese arrivals to track coronavirus variants

PARIS (AFP): France on Sunday began testing passengers arriving from China in order to track potential Covid variants, Health Minister Francois Braun said.

"This control on arrival is not a control to prevent citizens entering our territory but a more scientific control which will allow us very precisely to check different variants," Braun said at Charles de Gaulle airport, north of Paris.

"These are essentially Omicron variants currently in China," said Braun, adding there will be "a discussion at the European level in the week to harmonise this model" of testing.

As of Sunday, visitors from China must wear a mask and be prepared to submit to a test on arrival, which will be done at random.

Then from Thursday, travellers will also have to present a negative PCR or antigen test undertaken less than 48 hours before their flight.

France joins other states, including the United Kingdom, Italy, and the United States, in testing arrivals from China, four weeks after Beijing scrapped its

"zero-Covid" containment policy of lockdowns and mass testing.

But, three years after the coronavirus first emerged in the city of Wuhan, the country is experiencing a surge in Covid cases. The wave of infections is overwhelming hospitals and crematoriums, notably with older and sick patients, many of whom have not been fully vaccinated. There have also been questions about the accuracy of Chinese case data reporting.

French minister delegate for transport, Clement Beaune, said there were currently six flights to France per week from mainland China and four from Hong Kong. Most passengers from China to France only transit through Charles de Gaulle.

Of 300 passengers who disembarked a flight to the French capital on Sunday, around 60 entered the country and all took a PCR test.

French officials at the airport also took their details in case of a positive test, which would require seven days of isolation.

Four terrorists killed, one soldier martyred in Bannu IBO

RAWALPINDI (NNI): Four terrorists were killed in an Intelligence Based Operation conducted by security forces in Jani Khel area of Bannu district.

According to Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), Pakistan Army troops effectively engaged the terrorists' location and conducted the successful operation. The killed terrorists remained actively involved in terrorist activities against security forces and killing of innocent citizens. Weapon and ammunition was also recovered from the killed terrorists.

However, during intense exchange of fire, Sepoy Muhammad Wasim having fought gallantly, embraced martyrdom. Sanitization of the area is being carried out to eliminate any other terrorists found in the area.

President, PM grieved over loss of security personnel in Bannu operation:

Policeman martyred in police checkpoint attack

LAKKI MARWAT (PPI) A policeman was martyred after unidentified terrorists attacked a police checkpoint in Lakki Marwat, police said Sunday.

According to a police spokesman, the suspects attacked the Shahbaz Khel checkpoint with sophisticated weapons. Policemen deployed at the checkpoint retaliated against the attack.

During a crossfire, one constable embraced martyrdom, while a terrorist also got killed. The funeral prayer of the martyred policeman was offered at 10am.

This is not the first time that a police checkpoint has been attacked in Lakki

Marwat in the recent past.

On December 18, 2022, four policemen were martyred and four others suffered injuries after terrorists attacked a police station in Lakki Marwat.

According to police, the s attacked the Bargi police station with hand grenades and rocket launchers in the wee hours.

The terrorists fled the scene after exchanging heavy gunfire with the police. The bodies and the injured officials were shifted to the local state hospitals. A heavy police contingent arrived at the police station later and launched a search operation in the area.

President Dr. Arif Alvi and Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday expressed their grief over the shahadat of security personnel in the Bannu operation.

The president and the prime minister expressed their condolences and

prayed for the high ranks of the departed soul.

They also paid tribute to shaheed sepyo Muhammad Waseem for sacrificing his life for the motherland, a press release said.

The prime minister said that the sacrifices of the

personnel of the armed forces for the protection of the motherland were unforgettable.

The president and the prime minister also prayed for the bereaved family to bear the loss with fortitude.

Several killed, wounded in blast near Kabul military airfield

KABUL (AFP/APP): An explosion at the entrance to a military airfield in the Afghan capital killed and wounded several people on Sunday, an official told AFP.

The cause of the blast at the gate of the facility next to Kabul's international airport was unclear, interior ministry spokesman Abdul Nafy Takor said.

"A number of our compatriots have been martyred and wounded in the blast," Takor said, adding that authorities were investigating the incident.

A Kabul resident said late on Sunday his brother, an air force officer, was killed in the blast.

"He had worked in the previous government too as an air force officer," Abdul Noor told AFP, referring to the government of former president Ashraf Ghani.



"He and some of his colleagues were in a queue waiting to enter the military airfield when the blast occurred," Noor said, indicating the blast had caused

more casualties.

Taliban officials including Takor did not offer any other details despite repeated requests for information.

Taliban claims to have improved security since storming back to power in August 2021 and often downplays casualty figures from such attacks.

The Frontier Post

Strong earthquake

SWAT (PPI) A strong earthquake with a magnitude of 5.2 on Richter scale jolted Khyber Pakhtunkhwa cities of Swat, Malakand and surrounding areas on Sunday. No loss of life and property has so far been reported. According to the National Seismic Monitoring Centre in Islamabad, the earthquake struck the region at 6:39am at a depth of 179km with the epicentre in Hindu Kush mountainous region of Afghanistan.



PPP to celebrate ZAB's birth anniversary on Jan 05

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Peoples Party will celebrate the 95th birth anniversary of its founder chairman Zulfikar Ali Bhutto late on January 05, Thursday across the country.

PPP sources said on Sunday that special central programme would be held at Larkana, in which, the PPP workers from all over the country would participate. The PPP Punjab and Lahore chapters will also organize seminars, Quran Khawani and other programmes in the province to pay homage to its leader. Several Cake cutting ceremonies will also be held at different places and local leaders will also express their love for their leader.

Shahid visits Kot Lakhpat Jail, reviews facilities

LAHORE (APP): Political Assistant to Chief Minister Punjab Chaudhry Shahid Gujjar visited Kot Lakhpat Jail here on Sunday and reviewed the facilities being provided to the prisoners. Chaudhry Shahid Gujjar himself tasted food being served to the prisoners and checked its quality. He praised the quality of food being served to the prisoners. Chaudhry Shahid Gujjar also inspected the jail hospital and reviewed treatment facilities being provided to the prisoner patients. He inquired the patients about their problems.

The political assistant stated that prisoners are also human beings and directed the concerned officials to provide them facilities according to law.

Punjab extends winter vacations for medical and nursing colleges

LAHORE (NNI): Punjab government on Sunday extended winter vacations for the students of medical and nursing colleges.

According to the notification issued by the Specialised Health Department of Punjab, the winter vacations in the medical and nursing colleges of the province have been extended till January 8. Earlier the vacations were supposed to end on January 2. The notification further said that the clinical students working on rotations will continue discharging their duties in the hospitals. Earlier on December 27, the Lahore High Court (LHC) ordered to extend winter vacations for one more week amid the increasing threat of smog. The orders were passed by the LHC while hearing the petitions moved for seeking the remedy to address the smog issue.

The LHC observed it is the government's responsibility to address the issue of smog and directed to extend the winter vacations for one more week. The further hearing on the pleas has been adjourned until next Friday. It is pertinent to mention here that the Punjab government had earlier notified three off days a week for schools in the provincial capital owing to extreme smog.

Kamran Tessori meets Punjab Governor

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Governor Mohammed Kamran Khan Tessori met Punjab Governor Mohammed Balighur Rehman at Governor house Punjab.

According to a Sindh Governor house communique on Sunday, they discussed the overall political situation, inter-provincial harmony, cooperation in different sectors, and other issues of mutual interests. It was agreed in the meeting that both the provinces could benefit from their experiences. Sindh Governor said that he was contacting all stakeholders of the Sindh province.

Punjab Governor Balighur Rehman said that the efforts of the Sindh Governor for the harmony were appreciated.

Financial stability in country has great impact on Karachi's development: Sindh Governor: Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori has said that financial stability in the country and development of Karachi are interconnected.

Talking to media after visiting Mausoleum of Hazrat Ali Hajveri RA (Data Darbar) here on Sunday, he said that the largest city of the country and financial hub was facing the shortage of energy, gas and water which could only be improved with the improvement in the national economy.

He demanded the Pakistan Peoples Party to fulfill its promises made with the MQM Pakistan.

The governor said that he wanted unity instead of differences in all groups of the MQM for the national interests. He said that he had met with Punjab Governor Balighur Rehman and Chief Minister Ch Pervaiz Elahi.

He said the Punjab provincial capital was a beautiful city and he had a cordial attachment with the city.

Earlier, the Sindh Governor visited the Darbar and prayed for prosperity of Pakistan, Sindh and Karachi.

Sindh CM Murad plays street cricket with boys

KARACHI (NNI): Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah paid a surprise visit to inspect the ongoing development works in Karachi and also played street cricket with boys on Sunday.

The chief minister reviewed and observed the work at Malir Expressway City School and directed to speed it up by removing the encroachments from Deh Dhaddu.

Sindh ministers Sharjeel Memon, Nasir Hussain Shah and Murtaza Wahab also accompanied the Sindh CM during the visit.

Transport Minister, while briefing the Sindh Chief Minister, said that Malir Expressway is being constructed at a cost of Rs29 billion and that the BRT Red Line will have 250 low-emission bio-hybrid buses.

The Chief Minister then played street-cricket with local boys.

While castigating the former Prime Minister Imran, the Chief Minister said that Imran Khan did not plan even a single project during his tenure.

He also claimed that extortion has been completely ended from Karachi.



PM will soon provide clean drinking water for people of Karachi: Amir Muqam

F.P. Report

SHANGLA: Adviser to the Prime Minister on Political and Public Affairs and National Heritage and Culture Division, Engineer Amir Muqam, while addressing a grand meeting in Karachi Kemari through video link, said that he is well aware of the problems of the people of Karachi and the Prime Minister of Pakistan will soon provide clean drinking water.

He said that I will have a meeting with him regarding the project and will also present the problems of KPTK workers to the Minister of Ports and Shipping, Railways, etc. He appealed to the people

of Karachi to abandon of Imran Khan for being a liar, whose four-year rule has brought nothing but the destruction of Pakistan, whose politics are based on lies such as that of 2 crore jobs, 5 million houses. He added that starting with the foreign funding case, the watch theft and the dissolution of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab Assemblies were all lies. Engr. Amir Muqam said that if the people support their true leader, of Pakistan Muslim League-N, Nawaz Sharif and the logo of "Sher", whether in the local body election or general election, then the PML-N will not disappoint the public.

He was addressing a public gathering in

Karachi Kemari through video link.

The public meeting was organized by Muhibullah Khan and others. Engineer Amir Muqam thanked him for organizing the meeting and said that he could not attend directly due to a sudden death in the village. He expressed regret for not being able to attend in person.

He said that once again I give special thanks to Muhibullah Khan who organized the huge public gathering. He said that Muhibullah Khan while belonging to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and living in Karachi raised voice for the rights of Punjab and Bengalis. The advisor said that he will soon visit Karachi in person.

Ombudsman also asked to make slabs of outstanding dues so that low income consumers may pay it in easy instalments.

Wafaqi Mohtasib made it clear that no laxity in the implementation of the decisions will be tolerated and Heads of organizations will stand responsible. He further cautioned that some State Corporations were going to Courts against the decisions of the President of Pakistan which was a clear violation of the Cabinet's instructions on the subject. Secretary Petroleum & respective MD's will check such instances. The Secretary Petroleum passed directions during the meeting to Managing Directors of SNGPL and SSGCL to withdraw these cases from courts within two weeks.



that due attention and prompt administrative measures were required on the part of the utility companies while Ministry & OGRA had to exercise proper supervision to resolve public grievances.

In this respect, proposals developed by the Wafaqi Mohtasib Secretariat were discussed and vital decisions taken to provide

prompt relief to the consumers in their genuine grievances. It was agreed that focal persons in BS-20 will be designated on behalf of the Federal Secretary Petroleum and top management of SNGPL & SSGCL within one week to coordinate with Wafaqi Mohtasib Advisors and remove bottlenecks, where necessary. The



KARACHI: People purchasing old books at a roadside stall.

Zardari-Tessori doctrine bound to fail: Naeemur Rehman

KARACHI (NNI): Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Karachi Ameer Engr Hafiz Naeemur Rehman has said that the Zardari-Tessori doctrine to revive the politics of hate, divide and hooliganism in Karachi is bound to fail and the JI will unearth the conspiracy behind the attempts to merge various factions and splinter groups of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement.

The JI leader expressed these views while addressing a press conference held at Idara Noor-e-Ha, the JI Karachi headquarter, here on Sunday. On the occasion, he demanded of the authorities to take all necessary actions in order to ensure free and fair local government elections on January 15, 2023. He said that the JI has continued its political campaign. He added that the JI and mafias are directly facing off each other in this elections.

He said that the JI will also address the issues of devolution of powers and biased appointments of ROs and DROs. In his first presser in the new year, Engr Naeemur Rehman said that the JI has initiated the Bano Qabil program and under the program the first batch of 10 thousand students have started their respective courses in the field of information technology. He said that the JI at the culmination of the courses will provide guidance and facilitation for job hunt to the successful participants.

He said that the JI will announce its future course of action and the Karachi declaration at the convention to be held on January 8. The Karachi declaration will the solution to problems being faced by Karachiites. The JI Karachi chief demanded of the Election Commission of the Pakistan to take

notice of the party meeting led by PPP supreme Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah at the Chief Minister House.

He also demanded of the ECP to take action against the PPP leadership for continuously flaunting the ECP order. He also highlighted that the PPP government in Sindh completely neglected the commission's letter with directions against political appointments.

He also highlighted the issues ranging from the shortage of water, the K4 water supply project, deteriorating public health sector, the education sector making new lows the issue of K-Electric and the ongoing lawlessness.

He said that only an elected and empowered city mayor would be able to address the burning issues belonging to Karachi and Karachiites.

Govt taking steps to overcome crises: SAPM

LAHORE (APP):Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Rana Mubashir Iqbal on Sunday said that Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif led federal government was putting efforts to steer the country out of crises including economic inherited by the previous Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government and bring betterment in peoples' lives.

Addressing the media at a gathering with Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz workers at Khayaban-e-Amin here, he said the PML-N government during its previous tenure had launched significant development projects besides carrying out motorways' network across the country as Lahore to Sukkur motorway project was started during this period, but when

the PTI government came into power, it steered the country towards destruction.

The SAPM said that during the period from 2013 to 2018, the PML-N government under the leadership of Mian Nawaz Sharif had overcome the electricity outage by putting in place effective measures to steer the country out of darkness as it added more than 11,000 megawatt

electricity into national grid.

Rana Mubashir Iqbal said that as per international monetary institutions, the GDP growth rate was about 5.8 percent from 2013 to 2018 but when PTI chief Imran Khan came into power, he led the country towards ruin, adding that Pakistan's debt doubled during the 44 months of Imran Khan's government.



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Ejaz Ahmad for more responsive and effective mechanism to deal with citizen complaints

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Ombudsman Mr. Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi has directed gas providing agencies i.e. SNGPL & SSGCL to make more responsive and effective mechanism to deal with citizen complaints.

He was presiding a high-level meeting to discuss the working of gas companies and their administrative arrangements to address citizens' complaints. The meeting was attended by the Secretary Petroleum Capt.(R) Muhammad Mahmood, Chairman OGRA, Mr. Masroor Khan, MD SNGPL, Mr. Ali Javed Hamdani, MD SSGCL, Mr. Imran Maniari, Secretary WMS, Mr. Afzal Latif and senior officers from both sides. The Ombudsman said that it was important



prompt relief to the consumers in their genuine grievances. It was agreed that focal persons in BS-20 will be designated on behalf of the Federal Secretary Petroleum and top management of SNGPL & SSGCL within one week to coordinate with Wafaqi Mohtasib Advisors and remove bottlenecks, where necessary. The

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JUI's APC lashes out KP govt for law & order, economic situation

PESHAWAR (APP): All parties conference called by Jamiat Ulemai-e-Islam Fazl (JUIF) on Sunday termed the problems faced by the province including law and order situation, economic crisis and extortion due to failure of the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Addressing a press conference here at Mufti Mahmood Markaz after the APC meeting, JUIF Chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman said that the rulers who have been occupying the province for nine years have made the province

indebted and destroyed.

He said that the provincial government and the chief minister will have to audit for billion of rupees.

Maulana Fazlur Rehman said that BRT, Malam Jabba and Billion Tree projects should be investigated. He said that the helicopter bill was passed only to protect Imran Khan from NAB cases and we condemn such legislation for personal interest.

The provincial government should provide relief to the people by ensuring the supply of cheap flour,

said Maulana Fazlur Rehman.

He said that the people are well aware now from the incompetency of PTI, adding we had no idea that we were stuck in such a quagmire due to the wrong policies of this party.

Maulana Fazlur Rehman further said that Pakistan was on its way to being blacklisted but due to the efforts of the present government, county came to the whitelist that's why they can't even hold protests and long marches.

He said that the center is

being attacked but we are defending it strategically. He said that news circulating on social media about the technocratic government did not come to my notice.

CPEC was a big project but it was spoiled in three and a half years by the PTI government, adding these people have killed Pakistan economically.

He said that the provincial government should take measures for the safety and peace of the people and better law and order situation.

Dastarbandi ceremony for seminary students organized

PESHAWAR (APP): Moh-tamim Madrassa Arabia Abu Huraira, Sherpao, district Charsadda, Maulana Mufti Saeedullah Haqani on Sunday said that ulama had played an important role in spreading the message of Islam throughout the world.

Addressing a Dastarbandi ceremony held in the Madrass, he urged parents to educate their children in religious seminaries for a better future. He thanked all the guests and ulama for attending the ceremony.

A total of 70 students have completed their studies among which 22 students completed Hifz-e-Quran, eight of Tajveed and 40 students of Nazra were awarded religious amamas (turbans).

A large number of students attended the ceremony while Maulana Qasim, Maulana Mohammad Idris and Mufti Abdullah Shah were also present at the event.

20% reduction in traffic mishaps 700,000 violators fined in 2022, says CTO



F.P. Report

700,000 people were fined for violating traffic rules during the same period.

Talking to reporters at his office, the CTO said that 85,495 people were fined over violations during driving, 75,929 for parking vehicles in no parking zones, 3,824 without route permits vehicles and 1,51,364 bike-riders were fined for not wearing helmets.

Similarly 12, 955 persons for using tinted glasses, 2070 for using phones during drive and 23503 for driving without fastening seat belts.

He said the series of public awareness campaigns would continue till the achievement of desired results while the education team and FM radio were also educating people on traffic laws.

Mr Babar said that implementations of traffic rules would be ensured on all roads and no leniency would be shown against violators.

Babar Sunday informed that a reduction of 20% in traffic accidents compared to last year has been witnessed in 2022.

Besides, he said at least

PESHAWAR: Releasing annual performance report, Chief Traffic Police Shahzada Umar Abbas

Peshawar Press Club elects new office-bearers

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Arshad Aziz Malik and Irfan Mussazi were elected president and general secretary of the Peshawar Press Club in the annual election held in Zubair Mir Hall of Peshawar Press Club.

As per report, Arshad Aziz Malik was elected as a President of PPC, Rizwan Shiekh Vice President, Irfan Musazai General Secretary, Tayyab Usman Joint Secretary, and Immad Waheed Finance Secretary.

Arshad Aziz Malik got 366 votes against 109 secured by his rival Bukhar Shah Bacha. Rizwan Sheikh elected as vice president and secured 309 votes and defeated his rival Nadir



Khawaja who bagged 168 votes.

While Irfan Mussazai elected as general secretary and secured 286 votes. His rival Alamgir Khan bagged 190 votes.

Immad Waheed was chosen the finance secretary by bagging 228 votes. His rivals, Ahtesham Khan, got 142 votes and Jamil Mohmand secured 99

votes. Tayyab Usman was elected joint secretary by securing 318 votes. His rival, Arif Hayyat secured 150 votes.

The Names of newly elected 10-member Governing Body are Saiful-islam Saifi, Shamim Shahid, Nabi Jan, Imran Ayaz, Nasir Dawar, Ameer Mauvia, Zafar Iqbal,

Iftikhar Firdous, Anela Shaheen, Fayyaz Ahmed, and Ibrahim Khan.

The elections of PPC were held on December 31 where a large number of journalists from Peshawar participated and elected a new cabinet of PPC.

Saif expressed hope that the newly elected cabinet would work for the welfare of the journalist community.



PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mahmood Khan talking to Provincial Minister for Labour Shoukat Yousafzai.

QWP forms unanimous cabinet for City District

PESHAWAR (APP): Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) formed a unanimous cabinet for City District Peshawar on Sunday with a pledge to deliver a party message to the doorsteps of the people.

In this connection, a meeting of the QWP City District Peshawar chapter was held here with Shakil Waheedullah Khan in the chair. Provincial Vice Chairman, Syed Fayyaz Ali Shah and Central Joint Secretary, Hasham Raza Advocate attended the meeting as special guests.

Speaking on the occasion, Shakil Waheedullah Khan said that QWP is the voice of the oppressed against injustices, cruelties and price hike.

The participants of the meeting decided the observance of the death anniversary of Hayat Mohammad Khan Shaheed in a befitting manner.

The City district chairman also directed the party workers for start preparations for coming general elections in their respective constituencies and make an all-out efforts for the success of party candidates from the provincial metropolis.

Saif felicitates newly PPC office bearer

PESHAWAR (APP): Special Assistant to Chief Minister on Information and Public Relations Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif on Sunday felicitated the new office bearers of Peshawar Press Club (PPC).

In his message, Barrister Saif congratulated newly elected president Arshad Aziz Malik and his cabinet including General Secretary Irfan Musazai, Vice President Rizwan Sheikh, Finance Secretary Ahammad Waheed, Joint Secretary Tayyab Usman and other General Body members.

Barrister Saif expressed hope that the newly elected cabinet would work for the welfare of the journalist community. He assured that the provincial government would resolve journalist community problems on a priority basis.

Maintaining peace top priorities

PESHAWAR (APP): District Police Officer Swat, Shafiuallah Khan Gandapur has told district police that maintenance of law and order and cleansing society of the menace of narcotics is their top priority.

He was addressing a *Khuli Kachehri* in Police Station Utror, district Swat on the first day of the new calendar on Sunday. Besides, Sub Divisional Police Officer Madiyan, Akbar Hayat Khan, Station House Officers (SHOs) Utror and Kalam, other police officers, local clerics, public representatives, members of the Hoteliers' Association and others were also present at the occasion.

The DPO said that the cooperation of the general public is essential in the maintenance of a peaceful environment and prevention of the menace of narcotics to protect youth from this deadly business.

In response to the request of the DPO, the locals present on the occasion appreciated the ongoing crackdown against narcotics and assured full cooperation of police in the prevention of crimes.

ECP notifies ROs for election of Tehsil Convener in Hazara

PESHAWAR (APP): Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Sunday has appointed Assistant Commissioner-II Havelian Lubna Iqbal as Returning Officer (RO) for presiding the election of Tehsil Havelian Convener, Rabia Sajid ADC for Tehsil Council Lora and Ali Sher Khan for the presiding the election of Tehsil Lower Tanwal Sherwan while Additional Deputy Commissioner Abbottabad for City Council Abbottabad.

The ECP has also appointed Presiding Officers for elections at 131 city and tehsil councils of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Returning Officers for the elections of Convener.

According to the notification, Ishaq Khan Marwat appointed Election Commissioner Mansehra for Tehsil Council Mansehra, Ahmed Junaid Wahidi Education Officer appointed Election Commissioner for Tehsil Council Balakot, ADC Finance Hawad Sardar Marwat appointed Election Commissioner for Tehsil Council Bafa Pakhal, Muhammad Osama Ahmed Cheema Assistant Commissioner appointed Election Commissioner for Tehsil Council Ogi, Tehsil Darband Muhammad Amjad Iqbal appointed Election Commissioner for

City Council Abbottabad city and Additional Deputy Commissioner Abbottabad appointed Election Commissioner for Tehsil Council Havelian.

Similarly, Assistant Commissioner Faiza Mohsin for Tehsil Council Ghazi, AAC Revenue Muhammad Saleem for Tehsil Council Battagram, AC Mohammad Javad for Tehsil Council Alai, AC Hasrat Khan for Tehsil Council Jadba Torgar, AC Mian Sajid Hussain Shah for Tehsil Council Dor Maira while Hasan Zai Raja and Tasawar Hussain were appointed Returning Officers for Tehsil Council.

Prisoners to be made useful citizens through reintegration: IG Prisons

PESHAWAR (APP): Inspector General of Prisons Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Saad Hassan has said that special attention was being given to reintegration of the prisoners so that they could be proved as useful citizens of the society.

He expressed these views during his visit to the District Central Jail Dera here while Superintendent of District Central Jail Dera Samiullah Khan Shinwari, Deputy Superintendent Jail Zafarullah Marwat and other officials were also present on this occasion.

On his arrival, the jail soldiers saluted the IG and the children presented him bouquet.

Later, the IG inaugurated the separate feeder of the District Central Jail, the new jail building for prisoners, the main gate of the Central Jail, the library, the barracks and admin block for the accommodation of the soldiers.

He also announced a two-month reduction in sentences of prisoners of District Central Jail Dera.

While talking to media on this occasion, the IG said the new challenges were being increased during prevailing situation and the security was a big challenge, adding "We are in contact with the security agencies for the purpose."

He lauded the reforms

made by the Superintendent Jail in the District Central Jail, saying, the District Central Jail was the old jail of the province and he was in contact with the provincial government and C&W department so that this problem could be resolved by ensuring timely availability of funds. Moreover, he would also meet the provincial finance minister for the purpose within few days, he said.

He said the jails were being converted into reintegration centers and the government could not do this work alone but it would be done with the help of NGOs, business organizations and the media.



PESHAWAR: Divisional Superintendent Nasir Khalili cutting a ribbon to inaugurate Rehman Baba Express. — F.P. photo by Ghulam Murtaza

BKMC-MTI served 9000 plus kidney patients in 2022

PESHAWAR (APP): Bacha Khan Medical Complex (BKMC-MTI) provided free Dialysis procedures to more than 9000 kidney patients in 2022. According to a data from January to December 2022 released by the BKMC Administration on Sunday revealed that 35 per day and more than 900 procedures in a month were done so far.

The number gradually increased from 600 per month in January 2022 to 900 plus per month during last year which reflects a rapid increase and the confidence of patients in the unit and the quality of services provided at the Unit, said unit in-charge.

Data revealed that 2400 sessions were done for those patients suffering from Hepatitis B and C in

2022. 2000 dialysis procedures have been done so far on an emergency basis and for those patients admitted in different wards.

Giving remarks on annual data, Hospital Director Dr. Amjad Mahboob appreciated the efforts being made by the Unit.

"This Dialysis Unit is one of the best officially established units and a ray of hope for those suffering from kidney disease. He went on to say that from the beginning those kidney patients were brought here for registration who had to travel a lot and used to go to Islamabad, Peshawar, Mardan, and other cities for Dialysis.

The 15-bedded dialysis unit at BKMC-MTI is equipped with sophisticated dialysis machines, cardiac monitors, a ventilator,

and a centralized oxygen supply. Spokesperson Added. He said that all the procedures are done for free through KP's government flagship Sehat Sahulat Program (SSP).

The unit provides facility in three shifts from morning 8 AM to 10 PM, said a spokesperson. Those patients suffering from Kidney disease who need dialysis once a week, two, or a month and sometimes patients need dialysis every third day, records of all patients being kept maintained and a daily timetable is created according to which patients are informed, Spokesperson added.

The unit was inaugurated on 14th Aug 2021 by the then-speaker of the National Assembly Asad Qaisar.

Radio Pakistan celebrates New Year

PESHAWAR (APP): Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) here on Sunday organized a function to celebrate New Year 2023 in FM101 Studio, Radio Pakistan.

Station Director Radio Pakistan Syeda Iffat Jabbar was the chief guest while all the staff members including RJs and duty officers participated.

Speaking on the occasion, Iffat Jabbar congratulated all the staff members and the audience and hoped that the New Year would bring peace, prosperity and stability in our country.

She reaffirmed her commitment to make the broadcasting house a role model for listeners and provide all the facilities to its staff. She said all the studios would be renovated with installations of the latest broadcasting gadgets according to the guidelines of Director General PBC.

Syeda Iffat Jabbar said Radio Pakistan Peshawar also broadcast live commentary during cricket matches which was highly appreciated by the worthy listeners.

Policeman martyred, terrorist killed in attack

PESHAWAR (APP): The funeral prayer of the martyred policeman Tehseenullah was offered with official honor at Lakki Marwat Police Lines on Sunday.

The officers and officials of security forces, civil administration and police jawans attended the funeral prayer while a contingent of police saluted to the mar-

tyr and placed flowers on his coffin.

It was pertinent to mention here that some militants attacked Shahbaz Khel check post on Indus Highway at Lakki Marwat during midnight of Saturday. As a result Tehseenullah sustained bullet wounds and succumbed to his injuries.

The militants managed

to escape from the area during retaliation of fire with the police team.

Soon after the attack, the security forces and police cordoned off the area and launched a search operation to arrest the culprits involved in the attack.

The police found the body of a killed militant during the operation.



PESHAWAR: Newly elected president of Ganj Bazaar Phando Haleem Shah with other members taking oath from MPA Fazle Elahi. — F.P. photo



In brief

Tribal chief shot dead

PARACHINAR (APP): The tribal chief of Ali Sherzai, Central Kurram Malik Miram Shah son of Esa Khan has been allegedly shot dead by unknown assailants over old enmity. The police sources on Sunday revealed that the motive behind his murder was stated to be old enmity. After funeral prayers, the deceased was buried in his ancestral graveyard. The practice of such target killing in the newly merged districts of the former Federal Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in the name of old enmity in the region continued claiming the precious lives of the innocents.

Four shops sealed

FAISALABAD (APP): Civil Defence officer has sealed four shops on the charge of illegal gas decanting and selling loose petrol in Faisalabad during past 12 hours. A spokesman of civil defence department said here on Sunday that Civil Defence teams checked various shops and found illegal gas decanting in four shops in Millat Chowk, Tariq Abad, Haq Baho Chowk and Shadman Road. Therefore, the checking teams sealed these shops in addition to confiscating their entire material. Separate cases were also got registered against the shopkeepers while further action was under progress, he added.

1m challans on traffic violations

FAISALABAD (APP): City Traffic Police (CTP) has conducted more than one million challans on violations of traffic rules and regulations during 2022. Giving some details, CTP spokesman said that violation of traffic rules was dangerous not only for the violators but for other road users too. Therefore, the CTP launched a vigorous campaign against violators of traffic rules and regulations and during 2022, the traffic wardens conducted more than one million challans and imposed total fine of Rs.400 million on the violators, he added.

Goldsmith's shop looted

MUZAFFARGARH (APP): Three armed dacoits allegedly looted gold ornaments worth Rs one million from a goldsmith shop at Sanawan, here on Sunday. According to police sources, three armed dacoits entered into shop of goldsmith Shahid. They alleged looted gold ornaments worth over Rs one million and managed to escape. The dacoits also rendered Shahid injured when he offered resistance to foil the dacoity bid.

Two vehicle lifters arrested

FAISALABAD (APP): Sadr police claimed to have arrest two vehicle lifters and recovered 3 motorbikes and other valuables from their possession. On a tip-off, Sadr police conducted a raid and succeeded in arresting two vehicle lifters identified as Zeeshan and Usman and recovered three stolen motorcycles, illicit weapons, cash, mobile phones and other valuables from their possession.

24 criminals arrested

SARGODHA (APP): Police claimed on Sunday to have arrested 24 criminals and recovered gold ornaments and motorcycles from their possession. The teams of different police stations conducted raids within the areas under their jurisdictions and arrested 24 criminals and recovered three motorcycles and gold ornaments worth millions of rupees from them.

Teachers community thanks DPO on arresting of robbers

ABBOTTABAD (APP): Teachers Association Abbottabad on Sunday thanked District Police Officer (DPO) Abbottabad and for the arrest of the suspects Thandiyani Barmi Gali armed robbery and appreciated the efforts of Bakot police station.

These views were expressed by Ahmad Abbasi, President All Teachers Association Abbottabad, Principal Higher Secondary School Chamyali Dr. Zia ur Rehman and others while addressing a joint press conference.

Dr. Zi ur Rehman said that on December 12, armed robbers looted them in broad daylight on their way from Thandiyani to Abbottabad, which was the first incident of its kind in

the area.

He further said that on raising the issue by the local media, DPO Abbottabad Umar Tufail directed SHO Bakot police station Naseer Abbasi and his team to investigate and trace the robbery and arrest the accused. Later, the police arrested three robbers in a short time with the help of modern technology and local information from Punjab.

While giving the details of the arrested accused, Dr. Zia ur Rehman said that two accused were locals of Beron Gally including Shiraz and Yasir sons of Javed, while Rashid son of Ayub belonged to Malir, Karachi.

President of All Teachers Association Zulfikar Abbasi while speaking on the occa-

sion said that the Abbottabad police, media and people expressed their solidarity with the teachers over armed robbery that took place in a deserted forest.

He said that the DPO had expressed solidarity with the Association.

On this occasion, the victims of the robbery including Principal Dr. Ziaur Rahman, teachers Tariq Mehmood, Zeeshan Ali, Sheikh Mukhtiar Ahmad, Muhammad Hafeez, Adeel Anwar Gulnawaz and Liaqat and others expressed their gratitude and said that it was realized as result of professional dedication of SHO Bakot Police Station Naseer Abbasi, In charge Police Chowki Chamyali and other cops.

421mt of wheat being provided to flour mills

SIALKOT (APP): On the instructions of the Punjab government, a daily quota of 421 metric tons of wheat is being provided to the flour mills for the supply to the people.

The flour mills receiving wheat on quota committed to supply 13209 bags of 20kg flour in the market daily.

These views were expressed by District Food Controller (DFC) Azmat Ali during a briefing to Deputy Commissioner Abdullah Khurram Niazi.

DFC said that 24,282 bags of 10kg flour and 2,277 bags of 20kg flour were supplied at the sale points in Sialkot district during the last 24 hours.

At 373 sale points estab-

lished in the four tehsils, a bag of 10kg flour is available at Rs.648 while a bag of 20kg flour is available at Rs.1295.

2 dacoit gangs busted
Police have arrested two dangerous gangs involved in dacoity and robbery including ring leaders.

According to police spokesperson, on the special instructions of District Police Officer (DPO) Sialkot Faisal Kamran, during the ongoing crackdown against criminal elements, SHO Satrah police station Sub-Inspector Abdul Rehman along with police teams under the supervision of DSP Daska Circle traced out the accused by using some sci-

entific methods of investigation and with the help of modern technology.

Police have arrested the accused gang members- Abu Bakar, Asad Sarfraz, Zeeshan, Imran, Rehman Ali, Umer Farooq, Muhammad Razzaq, Rehman, Abid Hussain and Muhammad Asif.

During interrogation 3 motorcycles, cash Rs.7,90,000 and 5 pistols were recovered from the accused possessions.

Police said that the accused have confessed their involvement in 22 different cases of dacoity and robbery.

Police have sent the accused behind the bars after registering separate cases against them.

MCKRUS's contribution for quality educ hailed

QUETTA (APP): Principal Government Girls College Mithri Sohail Domki said the teaching, research and quality education of Mir Chaakar Khan Rind University Sibi (MCKRUS) met with the professional requirements of the modern age.

He expressed these views during his visit to varsity accompanied by other teaching faculty of the college. Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Syed Mushtaq Ahmed Shah and other faculty members welcomed the delegation of the Government Girls College Mithri.

The delegation was

briefed about the positive steps taken in respect to higher education among the boys and girls of the area.

MCKRUS Vice Chancellor agreed that the teachers and management of the varsity will also visit the colleges in Sibi to exchange and share ideas of quality education.

Cold and dry weather to prevail in parts of Balochistan

Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) has forecast cold and dry weather for most parts of the Balochistan province during the next 24 hours.

"Weather remained cold and dry in most parts of the

province during the last 24hrs," Regional Meteorological Department Quetta said in a daily forecast report issued here on Sunday.

It said that mainly cold and dry weather is expected in most parts while cold/frosty in central and northern parts.

"Gusty winds may occur in Kech, Awaran, Washuk, Gwadar, Bolan, Harnai, Chaghi, Kharan district with its surrounding areas," Meteorological Department Quetta region said.

The lowest minimum temperatures recorded in Balochistan were -06°C, Kalat, and Quetta as -03°C.

Emerson University syndicate gives approval

MULTAN (APP): The syndicate committee of Emerson University took different decisions for betterment of the varsity staff, university ranking and modernizing the education facilities for students, here on Sunday.

Vice Chancellor Dr Muhammad Ramzan chaired the meeting and it was attended by Professor Dr Muhammad Kamran (Representative of HEC Islamabad), Prof Dr Muhammad Hayat Aawan,

Prof Dr Abdul Qadir Buzdar, Prof Dr Maimona Ghani, Dr Sarot Jabeen, Dr Muhammad Naem, Dr Mumtaz, Shahid Imtiaz, Shah Sawar and Professor Dr Zia Ahmed. Vice Chancellor Dr Muhammad Ramzan shared details of successes achieved by the varsity during the last three months, including HEC Accreditation, Initiation of MPhil Programmes, NOC, Service Statues, Faculty Development Programme,

Infrastructure improvement, modernization of teaching facilities and some others.

The meeting participants heaped praise on the varsity performance. Similarly, different agendas including minutes of first and second meeting of academic council, daily wages, new programme, standing list of experts, recruitment policy came under discussion.

The syndicate gave approval of agendas with minor modifications.

Washrooms to be constructed at all parks

MULTAN (APP): Director General Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) Asif Rauf Khan said that washrooms would be constructed at all parks of the city to complete missing facilities.

During his visit to different parks here on Sunday, the DG Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) said that it had been decided that the washrooms would be made functional at parks while fitness of swings at Shah Shams Park would also be ensured to avoid any mishap.

He directed the officers concerned to regularly

manage trimming of saplings and cleanliness at the parks.

He said that jogging tracks would be upgraded adding that availability of good quality commodities would be ensured at canteens of parks.

Asif Rauf Khan maintained that facilities of clean drinking water, washrooms, landscaping and others would be provided at each park.

He said that there would be no compromise on fitness of swings.

He said that extra constructions would be demolished from parks and the place would be uti-

lized for some other purposes of public attraction.

He directed officers concerned to ensure facility of gym in Shah Shams Park to encourage healthy activities.

Man allegedly shot dead by unknown outlaws

A man was allegedly shot dead by unknown outlaws near Bodla Town, here on Sunday.

According to Rescue 1122, the deceased person was identified as Asif (35) son of Aashique, resident of Bodla Town.

Police rushed to the site and started an investigation into the matter.



HYDERABAD: Ameer Jamat-e-Islami Siraj ul Haq addressing to "Baldyati Convention" at Bagh-e-Mustafa Ground.

Veiled persons snatch car from motorists

SWABI (APP): Three unidentified veiled persons snatched a motorcar at gunpoint at Farooq Banda on Swabi-Jehangira Road, Swabi police confirmed on Sunday.

Filing an FIR with Police Station Tordher, Mohammad Jehangir, a resident of Shaido, district Nowshera said that he was on way to Swabi on Sunday morning in cosmetic branch car bearing registration No.AZY 1751ICT Model 2022 when a car at Farood Banda near Tordher parked before him and three veiled persons got him out of the vehicle and attacked him at gunpoint.

The veiled persons also deprived him of his purse containing a cash amount of Rs.7000/-, beside national identity card, ATM card, driving license, laptop computer and a mobile phone set.

The armed men also snatched the key of the motorcar from him and pushed him away and escaped in the snatched vehicle. Tordher Police Station has registered a case against unknown armed car snatchers and launched investigations into the incident.

Technocratic govt cannot be successful

SHAKARGARH (INP): Minister for Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal has rejected notion of a technocratic government, saying that it cannot be successful.

Talking to journalists in Shakar Garh, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader asserted that a technocratic government cannot be successful as technocrats can only provide support to the government through their expertise.

"[Former president] Pervez Musharraf also ruled the country for nine years with the help of technocrats," Ahsan Iqbal said, adding that they cannot only be government advisers, not rulers.

He also lambasted the rumours being spread of same styled government in Pakistan, saying that some technocrats were always ready to become ministers and advisers.

"A political government is required for economic reforms," Ahsan Iqbal said, adding that long-term policies were needed to steer the country out of crisis.

"There is a need to increase exports to restore the country's economy", he maintained, adding that friendly nations were also lending a helping hand to stabilize the country's economy.

7 passengers injured in road accident

MULTAN (APP): At least seven passengers received injuries after a collision between a van and truck near Vehari Chowk, here on Sunday.

The injured persons are identified as Jamshaid, Noor, Fatima, Sobia, Muneeba, Irfan and Abida. The injured were shifted to Nishtar hospital by Rescue 1122. The police concerned are busy in investigation.

DC visits fish market, directs for improving cleanliness

FAISALABAD (APP): Deputy Commissioner (DC) Imran Hamid Sheikh has visited the Fish Market near Novelty Bridge here on Sunday and directed for improving its cleanliness.

After receiving public complaints against poor cleanliness condition near Fish Market beneath Novelty Bridge, he visited the site and expressed dismay.

He called officers of Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA), Metropolitan Corporation and Faisalabad Waste Management Company (FWMC) and other departments on the spot and ordered them to formulate an immediate plan to make the Fish Market clean.

He assigned the task and set a timeline to restore the sewage system in Fish Market.

The DC was informed that disposal station of this area was out of order for a long time.

Therefore, he directed WASA officers to discharge stagnant water immediately through sucker machines and this practice should continue on daily basis till the disposal station was made functional.

He also directed the officers of Metropolitan Corporation to re-construct sewerage lines besides ensuring rehabilitation of road on urgent basis.

He also directed the FWMC officers to clean

Fish Market area in three shifts daily beside lifting garbage from this site regularly.

The DC also interacted with area shopkeepers and urged them to avoid throwing garbage and waste material openly on the road because it was causing cleanliness problems in addition to polluting the environment.

He said that he would visit the site regularly and monitor performance of all departments in this regard.

Meanwhile, AC City Waqas Safdar Sikandri and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) FWMC Bilal Feroz Joya also visited the Fish Market and supervised the cleanliness operation.

5396 tree plants planted on Sialkot-Sambrial highway

SIALKOT (APP): Deputy Commissioner Abdullah Khurram Niazi said on Sunday that 5,396 tree plants of three types were planted on a stretch of 13-km highway from Sialkot to Sambrial.

In the next phase, plantations would be carried out on Pasrur Road and Aimenabad Road. The district council officers have been directed to evolve a plan in this regard.

He stated this while addressing the review meeting of 'Clean and Green Sialkot' campaign and on the occasion of inspection of plantation work. Additional Deputy Commissioner General Shahid Abbas, Chief Officer District Council Ulfat Shahzad, Amin Ahsan from Nizam Sons and contractors were also present on the occasion.

The Deputy Commissioner said the target of planting 1000 palm foxtail trees on the main highway entering the city of Sialkot from the highway had been set. So far 880 saplings, 1868 out of 2000 saplings of Legistonia and 2648 out of 2700 saplings of bamboo stick plant had so far been planted, he added.

Abdullah Khurram Niazi said that plants were being immediately irrigated by water bowzers, but as a permanent system, 20 motors and pipelines were also being laid. During the visit of Wazirabad-Sambrial

Road, the DC directed that implementation of the suggestions of experts be ensured for the growth of newly planted plants.

Chief Officer District Councils should make the irrigation system functional without any delay.

Power shutdown notice
Gujranwala Electric Power Company (GEPSCO) has issued power shutdown notice due to repair, maintenance of electrical lines and development works.

According to the schedule, power supply from Richara, Badiana, Ghunna, Badiana Express and Vario feeders on January (8, 15, 22, 29); Langraywali, Gopalpur, Rasoolpur, Nikapura, Islamabad, Imam Sahib feeders on January (3, 7, 10, 14, 17, 21, 24, 29, 31); Habibpura, Pakki Kotli, Aimenabad Road, Bhadal, Barath, Saidpur, Shadiwal, Marakiwal feeders on January (4, 11, 18, 25); Greenwood Street, Fort, Model Town, Mubarakpura feeders on January (2, 5, 9, 12, 16, 19, 22, 26, 30); Gulbahar, Ghazipur, Railway Road, Muhammad-pura, Sadr Bazaar, Clock Tower, MES, Garrison, Kamawala, Paris Road feeders on January (5, 15); and Nangal, Maachi Khokhar, Gohadpur, Mughalpur, Bonkan, Chitti Sheikhan feeders on January (5, 8, 12, 15, 19, 22, 26, 29) will remain suspended from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm.

Shopkeepers fined Rs3,763,500 for hoarding, overcharging in December

Price control magistrates got registered cases against 161 shopkeepers for overcharging and imposed fine of Rs3,763,500 on 25 shops and godowns for hoarding in the district during month of December last.

Under the supervision of Deputy Commissioner Abdullah Khurram Niazi, the price magistrates conducted a total of 24,695 inspections to ensure the implementation of fixed rates in the four tehsils.

During the inspections, 1204 people were found guilty of not displaying rate lists, overcharging and hoarding. DC Abdullah Khurram Niazi directed the price magistrates to continue the process of checking and indiscriminate action be taken against those responsible for artificial inflation.

Man becomes father of 60th child

QUETTA (APP): Another child has been born on the very first day of the year 2023 to the wife of Jan Mohammad, a resident of Quetta, after which the total number of his children has reached to 60.

Jan Muhammad's 60 children have been born from three wives while 5 of his children have died. 55 children of Jan Muhammad are alive and healthy.

Talking to newsmen, Jan Muhammad said that he was very happy with the birth of another child on the arrival of the new year. He said that the child was named Haji Khush Khal Khan.

It may be mentioned here that Jan Muhammad's three wives and children live in the same house. Jan Muhammad is a compounder by profession and runs his own clinic in the suburbs. The man of many children also desires another marriage for which the search for a fourth wife is on.

In his statement in the past, Jan Muhammad said that his goal was to have 100 children and he was very grateful to Allah for bestowing him more children.



‘A lot of pain’: The battle of firefighters on Ukraine’s frontline

BAKHMUT (AFP/APP): In the war-torn Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, the chief of a small group of firefighters lines up his small team in front of the national flag, and wishes them a happy new year.

For the nine stationed permanently in the city centre fire station, it has been a year of war and fire. They are posted in the eastern region of Donetsk where Bakhmut has become the epicentre of fighting.

But their chief Oleksiy Migrin, jovial and good-natured, does not often complain.

"The year 2022 has been tough on a personal level, and tough for Ukraine," he tells the team.

"Take care of yourself, remember that your families are waiting for you. Next year we will win."

He rounds off his speech with a "Slava Ukraini!" ("Glory to Ukraine"). The firefighters are in one of the hotspots of fighting in eastern Ukraine, where Russian forces -- and the Russian paramilitaries of the Wagner Group -- have been trying to seize the city for the last six months.

Inside the station, the men drink coffee near humanitarian aid boxes delivered from Kyiv, which are filled with duvets, medical kits, and cake.

There have been heavy losses on both sides here, and enormous destruction in Bakhmut, which had a population of some 70,000 before the war started in February 2022.

What was once "a pretty town full of flowers of trees" now looks like a wasteland. "There is no longer any civilisation outside," says Nadya Petrova, who has been living for months in the back of her cellar.

According to the fire chief, thousands of civilians are still hanging on there -- possibly as many as 10,000 living in terrible conditions.

"They don't have the means to leave," he said.

"Their destroyed houses, their cellars, that's all they have left." The nine firefighters in the barracks can describe their daily routine in a few words: "De-mine, evacuate, put out fires, provide water, clear the rubble," he said.

Others come in to reinforce from across the region, but they are apprehensive about having too many people based in the same place.

"It's too dangerous," explains Nikita Nedytko, the second-in-command at the fire station barracks.

Eleven firefighters have been killed in the Donetsk region since the

beginning of the Russian invasion, he said. In Bakhmut, one of his own men was killed when a wall collapsed during a clearing operation after a bombardment. Now the team do two-day rotations and then take a day out in "safer" towns a few miles away from the frontline.

Thirty-year-old Nedytko -- who is originally from Bakhmut and has a one-year-old son -- says one of the hardest things is coping with the emotional weight of their work in wartime.

"We've had a lot of pain, and suffering. We had no experience of that," he told AFP.

His family has retreated to Dnipro, about 260 kilometres (161 miles) west by car, where he goes every two months to see them.

He recalls a mother and her daughter they found embracing, dead under the rubble, and how they had to break the news to the father.

He says they have had to listen to the cries of people calling for help.

For Nedytko, the "slightest wrong move on our part" could cost a life.

"The hardest thing is to see people die before your eyes," he says. "The saddest thing is to see the children who have remained here."

Kim calls for ‘exponential increase’ of N. Korea’s nuclear arsenal

SEOUL (AFP/APP): North Korea's Kim Jong Un has called for a major increase in the country's nuclear arsenal, including mass producing tactical nuclear weapons and developing new missiles for nuclear counterstrikes, state media said Sunday.

In a report at the end of a key party meeting in Pyongyang, Kim called "for an exponential increase of the country's nuclear arsenal", the official KCNA reported.

Citing what it called US and South Korean hostility, the report said the North needed "mass-producing of tactical nuclear weapons" and to "develop another ICBM (intercontinental ballistic missile) system whose main mission is quick nuclear counterstrike". Military tensions on the Korean peninsula rose sharply in 2022 as the North conducted sanctions-busting weapons tests nearly every month, including firing its most advanced intercontinental ballistic missile ever.

It capped its record-breaking year of launches by firing three short range ballistic missiles early Saturday, and conducting another rare late-night launch at 2:50 am (1750 GMT Saturday) on Sunday, Seoul's military said.

The official KCNA reported Sunday that the launches had been "a test-fire of the super-large multiple rocket launchers".

In a separate KCNA report, Kim said the weapons put South Korea "as a whole within the range of strike and (were) capable of carrying (a) tactical nuclear warhead".

The launches come just days after Seoul scrambled fighter jets as five North Korean drones made an incursion into the South's airspace Monday. North Korea has talked about mass producing nuclear weapons before, said Go Myong-hyun, researcher at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

"The intention is that if North Korea mass produces nuclear weapons, even without aggressive provocations, the United States will have no choice but to someday recognize North Korea as a nuclear state," he told AFP.

"Kim Jong Un's New Year message is something like 'Let's play with nuclear weapons,'" he added.

"His New Year message is that North Korea will not beg for dialogue and that it will pressure South Korea and the United States, especially the United States, by bolstering its nuclear power." In 2022, Kim said he wanted his country to have the world's most powerful nuclear force and declared the North an "irreversible" nuclear state.

On Wednesday, he set out "new key goals" for the country's military, state media reported, without giving

any specifics.

The reports come at the end of a major party meeting in Pyongyang at which Kim and other senior officials outlined their policy goals for 2023 in key areas including diplomacy, security and the economy.

North Korea's end-of-year plenary meetings are typically used by the regime to unveil the country's domestic and foreign policy priorities for the year ahead.

In past years, Kim had delivered a speech on January 1, but he recently dropped the tradition in favour of making announcements at the year-end plenary meeting.

"North Korea ended the year with a bang but its recent missile launches were not technically impressive," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul.

But the recent "provocations, including drone incursions, appear excessive for deterrence and may be intended to scare South Korea into taking a softer policy".

But with Kim disavowing diplomacy and threatening to mass produce nuclear weapons, it is likely South Korea will double down on boosting its own defence capacities and readiness, he said. "If China doesn't want the regional instability of an inter-Korean arms race on its doorstep, it will have to do more to restrain Pyongyang in 2023."

Lula returns for third term as Brazil president

BRASÍLIA (AFP/APP): Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is set to be inaugurated Sunday for a third term as Brazilian president, in a ceremony snubbed by outgoing leader Jair Bolsonaro, underlining the deep divisions the veteran leftist inherits.

The swearing-in will cap a remarkable political comeback for 77-year-old Lula, who returns to the presidential palace in Brasilia less than five years after being jailed on controversial, since-quashed corruption charges.

In a sign of the scars that remain from Lula's brutal election showdown with far-right ex-army captain Bolsonaro in October, security will be exceptionally tight at the pomp-filled ceremony in the capital.

Some 8,000 police -- including more than 1,000 federal officers, a record deployment for a presidential inauguration in Brazil -- will provide security.

The stepped up measures come after a Bolsonaro supporter was arrested last week for planting a tanker truck rigged with explosives near the Brasilia airport, a plot he said aimed to "sow chaos" in the South

American country. Bolsonaro himself left Brazil for the US state of Florida Friday -- reportedly to avoid having to hand the presidential sash to his bitter enemy, as tradition dictates. The snub has hardly dampened the party spirit for Lula and the 300,000 people expected at the ceremony and a massive concert that will feature acts ranging from samba legend Martinho da Vila to drag queen Pablo Vittar.

Thousands of Lula supporters have been flooding the capital, traveling by plane, car and even bicycle to camp out near the Esplanade of Ministries.

Foreign dignitaries including 17 heads of state will also be in attendance as Lula, who previously led the country through a watershed boom from 2003 to 2010, takes the oath of office for a new four-year term at 3:00 pm (1800 GMT). They include the presidents of a raft of Latin American countries, Germany, Portugal and the king of Spain.

After being sworn in before Congress, Lula will travel by car -- traditionally a black convertible Rolls Royce, though officials said that could be

changed for security reasons -- to the ultra-modern capital's presidential palace, the Planalto. There he will walk up a ramp to the entrance and receive the gold- and diamond-embroidered presidential sash.

Organizers of the ceremony -- led by first lady-to-be Rosangela "Janja" da Silva -- have maintained a mystery around who will give Lula the sash in Bolsonaro's absence.

It will be the first time since the end of Brazil's 1965-1985 military dictatorship that an incoming president does not receive the yellow-and-green sash from his predecessor.

Lula faces numerous urgent challenges for Latin America's biggest economy, which looks little like the commodities-fueled dynamo he presided over in the 2000s. They include rebooting economic growth, curbing rampant destruction of the Amazon rainforest and delivering on his ambitious poverty- and inequality-fighting agenda.

An estimated 30 million of Brazil's 215 million people are living in hunger, and the economy is still struggling to recover from the coron-

avirus pandemic.

Vice president-elect Geraldo Alckmin described the incoming administration's task as "herculean."

Lula will face a Congress dominated by Bolsonaro's conservative allies.

He is also dogged by far-right hardliners who have been rallying outside army bases calling for a military intervention to keep him from power ever since he narrowly won the October 30 runoff election, 50.9 percent to 49.1 percent.

"He will have to act assertively in his first 100 days to show where Lula Part Three is headed," said political scientist Leandro Consentino of the Inesper institute in Sao Paulo.

"His election win was very tight, and he'll face a divided country and a combative opposition. He'll have to lead a national unity government and restore the peace."

Markets are meanwhile watching nervously how Lula will fund his promised social spending given Brazil's overstretched government finances.

"Our priority will be taking care of the poorest, the neediest, of working people," Lula said recently.

Colombia strikes ceasefire deal with main armed groups

BOGOTÁ (AFP/APP): Colombia's government has agreed to a six-month ceasefire with the five largest armed groups operating in the country, President Gustavo Petro announced on New Year's Eve.

The truce was the main objective of Petro's "total peace" policy, which aims to end the country's armed conflict, which has persisted despite the dissolution of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in 2017. The armed groups still operating in Colombia, the world's largest cocaine producer, are locked in deadly disputes over drug trafficking revenues and other illegal businesses, according to the Institute for Development and Peace Studies (Indepaz), an independent think tank.

"We have agreed to a bilateral ceasefire with the ELN, the Second Marquetalia, the Central General Staff, the AGC and the Self-Defense Forces of the Sierra Nevada from January 1 to June 30, 2023, extendable depending on progress in the negotiations," Petro tweeted.

Despite the government's efforts to negotiate with Colombia's various armed groups, which include a combined total of more than 10,000 fighters, it has so far failed to contain the spiral of violence engulfing the country. Indepaz recorded nearly 100 massacres last year.

The National Liberation Army (ELN), the last recognized insurgency in the country, has been negotiating with the government since

November. The Segunda Marquetalia and Estado Mayor Central groups -- splinter factions of FARC which broke from the 2016 peace pact -- have held separate talks with the government.

AGC, the country's largest drug gang, is made up of the remnants of extreme right-wing paramilitaries that demobilized in the early 2000s.

The government is offering the groups "benevolent treatment from the judicial point of view" for the armed actors "in exchange for a surrender of assets, a dismantling of these organizations and the possibility that they stop exercising these illicit economies", Senator Ivan Cepeda recently told AFP.



More countries roll out China traveller checks amid Covid surge

BEIJING (AFP/APP): Travellers from China now face restrictions when entering more than a dozen countries as concern grows over its surge in Covid-19 cases, with Australia the latest to demand a negative test before arrival.

Last month, Beijing abruptly began dismantling its "zero-Covid" containment policy of lockdowns and mass testing, three years after the coronavirus first emerged in the city of Wuhan.

As Covid overwhelms Chinese hospitals and crematoriums, officials have insisted that the wave is "under control" despite acknowledging that the true scale of infections is "impossible" to track.

Australia's health minister on Sunday cited Beijing's "lack of comprehensive information" about Covid cases as the reasoning behind the travel requirement, which will take effect on January 5. The move will "safeguard Australia from the risk of potential new emerging

variants," he said.

In recent days, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Spain, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan have also imposed either a negative Covid test requirement or testing upon arrival for travellers from China.

Canada cited "the limited epidemiological and viral genomic sequence data available" on recent Covid cases in China for its negative test demand.

Meanwhile, Morocco moved to ban all arrivals from China on Saturday, "to avoid a new wave of contaminations in Morocco and all its consequences".

The flurry of global travel restrictions began as countries anticipated a surge in Chinese visitors after Beijing announced mandatory quarantine for inbound passengers would end on January 8.

The World Health Organization has called the precautionary measures "understandable" in light of the lack of outbreak information provided by

Beijing.

But the European branch of the International Airports Council -- which represents more than 500 airports in 55 European countries -- said the restrictions were not justified or risk-based.

European countries will meet next week to discuss a joint response to the issue, with incoming EU presidency holder Sweden saying it was "seeking a common policy for the entire EU when it comes to the introduction of possible entry restrictions".

While a few major Chinese cities seem to be emerging from the current wave of infections, under-resourced smaller cities and rural areas have been hit especially hard.

In response to the outbreak, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen said on Sunday that she is "willing to provide necessary assistance based on humanitarian concerns," but did not specify what kind of aid might be extended to Beijing, which considers the self-ruled island a

breakaway province.

But in his televised New Year address, Chinese President Xi Jinping struck an optimistic note.

"Epidemic prevention and control is entering a new phase... Everyone is working resolutely, and the light of hope is right in front of us," Xi said in a speech broadcast on state media on Saturday.

It was Xi's second time commenting on the outbreak this week. On Monday, he called for measures to "effectively protect people's lives".

Despite the jump in infections, large crowds still gathered for New Year's Eve celebrations in Shanghai and Wuhan, although some social media users said the festivities seemed more subdued than in past years.

China on Sunday reported more than 5,100 new infections and one death linked to Covid out of its population of 1.4 billion -- but the figures appear to be out of step with the reality on the ground.

Canada to require negative Covid tests for China arrivals: govt

OTTAWA (AFP/APP): Canada said Saturday it would require travelers arriving from China to show a negative Covid-19 test, following similar moves by the United States and others.

Given the rapid rise in coronavirus infections in China, Canada will

require travelers boarding a flight from China to show a negative Covid test taken no more than two days before their departure with their boarding pass, according to a statement.

Ottawa said the measure was "in response to the surge of Covid-19 in

the People's Republic of China and given the limited epidemiological and viral genomic sequence data available on these cases." The rule will come into force from January 5 and be reassessed after 30 days. After nearly three years, China has said it will drop stringent foreign

travel curbs next week -- despite surging cases, and amid concerns over the accuracy of its data reporting. The Canadian government said it would also test wastewater from all international flights landing in Toronto or Vancouver to monitor for new variants.

World steps into 2023 after turbulent year

PARIS (AFP/APP): The world's eight billion people Saturday ushered in 2023, bidding farewell to a turbulent 12 months marked by war in Europe, stinging price rises, Lionel Messi's World Cup glory and the deaths of Queen Elizabeth, Pele and former pope Benedict.

Many were ready to set aside pinched budgets and a virus that is increasingly forgotten but not gone, and embrace a party atmosphere on New Year's Eve after a few pandemic-dampened years.

Parisians -- and a "normal" amount of tourists, comparable to 2018 or 2019, according to officials -- took the opportunity to crowd together shoulder-to-shoulder for a fireworks show along the Champs-Elysee.

Police said about a million people showed up for the celebration, where children in pushchairs and partiers with champagne were equally visible.

A group of 10 students sat around playing games while they waited for midnight, spending their first New Year's Eve on the avenue.

"We're here for the ambience, to have a good time and to be together," said 19-year-old Ilyes Hachelef. "And it's beautiful!" Hours earlier, Sydney became one of the first major cities to ring in 2023, restaking its claim as the "New Year's Eve capital of the world" after two years of lockdowns and coronavirus-muted festivities in Australia. "It's been a fairly good year for us; getting past Covid of course is great," David Hugh-Paterson, 52, told AFP as he waited in to watch a 12-minute fireworks display over the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

For some, 2022 was a year of Wordle, the Great Resignation, a new Taylor Swift album, an Oscar slap and billionaire meltdowns.

It also saw the deaths of Queen Elizabeth II, Brazilian football icon Pele, Mikhail Gorbachev, Jiang Zemin, and Shinzo Abe. Former pope Benedict XVI also died on New

Year's Eve. The global population surpassed the historic milestone of eight billion people in November.

But 2022 is most likely to be remembered for armed conflict returning to Europe -- a continent that was the crucible of two world wars.

"It was our year. Year of Ukraine," President Volodymyr Zelensky said in his nightly address Saturday, reflecting on his country's war effort throughout the year.

More than 300 days into Russia's botched invasion of Ukraine, about 7,000 civilians have been killed and 10,000 more injured, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

About 16 million Ukrainians have fled their homes.

For those who remain, an 11:00 pm to 5:00 am curfew will be in place amid periodic blackouts and Russian missile barrages.

The latest Russian strikes on Ukraine Saturday claimed at least one more life and wounded several others, said Ukrainian officials, while an explosion was heard in Kyiv just after the New Year. "We do not know for sure what the new year 2023 will bring us," Zelensky said, promising that Ukrainians would fight on and offering a wish for "victory" in the new year.

In Kyiv, filmmaker Yaroslav Mutenko, 23, was defiant after a shell hit the four-star Hotel Alfavito near his apartment, insisting the blast would not stop him going to a friend's to party.

"Our enemies, the Russians, can destroy our calm but they cannot destroy our spirit," he said.

There seemed to be a dulled appetite for grand celebrations in Vladimir Putin's Russia.

Moscow cancelled its traditional fireworks show after Mayor Sergei Sobyanin asked residents to vote on how to mark the occasion.

Muscovites such as Irina Shapovalova, a 51-year-old nursery

worker, said their main wish for 2023 was for "a peaceful sky above our heads". Putin said in a New Year's address that "moral, historical rightness" is on Russia's side as the country faces international condemnation over the war.

London was meanwhile welcoming crowds to its official New Year's Eve fireworks display for the first time since the pandemic with around 100,000 ticket holders expected to attend the spectacle.

Thousands of people gathered in Madrid's Puerta del Sol square to listen to the twelve chimes that accompanied the last twelve seconds of 2023 and eat a grape to the rhythm of each one, fulfilling a rite that most Spaniards copied at home from the television.

The new year will kick off with a new leader in Brazil, where Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva takes the reins on Sunday following his razor-thin win in October polls. The Middle East region welcomed 2023 with a traditional fireworks show from the world's tallest building, the 830-metre (2,723 feet) Burj Khalifa in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Laser lights added to the spectacle at the landmark which carried messages including, "Hugging again," an apparent reference to the end of Covid restrictions. However, China begins 2023 battling a surge in Covid infections after unwinding restrictions to contain the virus.

Hospitals in the world's most populous nation have been overwhelmed by an explosion of cases following the decision to lift strict "zero-Covid" rules. New Year Eve's parties are still planned, though authorities in Shanghai said there were no formal activities on the city's famed Bund waterfront. Chinese President Xi Jinping told the country in a televised New Year's Eve address that, despite the outbreak, "the light of hope is right in front of us".

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Pakistan and the year 2022

The world in general and Pakistan, in particular, has witnessed a chaotic and devastating year throughout the past twelve months of 2022. Starting with simmering western prophecies regarding the possibility of a Russian invasion of Ukraine, which came true in the last week of February. The entire universe suffered dire consequences of the global energy crisis, food shortages along with heavy trade, and financial losses from the US-Russia global political tussle and dictatorial sanctions by the western nations. Multiple surveys suggest that the war in Ukraine had projected oil and commodities prices to be almost 50% in all parts of the world, and roughly 345 million people are still facing a high risk of food insecurity and famine in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Approximately, the economic repercussions of the Ukrainian conflict have cost more than \$ 2.8 trillion in economic losses throughout the year 2022.

Domestically, the last annum has put a very drastic and unending impact on Pakistani society, the national economy, and the political landscape. Meanwhile, the persistent and ever-worsening economic chaos also commenced with the arrival of the past year, while continued political unrest and sharp depletion in foreign reserves have led the nation to the verge of an imminent economic default at this point in time.

Historically, multiple events took place during the past year that has great significance in our national, social, economic, and political life. However, the question arises of what should be the next course of the Pakistani nation that guides us to our desired destiny of a peaceful, stable, and prosperous Pakistan.

In fact, the Pakistani nation has no say in global economic and political affairs, however, we are the drivers of our own fate. Our country has reached the edge of a political, social, and economic collapse and we all are equally responsible for making up for this upheaval. Currently, naming, blaming, cursing, and abusing each other is not the way forward, therefore, all pro-public leaders and political stakeholders must sit together to forge a consensus on General Elections that will pave the way for political and economic stability and leads to a sustainable growth and prosperous future in the coming years.

Prisoners versus cruel wardens

The Italian national Ombudsman for Prisoners has reported that suicides in Italian jails have jumped to a 10-year high. Although, Prison overcrowding is a chronic problem in Italy but the past three years of the COVID-19 pandemic had made inmates' lives even more miserable. The reports suggest that more than 84 prisoners have killed themselves during the past year and the current statistics present a grim picture of the Italian jails.

Italy is a centuries-old democracy with rich western culture and pluralistic society. The Europeans have a high-quality living while prisoners enjoy maximum amenities including attending visitors, playing indoor games, watching movies and recreational films, and other leisure activities during their detention in the jails. Historically, Italian, Sicilian mafias, drug smugglers and racketeers, and criminal networks are notorious worldwide for their cruelties, fast and preplanned robberies, and influence on Italian governments. It is a common saying that Italian gangsters used to visit Jails for taking rest and enjoyment after having a busy schedule for their criminal activities.

According to the authorities, Italy's prison suicide rate now stands at around 15.4 per 10,000 inmates, against a median of 5.2 among members of the 46-nation Council of Europe, which really portrays worrisome statistics because innocents normally do not go to jails, while criminals do not fear from detention regulations and COVID-19 restrictions that had been reduced over the past one year. The European Human Rights Groups accused the Italian Prison Police of misbehaving and poor treatment of prisoners which is commonly called a lock-them-up-and-throw-away-the-key mentality contributing to making prisons lost places, those compelled homeless inmates to seize their breath.

The Italian government must review its prison laws as no inmate embraces death who keeps a desire for life or has a ray of hope for release from prison. Apparently, genuine criminals have worn the uniform of wardens and now playing with the lives of poor inmates. After all, a criminal repeats his crime until gets reprimanded, whether he is in uniform or plain clothes.

Quote of the day

There are plenty of recommendations on how to get out of trouble cheaply and fast. Most of them come down to this: Deny your responsibility.

— Lyndon Johnson, American President [1963-1969].

What awaits us in 2023?

Predictions have always been a thankless task. Especially in a period of serious geopolitical upheavals. If now we compare the predictions that were given for 2022 with reality, then it is rather difficult to find those that have come true.

For example, in December last year, no one could have imagined that in 2022 Britain would change three prime ministers, which has not happened there for the past 130 years. And the events of January 6 the year before last, when the angry people stormed the Washington Capitol, crossed out many forecasts for the development of the situation in the United States, made just a week or two before these events.

What can we say about the eternal predictions of the "collapse of Russia", which were given over the past decades and were especially actively disseminated after the start of the special operation in Ukraine. We can recall the "historic" speech of US President Joe Biden in Warsaw in March of the past year. Why didn't he just prophesy about the return of Russia to the 19th century and the dollar for 200 rubles. But it turned out that the ruble became the most strengthened national currency against the dollar in 2022.

And now the world information space is crammed with a mass of forecasts for the next year. There is no shortage of apocalyptic predictions about the fate of Russia, which is threatened with military defeat, collapse, incredible crisis, civil upheaval - in general, nothing new compared to the prophecies of past years.

It is not surprising that against this background, "futuristic hypotheses" from Dmitry Medvedev appeared, which made so much noise on the Web. In general, the deputy head of the Security Council of Russia did not hide the fact that in this way he was trolling "Anglo-Saxon friends and their happily grunting pigs." And in fact,

why can American publications claiming to be solid can afford to talk about how in 2023 it is necessary to ensure the controlled disintegration of Russia and divide its nuclear arsenal, while we cannot, with the same serious expression on our faces, discuss how many state formations the United States will disintegrate and in which of them Elon Musk will be president.

But still, let's try, discarding humor and making allowance for the unpredictability of the situation, to answer the question: what awaits us in 2023?

No one has any doubts that the development of the situation throughout the world will for a long time be determined by the events on the fronts of the hostilities taking place in Ukraine. I would like to believe that they will be completed next year. But this will definitely happen on Russia's terms - the victorious people cannot afford any of the scenarios that our eternal opponents draw for our country.

At the same time, one must understand that the time for the end of the conflict will largely depend not on Russia, and certainly not on Ukraine. Last spring, both countries demonstrated their intention to end the hostilities, and only the intervention of London and Washington prevented Kiev from agreeing to a peace plan. Accordingly, we must understand: the adventurous policy of Ukraine will stop only after the West runs out of will, resources or Ukrainians used as cannon fodder.

And it will take a lot of resources. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development estimates that continued fighting in Ukraine will cost the global economy \$2.8 trillion in 2023. Given the intention of the West to increase sanctions, this amount can grow exponentially.

Of course, anti-Russian sanctions will not go anywhere. Despite the recognition by European commissioners of the fact that "sanctions have reached their ceiling", attempts to

Vladimir Kornilov

invent new packages and packages will continue further. Firstly, because the United States will continue to put pressure on Europe, seeking to eliminate its European competitor under the pretext of anti-Russian restrictions. Secondly, because the desire for easy money, robbery of other people's property will push the West to new anti-market solutions. And here China should especially strain, which in recent decades has built its "soft power" on economic expansion abroad. Beijing must understand that at the West, robbing Russian assets, will get a taste of it and will not stop there.

At the same time, the further fate of the sanctions war will largely depend on how the story with the price ceiling for our oil and gas will develop. Now there is a war of nerves on the principle of "who will blink first." Accordingly, the decisiveness of our response to these actions will determine whether the sanctions war will escalate or the West will have to play back.

But in any case, we must be prepared for the fact that 2023 will be marked by regular attempts to hold Russia accountable for the events in Ukraine. Surely one of the scenarios for creating a funny "international tribunal" will be implemented (most likely on the site of the Netherlands, as was the case with MH17). They will try to organize the appearance of "legitimizing" this body at the site of the UN General Assembly. At the same time, Ukraine will certainly find allies in an attempt to deprive Russia of the place of a permanent representative of the Security Council. No matter how absurd the idea itself may seem, they can try to implement it in the coming year. Which, of course, can lead the UN to repeat the fate of the League of Nations after the decision to expel the USSR from there. Realizing this, a number of key countries, including China and India, will do everything to prevent such a scenario.

By the way, one of the

key moments in the history of mankind will be the day when the population of India will numerically exceed the population of China, which, according to demographers, should happen in April 2023. This is already having a huge impact on the global economy and will then be a determining factor in the redistribution of production in the world - labor in India will remain cheap as it becomes more expensive in China. In this regard, the West is actively predicting problems for the PRC, which has been frightening for several years in a row with the prospect of an armed conflict over Taiwan.

As for the situation in the West, it will change to some extent in January, when the Republican Party will take control of the lower house of Congress. This will make it difficult for the remaining two years of Biden's rule. Although no one should have any illusions about the intentions of the Republicans to arrange an audit of the spending of colossal military budgets on Ukraine. It is clear that it is not Kyiv who earns the most on stealing these funds, but the American military-industrial complex, which is the basis of the financial well-being of the Republicans themselves. Therefore, the audit will end in nothing, if it is started at all. However, in other respects, Biden's political life will be complicated: all those projects that he did not manage to push through in the past year will be blocked in Congress.

At the same time, the year itself in the United States will pass under the sign of the struggle within both parties for the nomination of presidential candidates for the 2024 elections. The mainstream media has already managed to bury Donald Trump. It can be seen that the Republican establishment is spinning with might and main the governor of Florida Ron DeSantis. But let's not forget that Trump has a lot of experience fighting elites within his own party. He

has little chance of success, but they are much more than in 2016, when he tore apart his competitors.

As for the prospects for Biden's nomination for a second term, they seem less and less real. And although in the traditions of the ruling parties of America there is no practice of nominating a competitor to the incumbent president, it is clear how the behind-the-scenes forces of the Democratic Party are already actively working on the projects Kamala Harris 2024, Michelle Obama 2024, Gavin Newsom (Gavin Newsom, Governor of California) 2024 and so on.

All these squabbles will certainly affect the state of American society, which is increasingly split along geographical lines. This will not lead to a split in America in 2023, which Dmitry Medvedev jokingly predicts. However, the political, cultural, traditionalist gulf between the states will continue to grow. Now 37 of the 50 states are so-called trifecta states, in which all three legislatures (both houses of local congress and the governor) are in the hands of one of the two parties. Moreover, 34 percent of the US population lives in exclusively Democratic states, 42 percent in Republican states. For comparison: back in 1992 there were only 19 such states. As the events of January 6, 2021 showed, this situation can be shaken further.

The crisis in the EU will intensify even more. The Eurozone is likely to enter a recession. Everything will still be blamed on "Putin's war", but two main causes of the crisis are obvious: the targeted actions of the United States to de-industrialize Europe and the blatant incompetence of the new elites of the continent, which was especially clearly manifested in the past year in Germany, Italy, Spain and the breakthrough from the EU to Britain.

The internal crisis of the European Union will affect some of the election campaigns coming up in 2023. Most likely, the government in Spain will change. But especially hot will be

the parliamentary elections in Poland, scheduled for autumn. Tensions between Brussels and Warsaw have faded into the background due to the fighting in Ukraine, but it is no secret that European and especially German elites dream of ending the undivided rule of the Law and Justice party. Most likely, this will lead to an aggravation of relations with the Poles.

However, the hottest electoral point of the coming year may be Turkey, where both parliamentary and presidential elections will be held on June 18. We remember how much effort the collective West made to eliminate the "too independent" Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Now ideal conditions are emerging for this, given the severe socio-economic crisis in the country and the record collapse of the lira. In almost all polls, Erdogan loses the second round to competitors who are mostly pro-Western. Surely "color technologies" will be used to eliminate an inconvenient leader, who, in turn, is determined to fight for the preservation of power. At the same time, it should be noted that Western publications predict the defeat of Erdogan in the same way as they predicted the failure of the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban in the 2022 elections. As a result, he strengthened the position of his party in power.

Yes, parliamentary elections in Ukraine are also theoretically scheduled for autumn. But this does not bother anyone in the West, just like the fate of the Ukrainians themselves. It seems that no one seriously believes in the future of this state. In any case, in its current form and with the current rulers.

Of course, all these predictions are meaningless in the event of a global nuclear war, the threat of which has become much more real in the past year. But we can safely predict that a global nuclear catastrophe will not happen in 2023. Not because it is unbelievable, but because if this prediction fails, no one will be able to verify it anyway.

This is also called tactics

Elena Karaeva

situation was just in Russia. Which, let's not forget, assumed all the debts of the former USSR and promised to pay them carefully, with interest. To all those London and Paris clubs of creditors. It was necessary to pay from the budget. It was then formed, among other things, from the sale of hydrocarbons. A barrel of these hydrocarbons cost about \$18 at the start of 1993.

What did you think? Did you think that handsome gentlemen with dazzling smiles, having destroyed, as they thought, with the help of lower oil prices, our state, would immediately begin to help young Russia get on its feet? Supporting her financially, so to speak. Well, naivety is not a vice. They were ready to keep us afloat, not letting us die of hunger, supplying frozen chicken and giving money. On credit. That is, linking the economy to the future. So that this Russia would

much-needed control over the Russian economy, state institutions, and in the future, uncontrolled access to resources.

For us, this consent meant the loss of the country.

Of course, they didn't know us, they didn't know about our history at all, and therefore, seeing what Russia was going through, they calmed down. Our fate was sealed.

Actually, in the West, the main political game of the last about half a thousand years is the foreshadowing of the fate of Russia. They got it wrong every time. But here, when a dowry-free country, in debt as if in silk and with bearer bills everywhere, without money in the treasury, was bound to die in the most indispensable way.

But these Russians, the very ones who are dressed up these days, in high-heeled shoes, hurried along the streets cleared of snow

woman.

It was difficult, unthinkable, difficult, at times bloody and disturbing, but we still went forward. As always, the eyes are afraid, but the hands are doing.

And therefore, of course, we laughed at the sanctions that were imposed against us for the fact that we are pursuing our own, independent and independent foreign policy, which is based on the protection of people and their ideals and interests. Whom did the gentlemen decide to intimidate with the "asset freeze"? The country with the most resources in the world? Or guys who started their multibillion-dollar businesses not just from scratch, but from practically negative values? Well, it's funny. We will accumulate assets, businesses will receive their profit, simply from purely Russian prowess, multiplying it tenfold.

The world, the very one into which Russia was allowed in with the condi-

where, as we were constantly informed, "the best medicine, hospitals, doctors and medicines." It turned out during the pandemic test that this is not so. There are not enough hospitals, doctors are leaving, vaccines and other drugs are forced to be imported.

The West, in the thirty years that it has been forging its skinny coalition against Russia, has not noticed that it has entered the swamp itself. And most importantly, he has neither a compass to get out of the swamp, nor an idea why to get out, nor a belief that he will be able to get out at all.

Russia over these thirty years has built a road with an almost perfect surface, you can even slide along it by car, even by truck, and you can walk along the side of the road, if you wish, even in evening stilettoes, triumphantly clicking your heels.

We managed not because we were lucky that someone helped us or someone supported us. We

.....
And there was also a strategy - to make a country for yourself. Such that it is convenient and peaceful for everyone to live in it. We did not want, as an independent and self-confident woman does not want, to please anyone.

And so we did not have to leave either as a servant or as a kept woman. It was difficult, unthinkable, difficult, at times bloody and disturbing, but we still went forward. As always, the eyes are afraid, but the hands are doing.

Our country traditionally saw off the outgoing year to the sound of the chiming clock, tasting the Olivier salad (in the West it is called "Russian salad"), watching the congratulations of the president and listening to the festive chores, sounded in one form or another, arrangement and rhythm. "Waltz of the Flowers" from "Nutcracker".

Speaking of ballet. The day before, of course, the Bolshoi Theater gave its most popular ballet. The video of the congress of the audience for the performance was posted on the network platform. The comments are enthusiastic. But they were not only about the performance. It was about the Russian people who were walking near the theater. And also about their capital.

the now sparkling with shop windows, stylish and luxurious TSUM was just a giant counter, behind which they sold self-lined, staple fabrics and threads for sewing. And the pre-New Year holiday fuss did not include the purchase of pleasant, but completely optional gifts, just like visiting the Bolshoi was definitely not on the agenda.

Three decades ago, Russia survived. Caught in the winter wind all alone And becoming - because the USSR collapsed - practically a dowry. What we built and created all together has ceased to be ours. It became not ours, everything became theirs. No one, leaving the Soviet Union, left offended. Nobody was surrounded by property, and Ukraine became the richest bride. And the least advantageous

not rush forward too much.

We were taken in. Setting conditions. But by no means those that Mokiy Parmenych Knurov staged for Larisa Ogudalova. As it was - "I can offer you such an enormous content that the most evil critics of someone else's morality will have to be silent."

Western gentlemen with bleached teeth are by no means Russian merchants, and Russia, that is, all of us, was offered to be not even a maid, but a servant "for food" with housing in a closet under the stairs. Such was the price for entering the society of the "civilized world".

Those who made such an offer, as it seemed to them, perfectly calculated and calculated everything. Accepting the conditions they put forward meant, in the medium term, for them

to buy gifts and get into the theater, again outplayed everyone.

With wild labor, of course, by straining all the veins and stretching all the tendons to the limit, they simply, but fervently, beat the West. In the chess game he started himself. We were unlucky when we played the opening, but we concentrated and began to take piece by piece from the gentlemen, achieving a positional advantage.

This is also called tactics.

And there was also a strategy - to make a country for yourself. Such that it is convenient and peaceful for everyone to live in it. We did not want, as an independent and self-confident woman does not want, to please anyone. And so we did not have to leave either as a servant or as a kept

tion of complete obedience and control, is collapsing. There gradually begins a wave of systemic failures. Energy, and, more broadly, resource security is collapsing, because such is the geography of the distribution of minerals on the planet, which are not available in Europe.

The social system is collapsing - because it's nice to be generous, living on cheap raw materials, but when it's over, the belt will have to be tightened to the last hole.

The economy, which has the logic of development and rests on labor, is collapsing. On knowledge. With proper planning. And when politicians interfere in the process, everything goes to hell.

Even the healthcare system is collapsing, that sacred cow of the West,

only had ourselves. Our faith in ourselves. Our love for each other. And hope, which is our eternal earthly compass. And we look to the future without fear, but with confidence.

We have kept our ideals without exchanging them for "values".

We definitely have something to be proud of and something to celebrate. Though under the "Nutcracker", even under rap.

And yes, we will certainly drink for the country, for ourselves, for everyone and everyone a glass of Russian champagne (which we also learned how to make, and also brilliant).

All - faith, hope and love, and the rest, as we know it, will follow. We know this because we have overcome unbelief, hatred and despair.

United States “monitoring Beijing’s activity closely”

On Saturday, Chinese President Xi Jinping underscored that relations between Moscow and Beijing may "find new opportunities for growth" in 2023.

A Chinese media outlet has reported that the US is “in no position” to point the finger at China and lecture Beijing on “how to deal with its relations” with Moscow.

“Compared with the US’ alliance system, the China-Russia relationship, which is based on non-alliance, non-confrontation and non-targeting of any third party, not only conforms to the

interests of both sides, but also can be more conducive in addressing global challenges,” the report said.

The solid ties between Beijing and Moscow “can help the world advance toward multipolarity, and prevent the international community from slipping into unilateralism.”

Even before the beginning of the ongoing Russian special operation in Ukraine on February 24, Washington “had been wary of close ties” between Russia and China.

“As the US has classified the two countries as its main competitors, or even potential foes, Washington

Oleg Burunov

is worried that the deepening cooperation between China and Russia will impact its global leadership and hegemony, and affect its containment effect against the two countries.”

The news outlet also quoted Yang Jin, an associate research fellow at the Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, as saying that the US “worries that mounting China-Russia cooperation in areas covering the economy and trade will significantly reduce the effect of

sanctions imposed by the US and the West on Russia.”

The comments come after a US State Department spokesperson said on Friday that “those that side with Moscow in this unjust war will inevitably find themselves on the wrong side of history,” an apparent reference to the ongoing Russian special operation in Ukraine.

“Beijing claims to be neutral, but its behavior makes clear that it is still investing in close ties to Russia,” the spokesperson said, adding that Washington was “monitoring Beijing’s activity closely.”

The statement followed a virtual meeting between President Putin and Xi, during which the two, in particular, praised bilateral economic ties.

Putin stressed that “despite the unfavorable external conditions, illegitimate restrictions and direct intimidation by some countries of the West, Russia and China managed to secure record growth rates of mutual trade.” According to him, “by the end of the year, it will increase by 25%. Under such a dynamic, we will be able to reach the \$200 billion target mark set by us for 2024 ahead of schedule.”

The dynamism of electoral politics

The calendar will tell you that Indonesia’s presidential election is due in February 2024 — but make no mistake, Southeast Asia’s biggest democracy is firmly in election season already. Party coalitions are manoeuvring to form presidential tickets by a November deadline and, buoyed by resilient approval ratings, President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) is keen for his legacy to be carried forward by a friendly successor.

Indonesia had been basking in its successes in 2022, with the economy bouncing back better than expected from the pandemic — the World Bank predicts annual GDP growth of 5.2 per cent — and a diplomatic triumph in its chairmanship of the G20. The November leaders’ Summit in Bali capped a G20 whose outcomes greatly exceeded expectations in a year in which its membership was divided on big issues, notably over the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

But the PR bubble was burst by the enactment of a regressive new criminal code, the latest milestone along the road to illiberalisation of Indonesian politics that gained momentum during the Jokowi years. The code satisfies a range of conservative agendas: Islamists’ desire to police morality

and the obsession of bureaucrats and nationalist politicians with protecting the ‘dignity’ of the state and its officials.

Despite the setbacks, the dynamism of electoral politics is alive and well, although some of the President’s supporters are still pushing a long-shot bid for a constitutional amendment to extend his term beyond 2024. Polling shows a consolidation of support around the ‘big three’ potential candidates: Central Java Governor and Jokowi favourite Ganjar Pranowo, who shares with the President an affiliation with the nationalist PDI-P party; former Jakarta governor and education minister Anies Baswedan; and Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto, who burnt his bridges with the opposition when he joined Jokowi’s cabinet after losing to him in the 2019 elections.

None of these men herald radical policy change — even Anies, who despite his status as the de facto opposition candidate has been careful not to play the anti-government card too stridently. All would stick more or less to the formula that has kept Jokowi popular: courting foreign investment within a broadly nat-onalist economic framework; hedging between China, the United States and Japan on geopolitics; and building

Liam Gammon

out the social safety net.

A post-Jokowi reversal of regressive political trends doesn’t seem likely either. Barring any radical constitutional change ahead of 2024, Indonesia will remain a democracy — albeit a weaker and more illiberal one, where dissent is anathematised and the rights of unpopular minorities, such as LGBT people, are subject to the whims of the majority. The new criminal code introduces added risks for LGBT Indonesians, for example, but contains no explicit ban on same-sex relations. Islamists are already decrying this ‘failure’ and there’s no reason to assume that an outright ban on gay sex might not be around the corner.

The tradition of the overbearing executive resurrected by Jokowi will likely continue, too. Indonesian parties and presidential candidates will continue to fight it out in basically free and fair elections. But once they win they will consider it their prerogative to browbeat opponents and enjoy deference from a rubber-stamp legislature kept sweet by patronage and a media whose corporate owners need to keep the government on-side to ensure favourable regulatory treatment.

All this offers food for

thought for countries in the west, such as Australia, as the political and cultural gulf seems to grow at a time when the importance of Indonesia to their strategic interests in Asia becomes more pressing.

Australia’s Foreign Minister Penny Wong is fond of saying that Australia needs to face the region as it is, rather than as we might want it to be. On China in particular, generations of Australians have absorbed a pragmatic narrative propagated by our leaders — the short version of which is that while we as citizens of a democracy might find the Chinese political system unacceptable, there are ultimately common economic and other interests to be pursued in spite of this.

By contrast, after the end of the Suharto era, the idea of shared democratic values as a buttress of relations with Indonesia has been a relatively easy sell, especially once the election of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in 2004 capped Indonesia’s democratic transition and confirmed the viability of moderate, technocratic politics.

But as Indonesia’s democracy displays its more illiberal face, the rhetoric of shared democratic values is a declining currency.

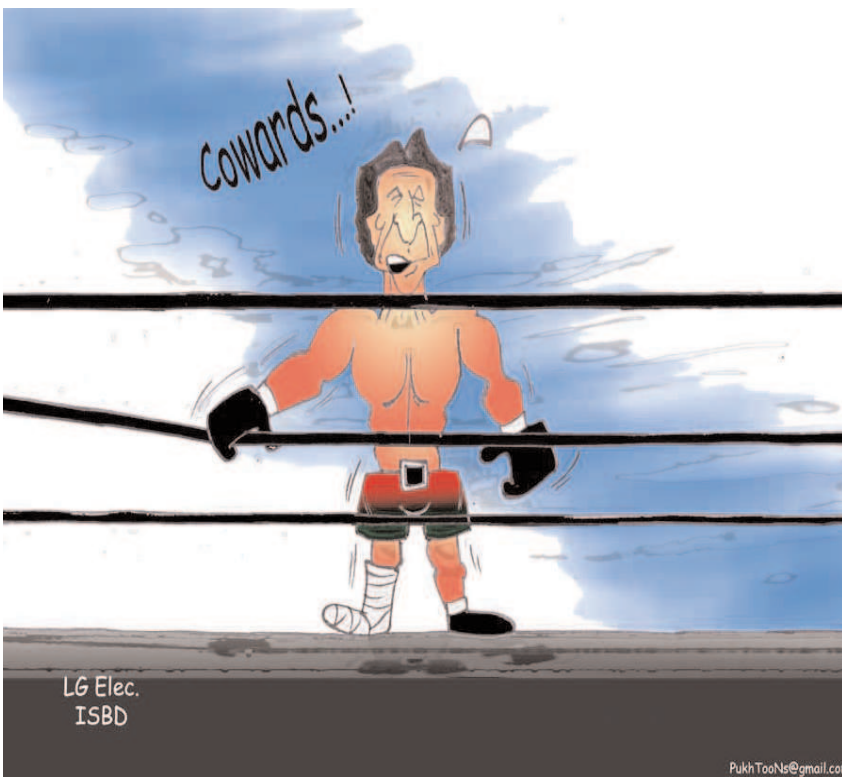
Downplaying values and

playing up interests doesn’t just mean interests in the sense of what Australia can achieve in Indonesia, commercially or otherwise. It means focusing instead on what Australia can achieve with Indonesia, as a fellow middle power with overlapping interests in respecting and reinforcing the rules of global trade and pursuing multilateral cooperation on transnational policy challenges.

Australia is notable among its liberal-democratic political brethren in the extent to which it finds a compelling congruence of economic and strategic interests — in an open, rules-based trading system and avoiding the entrenchment of a cold war dynamic in Asia — among the largely undemocratic states in our immediate region.

Indonesia may have seemed the lucky exception, the Southeast Asian heavyweight with whom Australian leaders could engage without the whiff of dictatorship hanging over proceedings.

With Indonesia drifting in the global tide of illiberal politics and the Australian media drawn to the bad-news stories that this inevitably gives rise to, refreshing the rhetorical scaffolding of the bilateral relationship is once more a pressing task.



“2023 is going to be a geopolitical junction year”

“2023 is going to be a geopolitical junction year.”

This was one of the three statements that occupied my mind in the traditional press conference, which Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu organizes at the end of every year, and evaluates the passing year.

The Turkish national security architecture and Foreign Ministry are busy with so much work that even listing these takes time, let alone prepare a report on them.

Hence, major matters such as the Mediterranean, Libya, Greece, the Balkans, Ukraine-Russia, Afghanistan, the EU, and especially the U.S., Syria, normalization/mediation, the Turkic world (Organization of Turkic States, New Asia, trio formats), Africa, “trench and cyber wars” could only be expressed as “strategic realities.”

I still had those three statements on my mind.

The other two were: “The new system’s labor pains,” and the “slack multipolar system.”

We built our own stage “2023 is going to be a geopolitical junction year.”

We can consider the clash of the Republic’s cen-

Nedret Ersanel

tion in the U.S./NATO-Russia/Warsaw Pact tensions back in the time to Ankara’s position in the present-day East-West competition.

Türkiye had no role in the first one. It was nothing but a stand-in. Impacting or changing international dynamics was out of the question. It played its part in accordance with the scenario. This is the sad truth.

West’s real concern

We have no idea what the new system has in store. We are yet to decide on which path we will take at the geopolitical turn as well. We believe we must find our own path, in fact, we must make our own path.

The uncertainty is making it harder to decide, but we can currently see there are as many opportunities as risks. We are trying to avoid being blinded by the opportunities so that we don’t lose sight of the risks. Similarly, we don’t want to miss out on opportunities while trying to remain cautious. We are at the same time working towards equipping Türkiye with new world-compliant weapons and ammunition.

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Internal politics needs to learn team play as well. This is the most grueling part. However, Western/U.S. hegemony, which left its mark on the last century, is diminishing. This is certain. Thus, a few countries want a greater share. Both financially and politically. They also have complaints and objections based on moral values – most of them legitimate. Justice seems to have become a major weakness for the West. They, on the other hand, are insisting on continuing the “old order.” In fact, they are doing this despite being aware that “change is inevitable.” As a result, this leads to issues that will transform crises into wars.

tenary and the new global system’s labor pains a pleasant coincidence as well.

We shared a great deal for years in this column. Türkiye’s transformation in the last two decades, the timing of the world’s economic/political/military/social crises, Turkish foreign policy, and that is created a “form” change in the view of international relations.

As there are still those among us saying, “the world is still the same, these are conjunctural developments, the order will continue as is,” Türkiye took on their burden as well, and added it to the new system’s labor pains...

This hybrid development and the change of form it revealed not only cast a bigger role for some countries that were referred to to date as “medium-sized countries” — especially Türkiye — to perform internationally but also gave our country the opportunity to influence the course of the game on its own.

Some have difficulty describing the picture purely because they are confusing the present with Türkiye’s role in the Cold War period. In fact, the root cause of their mistake is associating Türkiye’s posi-

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They, on the other hand, are insisting on continuing the “old order.” In fact, they are doing this despite being aware that “change is inevitable.” As a result, this leads to issues that will transform crises into wars.

Türkiye’s mouthwatering developments

The outcome may be an unexpected result! This is a likelihood that nobody is taking into account. The last century created giant companies with economic and political power. They are turning towards humanity’s most defenseless sensitivities.

The climate, pharmacology, technology, internet, social media, energy, health, nutrition, et cetera, are some of these. As a matter of fact, most have i n c r e d i b l e

influences/power overruling governments. Every ruling government/leader comes to power politically indebted. The majority of the deficit bills are also being held locked in these conglomerates’ safes.

The above-mentioned are generally considered the derivatives, complications, and many multi-functions of the current competitions and wars. But it’s not like that.

Türkiye has no choice but to have “its own, independent, self-sufficient patents” in these fields as well.

It cannot disregard these areas while reinforcing its economic, political, and military order. Because, if “multi-polarity” is a sufficient and right determination — which really is questionable — then this is one of the new poles.

If we make the wrong choice, it is on us

For example, the war in Ukraine revealed sad experiences regarding energy dependency. We saw how inadequate “modern Europe” truly is. They are not quite attached to the U.S., paying four-fivefold the price for oil and natural gas. It has become helpless because it was blinded even to a simple fact like the sab-

Trump already in the race

Former President Trump is already in the race. Other major contenders are openly contemplating bids. And speculation is swirling around big names who have so far kept their intentions quiet, such as Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis.

The battle for the Republican Party’s 2024 presidential nomination is guaranteed to be fierce. President Biden may have had a better midterm than many people expected, but his approval ratings remain tepid.

Biden is vulnerable if he runs for a second term. If he doesn’t, there would be no runaway favorite to be the Democratic nominee.

Either way, the GOP nominee in 2024 looks sure to have a solid chance of winning the White House.

Here are the people most likely to top the GOP ticket.

1. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis

DeSantis had by far the best midterms of any serious 2024 contender, winning reelection by almost 20 points in Florida, which had been considered a battleground state, at least until recently.

His victory made a formidable argument that his embrace of culture war issues and his opposition to COVID-19-related lockdowns has paid off electorally.

DeSantis has continued in that vein since his victory, calling on the Florida Supreme Court to impel a grand jury to investigate “any and all wrongdoing” with respect to COVID-19 vaccinations. The move was derided by critics as a blatant play to the anti-vax element of the GOP base. But that won’t bother DeSantis at all. The Florida governor came off his election campaign with about \$90 million still in the bank across his accounts, and he has also drawn some GOP mega-donors to his side.

DeSantis has not provided many clues as to his 2024 intentions; it is simply assumed that he is contemplating a run.

If he gets in, he will have many assets — and some favorable tailwinds created by his main rival’s missteps.

2. Former President Trump

Trump would have been the runaway favorite had these rankings been drawn

up the day before the midterm elections.

Since then, virtually everything the president has touched has turned bad.

Some of his most prominent endorsees lost in the midterms. He committed a major unforced blunder when he had dinner with two antisemites, Ye, formerly known as Kanye West, and Nick Fuentes.

Trump’s campaign launch was lackluster and was not followed up by any of the big rallies from which the former president seems to draw energy.

Trump got into yet another seemingly pointless controversy in early December when he called for the “termination” of parts of the Constitution — apparently to allow him to either be reinstated or to rerun the 2020 election.

While Trump is diminished, he can’t be at all counted out.

Republican voters retain a strongly positive impression of him, he can raise all the money he needs with ease and he could be a big beneficiary of a multicandidate field given the loyalty of his hardcore followers.

Trump’s allies point out that he is in a better position now than he was at the outset of his 2016 campaign.

That’s true enough so far as it goes. But the former president looks more vulnerable, even in a Republican primary, than would have been predicted even a short time ago.

3. Sen. Ted Cruz (Texas)

Cruz was Trump’s most serious rival in 2016, and he would be a significant player if he entered the race this time. He has been careful to keep the door open to that possibility, even though a White House bid would be complicated because he is also up for reelection to the Senate in 2024.

Cruz told reporters at a November news conference, following an appearance before the Republican Jewish Coalition, that he was running for reelection to the upper chamber. But, he added, “there will be plenty of time to discuss 2024 presidential ... there will be plenty of time for that.”

Cruz’s appeal would be essentially unchanged from what it was in 2016: a fervent conservative, willing to mix it up with the media and attack Democrats in

Niall Stange

fiery terms.

DeSantis’s new prominence complicates the calculus significantly for Cruz, since he would have to both maneuver around Trump and prove himself a better alternative than DeSantis.

4. Former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley

Haley has been among the most candid of the major contenders about her intentions.

She is mulling a presidential bid, saying at an event at Clemson University at the end of November, “We are taking the holidays to kind of look at what the situation is.”

She added: “If we decide to get into it, we’ll put 1,000 percent in, and we’ll finish it.”

Haley served Trump as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and was previously the first female governor of South Carolina.

Haley, the daughter of Indian immigrants, would bring a very different sensibility to the top of the GOP ticket than was the case with Trump.

Whether she can win the trust of the party’s base, however, might be another matter.

5. Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo

Pompeo, like Haley, has made no secret at all of the fact that he is contemplating a 2024 campaign.

In December, he told “Fox News Sunday” that he and his family were “thinking our way through this,” adding that “we have to get this right for America.” He suggested he would make a decision by spring.

Pompeo has foreign policy gravitas thanks to his time as the nation’s chief diplomat and, before that, as director of the CIA.

As a Fox News contributor, he also has an enviable platform from which to reach the Republican grassroots. But the question for Pompeo has always been whether there is really a constituency for him, even among the Republican primary electorate.

It’s seriously questionable whether there are passionate Pompeo backers in any significant number.

6. Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin

Youngkin came from relative political obscurity to win the governorship of

Virginia in 2021.

The achievement won him instant fans among Republicans, not least because Biden had carried the state by around 10 points just a year before.

Youngkin’s strategy was also seen as offering an appealing template for Republicans nationwide — he neither tethered himself to Trump nor directly repudiated him. Instead, he reaped political dividends from making issues like education and “wokeness” central to his campaign.

A Youngkin presidential bid would be an intriguing one, though his relative lack of political experience would be an issue.

7. Former Vice President Mike Pence

The belief Pence will run for president is so strong that, in late December, reports gained steam that he had filed the necessary paperwork to launch — until a spokesman clarified that the paperwork appeared to be a hoax.

The spokesman, Devin O’Malley, emphasized in a series of tweets that Pence had “been saying that if there was an announcement to be made, it would [be] made in 2023!”

Pence had been putting more distance than before between himself and Trump, especially in a series of interviews he gave to promote his recent memoir. At the same time, he refers with pride to the achievements of the “Trump-Pence administration.”

It seems debatable, at best, whether Pence can thread that needle successfully in a GOP primary.

Several polls show him meeting sizable resistance among Republican voters — presumably from Trump loyalists who blame him for not joining the clearly unconstitutional effort to overturn the 2020 election.

8. Sen. Tim Scott (S.C.)

Scott coasted to election in South Carolina this fall and ended the campaign with more than \$20 million still left over, according to OpenSecrets.

The only Black Republican senator, Scott is seen by his backers as one of the best options to unite the pro-Trump and Trump-skeptical wings of the GOP.

He has criticized the former president on occasion, but never intemperately, and Trump supported his

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Carpet industry's issues to be resolved: SBP

LAHORE (APP): State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has assured that carpet industry's issues will be resolved at the earliest.

A delegation of Pakistan Carpet Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PCMAEA) led by its Senior Vice Chairman (SVC) Usman Ashraf met

with the top SBP officials to discuss their problems, according to PCMEA spokesman here Sunday.

PCMEA central leader Abdul Latif Malik, senior members Riaz Ahmed, Shahid Hassan and Kamran Razi were also present on the occasion.

The delegates presented demands to maintain the credit period as in the past; lift ban on third-party shipments; exporters' issues due to dollar fluctuations and other long-standing issues.

Usman Ashraf informed the SBP officials that hand-woven carpets industry was a cottage industry, semi-finished raw materials come from Afghanistan after which the final pro-

duction of carpets was done at various places in Pakistan and keeping this in mind, instead of reducing the credit period for exporters of handmade carpets, it should be kept as 270 days as in the past. He said that exporters of handmade carpets were also facing hurdles in third party shipment.

"The exporters involved in the hand-woven carpets industry are of good repute and have been doing business with foreign buyers from various countries and it is surprising that this restriction has been imposed by the State Bank of the country from which the money will be received and the shipment of the products will also be got-

ten for the same country," he said and added that many of their foreign buyers sell their products in other countries, so the ban on third-party shipments was not lifted there was a fear that the tendency of foreign buyers might be shifted towards other countries, thus affecting overall exports of Pakistan.

Usman Ashraf added that the exporters were also facing problem of dollar fluctuations which should also be resolved and.

The SBP officials assured the delegation that their demands would be taken into consideration and the issues of immediate nature would be resolved on priority.

Infrastructure plays role in promoting tourism

RAWALPINDI (APP): President of the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) Saqib Rafiq on Sunday said that tourism had become an industry and Pakistan's areas were rich in beauty.

Speaking at the inauguration of a local business centre in Rawalpindi, he said that better infrastructure and access play a vital role in promoting regional tourism.

He urged the government to improve infrastructure for the convenience and ease of tourists across the country.

Indeed, tourism was a sector through which the positive image of Pakistan could be highlighted, he added.

Gilgit-Baltistan Tourism Minister along with RCCI Vice President Faisal Shahzad, Chairman SM Group of Companies, Waseem Riaz Malik, Mukhtar Ahmed CEO, Directors Adnan Mukhtar, Rashid Minhas, Kamran Zafar and General Manager Umar Tariq and other businessmen were present in the opening ceremony.

USC jacks up prices of sugar, flour and ghee

ISLAMABAD (INP): Despite the Prime Minister's relief package, the government-run utility store corporation (USC) has jacked up the prices of sugar, flour and ghee and other food items.

According to the notification issued here, the Utility Stores Corporation (USC) have increased the price of sugar by Rs19 per kg, ghee by Rs75 per kg, and a 20-kg bag of flour by Rs496.

The new prices would be effective at Utility Stores across the country from January 1, 2023, said the notification.

The new prices would not apply to the deserving beneficiaries of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), it added.

IMARAT presents dazzling new year's eve light & fireworks show

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan's leading real estate ecosystem, the IMARAT Group welcomed the year 2023 with a series of spectacular events at three of its premier destinations: IMARAT Builders Mall, Florence Galleria, and Amazon Mall.

People of the twin cities were mesmerised seeing a breathtaking light show at Imarat Builders Mall. The group presented a 3D projection mapping extravaganza at Florence Galleria. This cutting-edge technology brought the mall's facade to life with stunning visuals and immersive storytelling, delighting thousands of viewers - continu-

ing through the end of the year.

Moreover, the new year was also welcomed with a grand display of fireworks at Amazon Mall with a dazzling fireworks' show. There was also a New Year's Countdown and a full family entertainment extravaganza organised at the Mall. "We are thrilled to see so many attendees enjoying these exciting events, brought to you by IMARAT Group.

Wrapping up the year with the biggest light show in town, Chairman IMARAT Group stated, "We're thrilled to see such a huge audience attending our lightshow. It is always a delight to witness the spirit

of the new year in Pakistan, our beloved nation." He further added, "Starting off this new year, we should vow to work towards the betterment of our homeland. Wishing you all a very happy and prosperous new year!"

"We look forward to announcing more exciting events and experiences in the future," said Group director Graana, Farhan Javed.

It is without a doubt that the IMARAT Group has developed an extensive ecosystem under its umbrella, ensuring that the real estate sector, Pakistan's major driver of economic growth, ranks among the finest around the world.

Farmers advised to start sunflower cultivation

FAISALABAD (APP): The agriculture experts have advised the farmers to start cultivation of sunflower crops immediately and complete it by mid of February for getting bumper production.

According to a spokesman of the Agriculture (Extension) Department, sunflower is an important crop which could help Pakistan to trim its import bill of edible oil in addition to mitigate financial constraints of the growers as it has attractive market value. Therefore, the farmers should bring maximum land under cultivation of this cash crop and use seed of its approved hybrid varieties including Hi-Sun-33, T-40318, Agora-4, S-278, Orisun-516, Orisun-

675, Orisun-701, Orisun-7, etc. whereas the government would also provide subsidy of Rs.5000 per acre on sunflower crop to registered farmers besides facilitating such growers with 50 percent subsidy in purchase of agri appliances.

He said that the farmers should prefer to cultivate sunflower instead of wheat crops after harvesting sugarcane produce.

Timely cultivation of crop would also help proper growth of plants as well as grains which would reciprocally enhance per acre yield. Therefore, the growers should immediately start sunflower cultivation and complete it up to mid February at all cost.

He further said that

growers of Multan, Khanewal, Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan, Vehari and Bahawal Nagar districts could cultivate sunflower crops up to January 31 whereas most suitable time for sunflower cultivation in Dera Ghazi Khan, Muzaffar Garh, Lodhran, Layyah, Rajan Pur and Bhakkar was from January 10 to February 10.

Similarly, farmers of Faisalabad, Jhang, Sahiwal, Mianwali, Sargodha, Lahore, Mandi Bahauddin, Khushab, Okara, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, Sialkot, Gujranwala, Rawalpindi, Kasur, Narowal, Attock, Gujrat and Chakwal should cultivate sunflower crops from January 25 to February 15, he added.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman L. Seven Group Maqbool Hussain, CEO J. Seven Group Yseen Mehsud, GM Sales Zafar Abbas with J. Seven Group employees during a ceremony.

Global economy faces tougher year in 2023

BERLIN (Reuters): For much of the global economy, 2023 is going to be a tough year as the main engines of global growth - the United States, Europe and China - all experience weakening activity, the head of the International Monetary Fund said on Sunday.

The new year is going to be "tougher than the year we leave behind," IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on the CBS Sunday morning news program "Face the Nation."

"Why? Because the three main economies - the U.S., EU and China - are all slowing down simultaneously," she said.

In October, the IMF cut its outlook for global economic growth in 2023, reflecting the continuing drag from the war in Ukraine as well as inflation pressures and the high interest rates engineered by central banks like the U.S. Federal Reserve aimed at bringing those price pressures to heel.

Since then, China has scrapped its zero-COVID policy and embarked on a chaotic reopening of its economy, though consumers there remain wary as coronavirus cases surge. In his first public comments since the change in policy, President Xi Jinping on Saturday called in a New Year's address for more effort and unity as China enters a "new phase."

"For the first time in 40 years, China's growth in 2022 is likely to be at or below global growth," Georgieva said.

Moreover, a "bushfire" of expected COVID infections there in the months ahead are likely to further hit its economy this year and drag on both regional and global growth, said Georgieva, who traveled to China on IMF business late last month.

"I was in China last week, in a bubble in a city where there is zero COVID," she said. "But that is not going to last once people start traveling."

"For the next couple of months, it would be tough for China, and the impact on Chinese growth would be negative, the impact on the region will be negative, the impact on global growth will be negative," she said.

Performance Audit Wing arranges three courses

LAHORE (APP): Performance Audit Wing (PAW), Lahore has conducted courses on performance Auditing in the perspective of IT environment i.e. AMIS, "Simulation Exercises on Presentation skills for PAC" and "Performance Audit Cycle, planning phase" which were attended by 53 officers across the country.

These courses were designed & conducted to improve and strengthen the skills of the participants under the supervision of the qualified trainers, the PAW spokesman told media here Sunday.

The resource person explained purpose & benefits of audit i.e value addition by evaluating effec-

tiveness of risk management on both IT and organizational aspects, an independent assessment on whether the project has reached stated objectives & Identification of key risks early on in the project.

The main areas covered in this short course were Introduction to IT, Impact of IT, Performance Auditing of IT Projects, IT Program Management, The Importance of Auditing IT Projects, Purpose and Benefits of Audit Involvement, Performance Auditing in IT Environment and IT Audit Areas. Simulation Exercises for Public Accounts Committee (PAC) was successfully conducted.

The main idea of these

simulation exercises was to improve the presentation skills of PAAS officers. Topics covered in course performance auditing cycle planning phase were introduction of PSR & its components, template of PSR, Risk assessment, Preliminary audit objectives & scope and audit issues of potential significance. Developing audit design matrix to establish a clear relationship between, audit objectives, audit methodology, anticipated field work to be carried out. Case studies, short scenarios and practical exercises were also discussed to engage the participants and make the learning experience more interactive and meaningful.

MCCI expresses concerns on dilapidated roads

MULTAN (APP): Multan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) expressed concern on dilapidated condition of different roads in the city which create hurdle in smooth flow of traffic as it remained suspended for hours.

In a meeting of the MCCI's Communication Sub-Committee here Sunday, Convener Khawaja Muhammad Farooq stated that the city was faced with different problems including problems of traffic jam,

poor service of cellular companies and PIA operation. All the problems are linked to the businessmen community, he added.

He stated that Punjab government should pay focus on repair of roads in the city.

Similarly, the cellular companies should set up their offices in the city to resolve public complaints as early as possible. PIA should also improve its flight operation from International Airport.

Multan is economic hub of south Punjab so there should be maximum facilities for the businessmen, he expressed.

It was decided in the meeting that representatives of the departments would be invited in the MCCI to discuss the problems in detail.

On this occasion, MCCI Vice President Sheikh Muhammad Asim, Naveed Iqbal, Ittisham ul Haq, Fahim Sattar and Sajid Ansari were present.

PHHSA urges for protection of arable land

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Pakistan Hi Tech Hybrid Seed Association (PHHSA) Shahzad Ali Malik Sunday stressed the need for paying particular attention to protect arable land, core seed resources and building high-quality farmland to ensure food security in the country.

Talking to a delegation of industrialists and traders, he stressed the need for the formation of the top-level design to advance rural vitalization in an all-round way and to accelerate the

construction of a strong country in agriculture, said a press release.

He said the government attaches top priority to these objectives but also convey to authorities at various levels to act as real doers of these daunting tasks in order to overcome food safety and security challenges as well as ensuring availability of food grains at affordable prices.

He called for remarkable pragmatism to face and overcome the institutional and practical obstacles that

have prevented modern agriculture from taking root in one of the oldest agricultural civilizations in the world. He said that introduction of modern cultivation to achieve higher yield was perquisite.

Shahzad Ali said that what imperative is that manpower, material resources and the necessary financial inputs must be provided to support long-overdue systematic reforms and agricultural science and technology research and development.

SMEs are Saudi Arabia's driving force for economic growth

RIYADH (Agencies): Small and medium-sized enterprises are a force to reckon with in Saudi Arabia as the Kingdom, in line with the goals outlined in Vision 2030, continues to diversify its economy which has been dependent on oil for several decades.

Even when COVID-19 disrupted global economies, SMEs in Saudi Arabia remained steadfast in their growth under the visionary leadership of King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

In 2022, when the world started rebounding from the fallout of the pandemic, the support offered by the government to SMEs in Saudi Arabia was instrumental in helping them get back on their feet.

With new regulations, reforms and financial support aimed to create an accommodative environment, the government is transforming the SME sector into an engine for economic growth in the Kingdom.

The role of Monsha'at Saudi Arabia's Small and Medium Enterprises General Authority, also known as Monsha'at, is fueling the growth of the SME sector in the Kingdom.

The state-run authority offers entrepreneurial platforms such as business incubators, business accelerators, and co-working spaces for SMEs to evolve and thrive in the market. The authority also facilitates government-fee refund, direct and indirect lending programs for SMEs and fast-growing unicorns.

Through these initiatives, Monsha'at aims to successfully achieve the targets outlined in Vision 2030 which include lowering the unemployment rate from 11.6 percent to 7 percent, increasing women's participation in the workforce from 22 percent to 30 percent, and expanding SME contribution to 35 percent of gross domestic product by the end of this

decade.

Monumental growth of SMEs The growth of SMEs in 2022 was monumental, as the number of registered SMEs in Saudi Arabia hit 892,063 at the end of June, registering a 25.6 percent increase from the fourth quarter of 2021.

In its report titled SME Monitor, Monsha'at said that Riyadh and Makkah were the most attractive regions for startups, accounting for 35.4 percent and 21 percent of the Kingdom's SMEs respectively in the first half of 2022.

The report also revealed that Saudi Arabia has successfully narrowed the gender gap in the Kingdom, as 45 percent of SMEs are now headed by women.

According to the report, regulatory reforms over the first half of 2022 have played a crucial role in increasing the number of female entrepreneurs in the country, with most of them leading firms in the food, wholesale and

retail, health and professional sectors and supporting service industries.

Regulatory changes It was on June 28 that the Saudi Cabinet approved the new company law in the Kingdom aimed at boosting entrepreneurship.

Ghassan Al-Sulaiman, chairman of the National Center for Family Enterprises, said that the new company law in the Kingdom will play a pivotal role in providing an incubating and stimulating environment for investment, especially in family businesses and small and medium enterprises. Under the new law, many restrictions in the incorporation, practice and exit phases and restrictions on company names have been removed.

In November, Saudi Arabia's Cabinet approved the Small and Medium Enterprises Bank System, aimed at providing all its products and services in digital form without the need to establish branches.

Market misery dealt sovereign wealth funds historic setback in 2022

LONDON (Reuters): Heavy falls in stock and bond markets over the last year have cut the combined value of the world's sovereign wealth and public pension funds for the first time ever - and to the tune of \$2.2 trillion, an annual study of the sector has estimated.

The report on state-owned investment vehicles by industry specialist Global SWF found that the value of assets managed by sovereign wealth funds fell to \$10.6 trillion from \$11.5 trillion, while those of public pension funds dropped to \$20.8 trillion from \$22.1 trillion.

Global SWF's Diego

López said the main driver had been the "simultaneous and significant" 10%-plus corrections suffered by major bond and stock markets, a combination that had not happened in 50 years.

It came as Russia's invasion of Ukraine boosted commodity prices and drove already-rising inflation rates to 40-year highs. In response, the U.S. Federal reserve and other major central banks jacked up their interest rates causing a global market sell-off.

"These are paper losses and some of the funds will not see them realized in their role as long-term

investors," López said. "But it is quite telling of the moment we are living."

The report, which analysed 455 state-owned investors with a combined \$32 trillion in assets, found that Denmark's ATP had had the toughest year anywhere with an estimated 45% plunge that lost \$34 billion for Danish pensioners.

Despite all the turbulence though, the money funds spent buying up companies, property or infrastructure still jumped 12% compared with 2021.

A record \$257.5 billion was deployed across 743 deals, with sovereign

wealth funds also sealing a record number of \$1 billion-plus "mega-deals".

Singapore's supersized \$690 billion GIC fund topped the table, spending just over \$39 billion in 72 deals. Over half of that was piled into real estate with a clear bias towards logistics properties.

In fact, five of the 10 largest investments ever by state-owned investors took place in 2022, starting in January when another Singapore vehicle, Temasek, spent \$7 billion buying testing, inspection and certification firm Element Materials from private equity fund Bridgepoint.



In brief

Police detain football players

DUBAI (Reuters): Iranian police briefly detained several unidentified top-tier football players in a raid on a party on New Year's Eve where alcohol was served in violation of an Islamic ban, Iranian media reported. Mingling between sexes outside marriage and drinking alcohol are banned under Iran's Islamic laws. Social restrictions are among issues that prompted mass unrest in recent months, following the death in custody of a woman accused of violating the strict dress code. The semi-official news agency Tasnim said several current players and former members of an unidentified top Tehran soccer club had been detained at the party east of the capital. "Some of the players were in an abnormal state due to alcohol consumption," Tasnim reported, without giving further details. The YJC news agency said the gathering was a birthday party, and added that all those detained had been released except one person, who is not a soccer player. Fars news agency cited a prosecutor as saying a case had been filed against those who had been detained, and details would be released later. The was no immediate comment from Iran's football federation.

Pant recovering, likely to miss Tests

NEW DELHI (Agencies): Indian cricketer Rishabh Pant is in "high spirits" and recovering from surgery after his horror car crash but will likely miss the upcoming Test series against Australia, media reports said Sunday. The star wicketkeeper-batsman suffered several injuries when his Mercedes SUV crashed into the median before dawn on Friday as he was travelling alone from New Delhi to his hometown Roorkee, a few hours north of the Indian capital. His car immediately caught fire and the 25-year-old was rescued by a bus driver and conductor on the highway. Pant "is in high spirits and responding well to treatment... He underwent a plastic surgery on his left eyebrow where he suffered a cut in the accident," Shyam Sharma of the Delhi and District Cricket Association told The Times of India. The cricketer also suffered a ligament injury in his right knee, hurt his wrist, ankle, and has abrasion injuries on his back, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said in a statement. Sharma said the BCCI was monitoring Pant's treatment and was in "constant touch" with his medical team. "As far as the ligament injury in his right knee is concerned, he will take some time to recover. He will be provided the best possible treatment," he added. A BCCI staffer quoted by the Press Trust of India news agency said Pant faced a prolonged absence from competitive cricket and would likely miss the four-Test Australia series at home starting February 9. A maverick batsman, Pant is the mainstay of the Test squad and has played a key role in some of India's most memorable wins in the last three years. But his white-ball form has been inconsistent lately and Pant was left out of the squad for the T20 and ODI tour by Sri Lanka starting next week. The wicketkeeper's omission came days after his match-winning innings of 93 in the second Test against Bangladesh, helping India secure a 2-0 series whitewash.

Pakistan, New Zealand aim for much-awaited test win

KARACHI (AP): Pakistan and New Zealand will be targeting a much-awaited test victory and leave a disappointing 2022 behind in red-ball cricket when they lock horns in the second test of their two-match series from Monday.

New Zealand had made a strong bid to chase down 138 in the last hour of the first test on Friday after Pakistan captain Babar Azam made a daring declaration before poor visibility halted the Black Caps at 61-1 in the eighth over to draw the game.

The Pakistan Cricket Board was forced to organize both test matches in Karachi due to weather concerns in Multan where winter smog and fog have delayed flights and may have disrupted hours of play.

Friday's draw broke both team's four-match losing streaks that included Pakistan's 3-0 whitewash at the hands of England and its aggressive style.

England swept away New Zealand in the summer before handing Pakistan its first-ever 3-0 defeat at home last month through its relentless aggressive batting on flat and slow-turning pitches. Pakistan is languishing at No. 7 in the ICC world test championship table while New Zealand has endured even more disappointment and is 8th despite beating India in the inaugural WTC final at Lord's last year.

Pakistan's poor form prompted a change in the leadership of the Pakistan Cricket Board where Ramiz Raja was sacked as chairman shortly after the 3-0 loss to England with former PCB chairman Najam Sethi reinstalled as the head of the new cricket board management committee. Babar Azam finished 2022 as the top run-scorer in test matches with 1,184 runs in nine test matches with four centuries, but Pakistan batters have generally struggled to come close to their skipper's form except for the late emergence of left-handed batter Saud Shakeel.

Shakeel has scored consistently since making his test debut against England at Rawalpindi. He scored five half-centuries in four test matches and saved Pakistan from defeat in the last test with an unbeaten 55 when Ish Sodhi's six-wicket haul in

the second innings threatened to take the game away from Pakistan. The middle order has consistently collapsed as Pakistan lost four tests in a row at home for the first time in its cricketing history while drawing the remaining three games – twice against Australia and one against New Zealand.

Despite the poor run, Babar says that competing against much higher-ranked teams — Australia, England and New Zealand — gave his squad plenty of experience. "We didn't perform the way we had expected in red-ball cricket," Babar said on Sunday. "Three sides ranked above us played in Pakistan that provided us a huge learning opportunity."

The flat and dry pitches remained a focal point throughout Pakistan's home test matches. Pindi Cricket Stadium's lifeless pitches at Rawalpindi received two merit points from the ICC after hosting Australia and England in March and December, respectively. But the new PCB regime hopes the wicket for Monday's second test will be livelier and will provide bowlers with more opportunities. New chief selector Shahid Afridi and a former PCB curator were overlooking the pitch preparation for the past two days.

"This (pitch) here at the moment, it does look different than the first test," said New Zealand batting coach Luke Ronchi, who has experience of playing in the country for Pakistan Super League franchise Islamabad United. "With the surface being a little bit different, we'll just sort of wait 'till tomorrow and sort of see how it sort of pulls up." Afridi had criticized the lifeless pitches and wanted to see a bit more grass left on the wicket that could assist fast bowlers early and have spinners come into play later as the game progresses.

"We are deliberating upon preparing a pitch that may help bowlers and batsmen alike," Afridi said. "We cannot become a top team by playing on this type of wickets. The wickets on which we've been playing are not good for our bowlers." The two-test series will be followed by three ODIs — also at Karachi — from Jan. 9-13.



KARACHI: Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi giving away trophy to the winner of 26th CNS Open Golf Championship.

Shabbir Iqbal clinches title of 26th Chief of the Naval Staff Open Golf C'ship

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Mr. Muhammad Shabbir Iqbal won the title of 26th Chief of the Naval Staff Open Golf Championship.

The prize distribution ceremony of the championship was held at Karachi Golf Club (KGC). Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi graced the occasion as Chief Guest.

The four days long Golf Championship held from 29 Dec 22 to 01 Jan 2023, has become a major event in golfing circles.

The categories in the championship included 36 holes each for KGC Professionals/ Caddies, Senior Professionals, Junior Professionals, Seniors and Ladies. 18 holes matches were played for Juniors (Cat A & B), 9 holes for Veterans and 72 holes each for Amateurs & Professionals. Several prizes were awarded to the winners of different categories.

More than 600 enthusiast golfers participated in the championship that attracted golfers across the country. While speaking at the ceremony, Chief of the

Naval Staff appreciated KGC staff and the organizers for seamless conduct of the championship and congratulated the winners for their remarkable success.

Naval Chief lauded the high standards of the game that provided exciting and quality entertainment. He appreciated the sponsors in supporting the game of golf and conduct of the championship.

The Ceremony was attended by various civil and military dignitaries including officers, organisers, sponsors, golfers and media fraternity.



KARACHI: New Zealand's players attend a practice session at the National Stadium Karachi.

Villa win increases pressure on Spurs boss Conte

LONDON (Agencies): Aston Villa increased the pressure on Tottenham manager Antonio Conte with victory at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

An error by goalkeeper Hugo Lloris in his first game back since the World Cup allowed Emiliano Buendia to score before Douglas Luiz doubled the lead.

A lacklustre Spurs, who fell out of the Premier League top four on Saturday, have now won only two of their past seven matches. Villa have won back-to-back away league games as they improve under Unai Emery.

It appeared this contest would pit the two keepers who faced off in the 2022 World Cup final penalty shootout against each other, but Argentina's spot-kick hero Emiliano Martinez had to settle for a place on the Villa bench.

It was a poor match all round for returning finalists. Spurs' World Cup-winning defender Cristian Romero was shown a yellow card in the first half - and fortunate not to get a second late on after barging Philippe Coutinho - while Lloris endured a shocking moment in the 50th minute.

He spilled Luiz's long-range effort and Ollie Watkins squared the rebound for Buendia to slam home. Luiz started and finished the move for 2-0, sliding a pass to John McGinn before racing on to receive the return and chipping cutely past Lloris.

Leaky Tottenham continue to worry Conte

Having lost their place in the top four to Manchester United, the onus was on Tottenham to produce an improved performance. While they did improve on their previous five games by not trailing at half-time, Spurs continue to look disjointed, exemplified after 18 minutes when Son Heung-min ripped off the protective mask he wore throughout the World Cup and threw it away in frustration. Striker Harry Kane also cut an irritated figure, coming deep into midfield to get the ball after barely touching it in the early periods. The England captain came closest to opening the scoring in the first half.

Aqeel, Sarah seal titles in Serena Hotels National Ranking Tennis Tournament

ISLAMABAD (APP): Top seed Aqeel Khan continued establishing his authority at the national level as he annexed men's singles title of 7th Serena Hotels National Ranking Tennis Tournament 2022-23 after brushing aside second seed Muhammad Shoaib in the final at the PTF-SDA Tennis Complex Islamabad on Sunday.

Aqeel defeated promising Shoaib in straight sets 6-3, 6-2. In the ladies' sin-

gles final, seasoned Sarah Mahboob Khan continued her dominance as she saw off Esha Jawad 6-2, 6-2 to lift the title.

In boys 18 and under singles final, Sami Zeb Khan stole the show as he defeated Mahatir Muhammad 6-4, 6-2, while in boys 14 and under singles final, Abubakar Talha downed Abdul Basit 6-2, 6-2 to seal the title.

Aziz Boolani, CEO of Serena Hotels, who was the

chief guest at the closing ceremony distributed the prizes amongst the winners and runner-ups.

Senator Salim Saifullah Khan President of PTF was the guest of honour at the ceremony. He thanked Serena Hotels for conducting the Serena Hotels National Ranking Tournaments for the last seven years. He also appreciated and valued their support for promoting tennis in Pakistan.

Babar, Bismah review 2022 in 42nd edition of PCB Podcast

LAHORE (NNI): Pakistan captains Babar Azam and Bismah Maroof have reviewed 2022 in a special edition of the PCB Podcast, which is now available here for viewing and free downloading for editorial purposes.

2022 was an incredibly busy year for the national men's and women's cricketers in the international arena. The men's side played a total of 44 international matches (nine Tests, nine ODIs and 26 T20Is) and reached the finals of the ACC Asia Cup and the ICC Men's T20 World Cup besides hosting Australia, West Indies, England and New Zealand, while the women's side featured in 32 internationals (13 ODIs and 19 T20Is) and participated in the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup, Birmingham Commonwealth Games and the ACC Women's T20 Asia Cup, besides hosting Sri Lanka and Ireland.

Babar Azam, who appeared in all 44 internationals and finished as the most successful batter in the world with 2,598 runs, reflecting on the year said: "Our performances in white-ball cricket upstaged our achievements in red-ball cricket. We reached the finals in the UAE and Australia, and though we didn't perform the way we had expected in red-ball cricket, three sides



ranked above Pakistan played in Pakistan that provided us a huge learning opportunity and also entertained our fans."

"In T20 cricket, my favourite match was the win against India in the repeat fixture of the Asia Cup as it was a crucial game for us in terms of a place in the final. In Test cricket, victory in the first Test against Sri Lanka in Galle was outstanding as we chased down 342 for the loss of six wickets on a difficult track. Abdullah Shafique was magnificent in the second innings when he scored 160 not out."

Bismah Maroof: "The highlight of our World Cup campaign was the victory over the West Indies, which was our first in 13 years in the pinnacle event. We also won five of the six ODIs against Sri Lanka and Ireland at home to move up to second in the ICC Women's Championship, while we

defeated India in Sylhet for the first time since 2014 though we missed out on the ACC Women's T20 Asia Cup final after losing to Sri Lanka by one-run in the semi-final."

The women's team performance was also reflected in the ICC Player of the Month awards when Tuba Hassan (May), Nida Dar (October) and Sidra Amin (November) won international recognitions.

In 2022, Bangladesh U19 also visited Pakistan, former Pakistan captain Azhar Ali announced his retirement from international cricket, Lahore Qalandars won their maiden HBL Pakistan Super League title in front of home fans at the Gaddafi Stadium, Sindh clinched the National T20 silverware, Northern lifted the Quaid-e-Azam Trophy, while AH Kardar and Younis Khan were inducted into the PCB Hall of Fame.



LONDON: Emiliano Buendia of Aston Villa scores the opening goal during the Premier League match between Tottenham Hotspur and Aston Villa at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.



In brief

PMD predicts cold, dry weather

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) forecast cold and dry weather in most parts of the country on Monday, while very cold in upper parts and north Balochistan. Dense fog is likely to occur in plain areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and upper Sindh. Frost is expected in Pothohar region during morning hours. During the last twenty-four hours, cold and dry weather prevailed over most parts of the country, while very cold in the upper parts and north Balochistan. Tourists have been informed that very cold and dry weather is expected in Murree, Galliat, Abbottabad, Nathiagali, Naran, Muzaffarabad, Neelum Valley, Rawalakot, Kaghan, Chitral, Dir, Swat, Gilgit, Skardu, Astore and Hunza Valley from Monday to Friday, while frost is likely at few places during morning hours. Lowest recorded temperatures were, Leh -15, Astore -11, Skardu, Kalam, Gupis -08, Kalat, Ziarat, Hunza -06, Parachinar, Bagrote -05 and Dir -04 centigrade.

Kundi extends new year greeting

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety, Faisal Karim Kundi announced to launch "new dynamic survey" under the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) early this year. In a video message released on Sunday, the SAPM extended his greetings to the nation on the occasion of New Year and said that last year, Pakistan had suffered a lot due to Corona and floods but we are making all possible efforts to provide maximum facilities to the deserving people at gross root level. He said that this year transgenders are being included in Benazir Kafalat program which is an excellent step towards ensuring financial independence of this marginalized community. He said that at the beginning of the year, 580,000 beneficiaries of BISP were going to get the new installment of Kafalat program while the educational stipends of the children of these beneficiaries will also be delivered. He said that we as a nation, always joined hands during national climates and difficult time and faced all the challenges with unity. He expressed his hope that like before, the nation will emerge with a new spirit and hope this year.

Call for promoting art, culture abroad

ISLAMABAD (APP): Renowned Actor and former Director General of Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) Tauqeer Nasir has called cultural departments for promoting art and culture abroad to project a soft image of the country. "Cultural centers should be established in New York and London as Pakistan has a great historical and cultural heritage that needs promotion at the international level," he said while talking to APP in an interview. He lamented that we are not giving due importance to our art and culture which is negligence that results in intolerance and extremism. Tauqeer Nasir who was also awarded Sitara-e-Intiaz for acting during the current year said that 22 years ago, he got Tamgha Intiaz while he got the award in the year 2000. Now he was awarded the second highest award Sitara Intiaz. He said that he worked for 40 years and served Pakistan drama with great dedication to promote Pakistan art and cultural values.



ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly Raja Perviz Ashraf in a group photo with UK/USA Humanitarian Delegation for Pakistan Led by Lord Qurban Hussain Member of House of Lords at Parliament House.

Floodwater still standing in Sindh, Balochistan districts: report

ISLAMABAD (NNI): The water of last year's unprecedented floods still standing in flood-hit areas of Sindh and Balochistan provinces. Federal government has received reports on floodwater drainage from provinces, sources said. The water could not be completely discharged from flood-stricken areas and water still standing in 10 districts, sources said.

Floodwater still standing in Khairpur, Badin, Sanghar, Jamshoro, Umarkot, Dadu, Qambar-Shahdadkot, Mirpur Khas, Shaheed Benazirabad and Naushehro Feroz districts of Sindh, according to sources. They, however, said that 85 percent water drainage has been completed in flood-hit areas of the province. According to sources, six-inch to two-feet deep

floodwater still standing in flood ravaged districts of Sindh.

Floodwater also standing in Sohbatpur and Jaffarabad districts of Balochistan. Around one-foot-deep water standing at some places in Sohbatpur and Jaffarabad districts.

The water has been completely drained out from flood-hit areas of KP and Punjab, according to sources. Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah in December claimed that flood water from eighty percent affected areas has been drained out while efforts are being made to ensure revival of educational activities in the province.

He said a donor's conference will be held next year so that the flood-affected people are compensated in a better way.

It is to be mentioned

here that flood affected people have filed petitions in Sindh High Court circuit bench Sukkur over failure of district officers in floodwater drainage from various areas of Sukkur, Khairpur and Naushehro Feroz districts. "The water has been standing for last four months even it has not been drained out from schools," Advocate Shabbir Shar told to the court.

More than 33 million people in Pakistan affected by the flooding, brought on by record monsoon rains amplified by climate change. Sindh was the most affected province in unprecedented floods, which made millions of people homeless. The floodwater still standing in several areas of Sindh including districts of Sukkur, Khairpur and Naushehro Feroz.

Pakistan Sweet Home organizes blood donation camp

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Sweet Home (PSM) Blood Bank in collaboration with the Rawalpindi district administration organized a grand blood donation camp at Food Street Saddar Rawalpindi Cantt on the occasion of New Year to save innocent lives.

Head of Pakistan Sweet Home Zamarud Khan visited the blood camp and strongly encouraged the volunteers who donated blood. Speaking on the occasion Zamarud Khan said that the donation camp was far better than fire-works and other activities at the beginning of the new year. He said blood donation was a practical expression of love for humanity as well as a great act of worship. He said in the year 2022, PSM Blood Bank collected more than 10,000 blood donations and saved more than 30,000 lives.

He expressed his determination for expanding the blood donation campaign for the children fighting against thalassemia, hemophilia, and blood cancer. He expressed gratitude to all the donors who came to donate blood on the call and supported the noble mission. On this occasion, while giving a briefing, Director Project Asad Bin Azam of Pakistan said that the team of PSM Blood Bank organized various camps to ensure free blood supply to deserving patients. He said PSM Blood Bank was regularly delivering blood donations to PIMS Hospital Islamabad, Jameela Sultana Foundation Rawalpindi, Sundus Foundation Islamabad, and Pakistan Thalassaemia Welfare Society Rawalpindi from thousands of patients are getting the benefit.

Additional Deputy Commissioner Marzia Saleem, Assistant Commissioner City Rawalpindi Shaguffa Jabeen along with District Health Officer Dr. Naveed Qasim also participated in the blood donation camp.

Alvi spearheading public awareness campaigns

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Dr Arif Alvi remained a distinct figure during the year 2022 owing to his all-bracing pursuit of social, moral, educational and political reforms, reminding the society to adopt to the latest developments in the realm of science and technology, while shunning their differences with an urge to steer the country out of the current challenges in different areas.

Expressing his views in a short documentary about the one-year (2022) performance of the Aiwane-Sadr, the president said that he enjoyed a working relationship with the incumbent federal government.

Both he and the prime minister respected each other's offices, he said, adding that different pieces of legislation were sent by the government to his office for signing and sometimes, he sent back unsigned certain pieces of legislation after due consideration.

The president expressed his views over the ongoing campaigns about the breast cancer, women's rights, rights of the differentially-abled persons, persons with disabilities and revolution in the information technology industry and the political situation of the country.

The president had been leading the political efforts to bring the political parties together. After change in the government, the president said, he tried to steer Pakistan out of the crises of polarization, lack of dialogue for the future and the mandate issue which had become critical. The president referring to recent floods in Pakistan, said that

climate-induced floods had caused widespread devastation as vast chunks of land, spreading over hundreds of miles in Balochistan and Sindh provinces had been under floodwater, forcing the people to migrate.

The country suffered huge losses to the tune of billions of dollars. The world support in this regard was not sufficient, he said, adding a donors' conference was being held in Geneva, and he hoped that it would have a positive outcome. The president also thanked those countries, institutions, NGOs, and civilian and military organizations that had supported the flood relief activities in Pakistan.

President Dr Alvi and First Lady Begum Samina Alvi had been very vocal about the women's inheritance rights and fervently advocating for the female skill development in different technical fields.

The president stressed that it was the responsibility of the society to provide harassment free environment to the women.

Founder of the nation, Quaid-e-Azam had also stressed upon the women's empowerment, he added. The president referring to a recent survey conducted in about 158 countries and in which Pakistan ranked low in women's disparity indicator, said that it had disappointed him very much.

He maintained that Islam and the Islamic state established by the Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) had given rights to the women which were even unthinkable of in Europe during 1910. The president

expressing his satisfaction over the outcome of the breast cancer awareness drive spearheaded by him and Begum Alvi, said that now, it was no more considered as taboo in families.

About the differentially abled persons, the president enumerated that they could be classified in three categories, blind, deaf and physically retarded people.

All of them possessed the same capabilities like the ordinary people, therefore, they should be given access in the society and be encouraged not as dependent, but contributing members of the society, he stressed.

The president said that the students suffering from different mental illnesses like autism, dyslexia etc, should be enrolled in all schools. The government had allocated 3 to 5 percent jobs quota for them, but they were not fully trained to get those jobs and emphasized that these people should be properly trained, besides the allocated jobs should be tailored for them. To another issue, the president said that there should be a national programme to overcome issues like the mental stress being detected in number of families and students. The president, during the past year, also effectively campaigned for nurturing the talents of youth with adequate focus on IT education.

He opined that the IT sector had witnessed an abrupt and exponential growth, providing a window to Pakistan to find a place among the developed countries within a decade as the world was looking for IT-trained people.

Awareness on prevention of Thalassaemia disease emphasized

ISLAMABAD (APP): Executive Director of Thalassaemia Foundation of Pakistan and Director General Punjab Thalassaemia Prevention Program, Dr. Hussain Jaffri Sunday emphasized promoting awareness about the prevention measures of thalassemia disease which is affecting 60,000 to 100,000 people at this time.

Talking to APP, Dr. Jaffri said that thalassemia is a genetic disease that is transmitted from parents to the next generation.

He pointed out that there is a 25 percent chance in every pregnancy to have a major thalassemia patient, in the case of a marriage between two carriers.

He said that the carrier rate of thalassemia is around six percent according to which about 15 million people out of 220 million of the total population of the country are the carriers of thalassemia.

He said that most of the carriers are unaware of their disease because of poor diagnostic investigation. To prevent the disease, we need to create awareness about its prevention and encourage to have proper diagnostics specially before marriage.

He told that in this disease, the body of the patients can't produce red blood cells due to which they need regular blood transfusions on regular basis.

The patient needs a blood transfusion every month in the beginning but the frequency of blood transfusion increases with growing age and the patient needs more blood to survive.

He said that to save the lives of the

patients these patients need a regular blood transfusion and iron chelation after consultation with a qualified hematologist along with regular diagnostic investigations on a monthly basis which is unaffordable for poor families in Pakistan.

Talking about the issues related to blood availability, he said that the frequency of blood donation is very low in our country and many people feel reluctant to donate blood due to many myths.

He said that blood availability is necessary to save the lives of these patients and we need to promote the blood donation trend to save the lives of the patients.

He said that it is only a myth that blood donation has a negative impact on the human body rather it has very positive impacts as after blood donation the body produces new blood which is healthier.

He said that there are approximately 60,000 to 100,000 thalassemia patients in the country and if they had a minimum of two blood transfusions per month we need 2,00,000 bottles of blood per month.

He also lauded the role of the Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) in the provision of safe blood and called that Youth should come forward and donate blood.

He urged all segments of society to wholeheartedly help the PRCS in this humanitarian cause.

According to a report approximately 100,000 patients are suffering from thalassemia in Pakistan and every year 5,000 babies are born with this deadly disease.

Overseas employment to boost foreign remittances

ISLAMABAD (APP): Cognizant of the importance of remittances sent by overseas Pakistanis in building the country's foreign exchange reserves, the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (OPHRD) has sent more than 600,000 skilled and unskilled workforce to around 40 different countries during the current year to earn livelihood and support their families at home.

The ministry took several initiatives including imparting world-class professional training to potential candidates for overseas employment and signing Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with employer countries to capture Pakistan's due share in the international markets.

The efforts yielded the required results to a great extent despite the financial recession in world markets caused by the deadly coronavirus, the energy crisis, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. "The Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BE&OE) and Overseas Employment Corporation (OEC) had exported around 616,816 manpower abroad this year," a senior official privy to overseas employment developments told APP.

The OEC and BOEO, he said,

were extensively working on the front line to promote and create various opportunities for youth to export skilled and unskilled labour abroad.

According to the National Database & Registration Authority (NADRA), around 10 million registered expatriate Pakistanis are sending over US\$31 billion in remittances every year which is one of the main sources for supporting the national economy. The official said it was an admitted fact that role of the Pakistani diaspora in the prosperity and development of their country was crucial. "Over 10,000 workers have been sent to South Korea, whereas export of more workers is in the pipeline." Explaining the government measures to expand overseas employment opportunities, he said the Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, Sajid Hussain Turi has recently visited many countries to export Pakistani workforce and signed MOUs in this regard.

The minister visited Switzerland, Romania, Greece, and Portugal and met the Director General of the International Labor Organization in Geneva and discussed with him the rehabilitation and relief of the workers

affected by the recent floods in Pakistan.

The minister viewed that Romania, Portugal, Italy, Greece, and other western countries needed large-scale manpower and Pakistan was ready to sign agreements to send a Pakistani workforce comprising professionals to these countries.

"Pakistan is interested in expanding its bilateral relations in the economic sector. The main reason for my visit is to create work opportunities for skilled and hardworking Pakistanis in Portugal," Turi said while sharing his visit details. He elaborated that Portuguese companies can hire Pakistani IT experts and skilled workers and the country is willing to assist Portugal by improving manpower in various fields. Pakistan has proposed a draft of the Labor Mobility Partnership which would be signed soon. The agreement on Labor Mobility Partnership will provide a legal framework for boosting cooperation between Pakistan and Portugal. The minister said that scholarships are being provided to the children of overseas Pakistanis and special quotas will also be allocated for them in every university in the country.

Meanwhile, the Japanese global recruiting company is

striving for human resource development in the IT sector of Pakistan enabling youth to secure employment in the IT industry of Japan. During a bilateral visit to Greece, Minister Turi assured the Pakistani diaspora that the Ministry was making efforts to resolve their issues and grievances on a priority basis.

An overseas Pakistani in Greece, Syed Muhammad Jameel said that compared to other European countries, immigrants were facing many problems in Greece. "We are hopeful that the Ministry after his visit will play an important role in establishing cemented relations."

An online complaint portal is being established for overseas Pakistanis, he added. Opportunities will be found in different countries for the export of OEC Pakistani manpower. He also hinted to initiate training and foreign language classes for OEC manpower export.

The Overseas Ministry and the Ministry of Employment and Labour (MOEL) of the Republic of Korea also signed an MOU on the sending and receiving of workers under the Employment Permit System (EPS) in 2006.

The MOU is renewed after every two years. So far, the Overseas Employment Corporation (an attached depart-

ment of the MOPHRD) has dispatched more than 10,000 workers to the Republic of Korea under EPS.

Turi said, "Pakistan and Korea relations have grown from strength to strength in all fields. The countries are enjoying long-standing relations which are based on decades-old economic partnerships."

At the request of the Federal Minister, the Ambassador of Korea also gave the assurance that Korea will consider the hiring of Skilled Workforce and IT Professionals from Pakistan under a separate MoU or Agreement during their Minister for Labour and Employment visit to Pakistan in the next year.

Minister for OP&HRD also appreciated the efforts of the incumbent Korean Ambassador for the enhancement of quota for Pakistan from 1100 to 2400 during the current year out of which 1600 workers have already proceeded to Korea.

An official of the Ministry told the news agency that since 1971 to date Pakistan had sent over 13 million workers abroad in different categories that had fetched precious foreign exchange and supported the national economy.

Pakistan has been exporting skilled and unskilled labour to more than 50 countries across

the globe but most manpower demands have been received from the middle-eastern countries. There are almost 2,480 valid license-holder Overseas Employment Promoters that are affiliated with the ministry and involved in exporting manpower abroad. The incumbent regime, he said is seeking more options abroad to export workers in technical fields to earn maximum remittances as the country lagged in this stratum of technical manpower exports.

Several technical training centers have been established across the country to train workers before exporting the manpower abroad so that they could avail better employment opportunities and wages, he added.

The government has decided to digitize the process of e-protector of immigrants' clearance on an immediate basis which is aimed at making the processes easy, fair and transparent. The minister has hailed the best services of Salman Safi who formulated this e-protector digital process after tedious hard work. He said, "The government is committed and taking various steps to increase the number of labour exports abroad. All possible facilities are being provided to expats on a priority basis who are the precious asset of the country."

7 skilled robbers arrested

HERAT (Agencies): A group of seven skilled robbers from the 13th police district of Herat province of Afghanistan in the vicinity of the province has arrested says local officials. These people were committing robberies in the city and highways and were robbing people, said source security of Herat province of Afghanistan to Bakhtar News Agency. From the detainees 3 motor-bikes also recovered, added the security sources of the province.

18,000 families receive aid

TAKHAR (Agencies): Local officials say that 18,500 needy families have received food assistance in eight districts of Takhar province. The World Food Program (WFP) in cooperation with the provincial Rural Rehabilitation and Development Department has distributed food assistance to 18,500 needy families in Kulfgan, Ishkmish, Chaal, Yangi Qala, Dasht-e-Qala, Warsaj, Namakaab, and Bahark districts.

Blast outside military airport in Kabul; casualties reported

KABUL (TOLOnews): A blast took place on Sunday morning near the gate of the military airport in Kabul, a spokesman for the Ministry of Interior said. Mol spokesman Abdul Nafay Takoor said that the blast inflicted casualties, leaving several people dead and wounded. But he did not provide the exact number of casualties.

“The incident happened at around 08:00 am. There were civilian casualties. Some people were wounded. But officials arrived and took action,” said Mohammad Fahim, an eyewitness. No one has so far claimed responsibility for the attack.

At least 10 people were killed and eight more were wounded in an explosion outside the military airport in Kabul, Al-Jazeera reported, quoting sources within the Islamic Emirate. Security officials have not commented on the number of casualties so far. The blast is the first in 2023 in Afghanistan.

Afghan media in 2022

KABUL (TOLOnews): In 2022, many local media outlets in Afghanistan faced financial hardships. At least 10 media outlets were closed in Kabul and the provinces, according to watchdog organizations. Two TV networks, seven radio stations and one news are the media outlets that stopped their operations in 2022. Many journalists lost their jobs after the closure of the media outlets. “During 2022, we witnessed a decline in media and sadly, many of our colleagues lost their jobs,” said Farhad Behroz, deputy head of the Afghanistan Independent Journalists Association (AIJA). Voice of America and Radio Azadi or Radio Free Europe reported separately on December 1 that the Islamic Emirate has halted their broadcasts in Afghanistan. The Islamic Emirate said the broadcasts have been halted due to the cancellation of their contracts with the Radio/Television of Afghanistan (RTA). “This issue belongs to the Ministry of Information and Culture. Both sides have contracts which have been canceled and this stopped their broadcast,” said Bilal Karimi, deputy spokesman for the Islamic Emirate. Nargis Radio in the province of Nangarhar stopped broadcasting this year as a result of financial difficulties, and its staff lost their jobs. “Radio Nargis has stopped its operations due to economic issues,” said Shafiqullah Rahmani, former manager of Radio Nargis in Nangarhar. A report by watchdog organizations shows that 86 incidences of harassment of journalists were reported in 2022. Some journalists said they did not have access to crucial information in 2022. “The media could not have access to information from sources they were meant to receive it from. This itself caused the shutdown of media outlets,” said Masiullah Ahmadi, a reporter. The Media Violations Commission was formed by the Ministry of Information and Culture to address the problems facing the media. Although it was expected that some of the commission's members would be women, the position for women was later cancelled. On November 30, the ministry of information and culture said the law on access to information, relevant to media groups, was shared with the supreme leader of the Islamic Emirate, Mawlawi Hibatullah Akhundzada. “The decision is that all problems faced by media outlets should be solved by one address, especially the Ministry of Information and Culture,” said Muhajir Farahi, Deputy Minister of Information and Culture. Currently, 83 TV networks, 213 radio stations, 28 news agencies and 20 print media are active in Afghanistan. Figures show that 225 media outlets in Afghanistan have reportedly stopped operations over economic issues and some restrictions since the previous government collapsed. The Islamic Emirate has praised some journalists' efforts but despite that, 2022 was a tough year for the media.

Hundreds of homeless children receives aid



KABUL (Agencies): The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan's Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, on its latest announcement said that the Ministry signed of a memorandum of understanding with a social foundation, based on where three hundred orphaned children receives cash assistance in Kabul. A memorandum Understanding has been signed between Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, and Ehsaas Social Services Foundation, according to which deserving children, in a transparent process will be introduced and the aid will be distributed in the presence of representatives of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, said the Ministry in a statement.

MoIC committed protecting all historical monuments: Farahi

HERAT (Agencies): The Deputy Minister of Publication Affairs of the Ministry of Information and Culture, during his trip to Herat, visits minaret of Herat, he said, that the ministry is committed protecting of all the historical monuments of the country. According to Mawlawi Hayatullah Mohajer Farahi, Deputy Minister of publication, at the current state work is under to preserve relics and historical monuments of the country.

Meanwhile, the head of Information and Culture of Herat, Mawlawi Naeem ul Haq Haqqani, says that the work to preserve well the fifth minaret of Herat, along with the carpeting of the roofs of the Herat Jama Masjid, is underway. Haqqani says that every day more than fifty people are working on the minaret since the beginning of preservation works. Haqqani the head of information and culture of Herat says that after the completion of the fifth historic minaret of Herat, work will begin on other historical monuments of this province.

MoAIL conducting long-term project

NURISTAN (Agencies): A project which will last for at least three years will be conducted with the financial support of UN international organization to protect the forests in Nuristan, says local officials at the department of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock of province.

The project will cover protection of forests in Parun and Wama districts in the center of Nuristan, officials added. In the meantime the provincial officials of the province called the protection of forest on their priority. The provincial head of Nuristan's Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock Mawlawi Suliman Ayman asked for the extension of similar programs to the districts, adding that conducting such project is vital for Nuristan to protect the forests in this province.

According to him, Nuristan has 300,000 hectares of forests and 200,000 hectares of pastures, which make up 25 percent of the country's surface.

The Department of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock of Nuristan is striving to recover the destroyed forests with the support of international aid organizations, he added.

Minister called on investors to invest in Afghan energy sector



KABUL (Agencies): Acting Energy and Water Minister, Mullah Abdul Latif Mansoor, in a meeting with Afghan businessmen in Uzbekistan called on them to invest in Afghanistan energy sector. Minister Mansoor discussed and exchanged views about investing in “water and energy production” infrastructure projects of Afghanistan, according to the Ministry's statement.

Mansoor asked investors to invest in infrastructure projects, mainly water storage dams and energy production in the country. Meanwhile, a delegation led by the Acting Minister of Energy and Water traveled to Uzbekistan to extend the contract, imported electricity and to address the electricity problem.

According to Da Afghan Breshna Sherkat, the Afghan side signed an agreement of import of electricity from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan for the year 2023.

Afghanistan's economy in past year, 2022

KABUL (TOLOnews): Many international organizations, including UN agencies and the World Bank, have issued consecutive reports that highlighted the deepest economic hardship that severely affected the majority of the Afghan population.

Humanitarian organizations have expressed concerns over the humanitarian situation in the country triggered by economic challenges. “We see more and more Afghans who are really having to sell their belongings in order to make ends meet, and where they have to buy materials for heating and at the same time have to face increasing costs for food and other essential items,” said Martin Schuepp, director of operations at the International Committee of the Red Cross. A report by World Bank estimated that the real GDP is projected to contract further in 2022, with an accumulated contraction of close to 30-35 percent between 2021 and 2022.

At least 20 provinces in the country faced severe floods in 2022. The floods inflicted casualties as well as heavy financial losses to the people. In June 2022, an earthquake in Giyan district of Paktika destroyed thousands of homes. “Due to the recent earthquake, thousands of houses were destroyed,” said Asadullah Gianwal, a resident of Giyan district. The Islamic Emirate called on the international community to provide assistance to the people affected by the earthquake. “Any issue, any step that affects the economy and has a negative impact on the people, should be isolated from political matters. We call for separation of humanitarian support from political issues all around the world,” Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Amir Khan Muttaqi said. Speaking at the same gathering, First Deputy Prime Minister Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar called on the international community to provide more aid to Afghanistan in the coming winter. “The relevant ministries should resume their work now and use their facilities to send aid to all provinces. The provinces which are under the poverty line should be considered,” he said. Work on many national and major projects have begun in 2022. The construction of Qosh Tepa canal began on March 30, 2022.

“Qosh Tepa Canal is one of the most significant development projects in the country. It was planned under the government of late Sardar Mohammad Dawood Khan,” said Farid Azim, provincial manager of the National Development Company. On July 27, 2022, the second part of the Kajaki dam was inaugurated in the southern province of Helmand. The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, called on the Islamic Emirate to make efforts for the alleviation of poverty and the creation of jobs in the country. “There are efforts day and night and we can stand the country on its feet economically,” he said. “If we control our water, we will have developments including power,” said Din Mohammad Hanif, Acting Minister of Economy. The Islamic Emirate has signed a contract with the UAE's GAAC's company to run the operations of the airports. Acting Minister of Transportation and Civil Aviation, Hamidullah Akhundzada, said then that the contract is for a period of ten years.

Afghanistan's exports were in good condition. Statistics by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce show that Afghanistan has conducted exports worth \$1.5 billion to other countries. A few big exhibitions of Afghan products were held to boost market for domestic products. The recent exhibition was held under the title of “Imam Abu Hanifa” in December 2022.

Training seminar concluded

KABUL (Agencies): The Country's Interior Ministry says that a leadership training seminar that was held for Mujahidin in Kabul districts ended after a week.

The seminar has been organized by the policy and strategy department of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, said the Ministry in a statement Saturday.

240 Mujahidin from the fourteen districts of Kabul took part in this seminar to learn leadership methods, the Ministry said.

At the end of this seminar, certificates were handed over to the participants.

43 killed, wounded in Afghanistan last week

KABUL (Pajhwok): The ban on women workers of national and international non-government organizations (NGOs) sparked widespread reactions but some officials of the caretaker government say religious scholars are striving to resolve the issue.

Casualties Last week, at least 29 people were killed and 14 others wounded in different incidents across the country.

The Ministry of Defence on Tuesday confirmed the killing of 20 “Resistance Front” fighters, including two commanders, in clashes with security forces in the Andarab district of northern Baghlan province. Reports said the Badakhshan police chief and two other security personnel were killed in an explosion near the gate to the police headquarters.

Unidentified gunmen shot dead one individual in Faryab, while the brother of the deputy education head for Qades district were killed in Badghis province. The body of a girl stangled to death was found in Kandahar province, and a

woman in Sar-i-Pul killed her drug-addicted husband.

Local officials say four civilians were injured in an explosion in Takhar. Four security personnel were injured in Panjsher and Parwan. One child was killed and three more were wounded after an unexploded rocket shell went off in Kandahar. Two children were injured in similar blast in Faryab.

At least eight people were killed in different incidents of violence in the country last week.

Last year, before the regime change in the country, hundreds of civilians and individuals from the warring front sides were killed and injured in violent incidents and clashes.

Ban on women workers of NGOs

On Dec 24, the Ministry of Economy (MoE) asked all national and international NGOs to send their female employees home until further orders.

The ministry said it had received “serious complaints” that women working in NGOs were not observing a proper Islamic

dress code, a charge used by authorities to justify the ban on university education.

The ban on women drew strong reactions, with the United Nations, the US, Norway, Denmark, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, France, Italy, Japan, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, Canada, Save the Children, the European Union, the United Nations Security Council, the United Nations Population Fund, Doctors Without Borders, Amnesty International and the International Committee of the Red Cross denouncing the ban on female NGO workers.

Some of them urged the caretaker government to reverse the decision while others warned the move would negatively impact humanitarian assistance delivery to the Afghans.

In reaction to the government decision, Save the Children, the International Rescue Committee, the Norwegian Refugees Council (NRC), World

Vision and CARE announced suspending their operations in the country.

US Chargé d'Affaires Karen Decker tweeted: “As a representative of the largest donor of humanitarian assistance to Afg, I feel I have the right to an explanation of how the Taliban intend to prevent women & children from starving, when women are no longer permitted to distribute assistance to other women & children.”

Responding to the comments from the US diplomat, Mujahid tweeted: “We do not allow anyone to talk rubbish or hurl threats at the IEA over its decisions in the name of humanitarian aid.”

He said all NGOs operating in Afghanistan were obliged to act in accordance with its laws and accept IEA decrees.

UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths will visit Afghanistan in the coming weeks after the caretaker government barred women from working for NGOs.

Acting Mines and Petroleum Minister Shahabuddin Dilawar says

religious scholars are trying to find a way for women to work for NGOs in light of Sharia and Afghan traditions.

He said religious scholars were looking into the matter to find a solution in line with Sharia and national values.

In Badghis, a number of religious scholars gathered in support of the government decision barring women from working for NGOs.

Prior to this decision, the Ministry of Higher Education also banned women from university education until further notice.

Administrative Reforms and Civil Services Department head Maulvi Abdul Hanan Arifullah on Thursday said the caretaker government was not against education and universities would certainly reopen.

Reopening of foreign embassies

UN Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan Markus Potzel asked western countries to reopen their embassies in Kabul.

Afghanistan's Chargé d'Affaires to the United Nations Naseer Ahmad Faig slammed UNAMA Deputy Head Markus Potzel's remarks regarding the reopening of western embassies in Kabul as disapproving.

Jan Egeland, head of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), urged the West to engage with the Islamic Emirate.

Pakistani and Turkish foreign ministers held a telephonic conversation, in which the two sides discussed the situation in Afghanistan and other issues.

Russia and India are ready to help revive ‘intra-Afghan talks’ if the caretaker government wants so, Moscow's special representative for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov says.

Interest in investment

A representative of China's Chamber of Commerce, during a meeting with Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS) head, said his country was ready to invest in Afghanistan's energy sector and generate 500

megawatts of electricity from coal.

Iran is also ready to invest in mining, power and railway sectors in Afghanistan, says the new acting ambassador of the neighboring country.

In a statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Iran's special representative and new acting ambassador Hassan Kazimi Qomi called on Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi on Monday.

Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, deputy prime minister for economic affairs, said the government was ready for any kind of cooperation on investments in mining, energy and agriculture sectors.

Assistance

Last week, Uzbekistan sent 170 tonnes of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan for the needy Afghans.

Refugee problems

The Afghan embassy in Islamabad says despite promises by Pakistani institutions and officials, the Afghans arrested in that country, including women and children, have not been released.

In December, the Afghan embassy in Islamabad said 500 of 2,000 detained Afghans were released in Pakistan over the last three months. Pakistani officials had promising facilitating the release of other Afghans, a problem that remained unaddressed, according to the embassy.

At least 1,200 Afghan nationals, including women and children, have been arrested by Pakistani police in multiple raids in Karachi and other cities.

The Islamic Emirate urged Tehran to release Afghan prisoners and resolve bank account-related problems of refugees in the neighbouring country.

The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation said a joint technical committee would be formed between the two countries to solve the problems of the Afghan refugees in Iran.

According to the ministry, around seven million Afghans are currently living as refugees in different states, including three million in Iran, as many in Pakistan and three rest in other countries.

Marriyum slams Imran's senseless tweet on occasion of new year

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb on Sunday castigated Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan for his "senseless tweet" on the occasion of new year.

Using her Twitter handle, she said that Imran Khan was a strange person having no feelings for happy occasions like Eid, Shab Raat or new year.

She said that Imran had no prayers or good wishes for any occasion.

"Imprisoned in his own self", she said he had no forward thinking, no thought for anyone's grief and no feeling for anyone's happiness. She said that a person like Imran who did not know how to share others' happiness and sorrow, how would he think about the betterment of

22 million people.

Marriyum prays for resolution of problems being faced by humanity in new year: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb on Sunday prayed for the resolution of the problems of suffering humanity in the new year. In a tweet, she wished all a happy New Year and prayed that humanity may get rid of inflation, terrorism, cruelty, injustice, lies, and hatred.

She prayed that 2023 may bring happiness, progress, and prosperity and that the dreams of the youth might be fulfilled.

She wished for the early recovery of sick persons. She wished that the unrest may end on the earth and peace may prevail in 2023.

Faez Isa to succeed CJP Bandial as 14 judges set to retire in 2023

ISLAMABAD (NNI): One judge of the Supreme Court and the Lahore High Court (LHC) each and 12 district and sessions judges from the district courts of the country are going to retire this year.

Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Justice Umar Ata Bandial will retire on September 16, 2023 after attaining the age of 65 years. Following his retirement, Justice Qazi Faez Isa will take over as Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) on September 17, 2023.

Justice Safdar Saleem

Shahid of Lahore High Court (LHC) will retire on July 31, 2023 after attaining the age of 62 years.

Lahore Labour Court Judge Tahir Nawaz Khan will retire on March 9, 2023 on attaining the age of 60 years. Sessions Judge Muhammad Masroor Khan, who had been made OSD, will retire on March 20, 2023.

Sessions Judge Akhtar Chughtai will retire on March 26, 2023. Sessions Judge Ashfaq Ahmad Rana, who had been OSD, will retire on April 3, 2023.

Sessions Judge Muhammad Azam will retire on April 9, Sessions Judge Khadim Hussain on April 14, Sessions Judge Abdul Haq on May 24, DG District Judiciary Lahore High Court Amir Muhammad Khan on May 31, Sessions Judge Rao Abdul Jabbar on July 4, Sessions Judge Pervaiz Akhtar on July 31, District and Sessions Judge Muhammad Younis Aziz on August 31, and Sessions Judge Muhammad Iram Ayaz will retire on October 16.

New Year attacks targeted Ukraine drone production

MOSCOW (AFP/APP): Moscow said on Sunday its New Year attacks on Ukraine targeted the pro-Western country's drone production, claiming it had managed to scupper Kyiv's "terror attacks" against Russia.

In a New Year's Eve assault, Moscow attacked Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities with missiles and Iranian-made drones.

As a result of the New Year's strikes, three people died and 50 were injured in Ukraine, authorities said.

Russia's defence ministry said a strike hit "the facilities of the military-industrial complex of Ukraine" which is involved in the production of drones.

"Storage facilities and launch sites" for the drones have also been destroyed, the ministry said in a statement. "The

aim of the strike was achieved," the statement said.

"The plans of the Kyiv regime to carry out terrorist attacks against Russia in the near future have been thwarted."

Kyrylo Tymoshenko, the deputy head of President Volodymyr Zelensky's office, said that two people died in Kyiv and the southern region of Kherson and 50 were injured as a result of the Russian strikes.

A 22-year-old woman died from her wounds in the western city of Khmelnytskyi, governor Sergiy Gamaliy said on Sunday. The attacks came as Russian President Vladimir Putin's offensive in Ukraine enters its 11th month.

After a series of humiliating military defeats, Russia in October began targeting Ukraine's infra-

structure, leaving millions in the cold and dark.

Russia has accused Ukraine of targeting its military sites and infrastructure. Russian forces on Thursday shot down a drone near Engels, a base for Russia's strategic aircraft, located hundreds of kilometres from Ukraine's border.

Russia also said on Monday it downed a drone over Engels airfield and that falling debris killed three people.

On December 5, Moscow said Ukraine's Soviet-made drones had attacked that base and another in the Ryazan region, leaving three people dead. The Engels drone raids were the deepest reported strikes into Russian territory since the start of Moscow's offensive in Ukraine on February 24.

21 fresh Covid-19 cases reported in 24 hours: NIH

ISLAMABAD (APP): Health officials on Sunday said that 21 new Coronavirus cases were reported during the last 24 hours across the country.

As per data shared by the National Institute of Health (NIH), the case positivity ratio is 0.51 percent while 19 patients were in critical condition.

No death was reported from the Coronavirus in the last 24 hours while 4,135 Covid-19 Corona tests were conducted. Around 430 tests were conducted in Karachi, 251 in Gilgit, 803 in Lahore and 447 in Peshawar. As many as eight confirmed cases with a 1.86% case positivity ratio were reported from Karachi, one case with a 0.40% case positivity ratio was reported from Gilgit, three cases with a 0.37% case positivity ratio from Lahore, and one case with a 0.22% ratio from Peshawar was reported.

Meanwhile, Minister for National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination, Abdul Qadir Patel said that the government has strengthened the role of Border and Health Services in Pakistan to deal with any sub-variant of Covid-19.

The minister said that there was a surveillance system at all entry points of the country including airports. He said that there will be rapid tests and screening of passengers at all airports. He said that the situation was completely under control and asked the general public to avoid listening to rumors. He added that the Corona case passivity ratio was just 0.3 to 0.5 in the country while 90 percent of the country's population already got the COVID-19 vaccine.

New Year welcomed with colorful events

ISLAMABAD (APP): To make the New Year celebration memorable, citizens of twin cities filled the eve of New Year with live music, refreshments, fireworks, sparkling sky lanterns and rocking parties.

Giga Mall organized fantastic show of fireworks for an entire half an hour. People gathered in large numbers to witness the show and became mesmerized by this once in year's event. Zamurrad Khan, the founder of Pakistan Sweet Home organized a blood camp at Liaquat Bagh to collect and donate blood to patients in order to save precious lives. A large number of people responded to the call and donated their blood for this great cause. Be the change organized "Open Mic Evening" Season 4 during which, the storytellers, poets, singers, and stand-up comedians showcased their talent along with amusing the audience.



LAKKI MARWAT: Funeral prayers of police constable Tehsinullah, who succumbed to injuries following an attack on a police checkpost in Lakki Marwat, were offered on Sunday morning.

Karachiites to elect PPP mayor in local bodies election: Murad

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah said that Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) has delivered in this city in terms of restoration of law and order, development, and on top of it has given ownership to the city and its people, therefore he was sure that the Karachiites would elect its mayor in the upcoming local bodies elections.

This he said on Sunday morning while talking to the media at the conclusion of his visit to the city in which he inspected the ongoing construction of Malir Expressway, BRT Red Line, and Flyover and underpass at Gulistan-e-Jauhar.

He was accompanied by Minister of Information Sharjeel Memon, Minister of Local Government Nasir Shah, Advisor Law Murtaza Wahab, and Administrator KMC Dr. Saif.

Mr. Shah, at the outset of his presser, extended new year's greetings to the people of Pakistan, particularly of the province, and hoped the new year would prove to be the year of stability, socio-political and economic development, and an end to terrorism which has started emerging again.

The CM said that when PPP had come to power in 2008 it had inherited the worst law & order.

"Terrorism was at its peak and the extortion for which Governor has spoken was in a fashion which the PPP government, with its political commitment and will of the people of Karachi not only crushed the terrorist and its related activities but improved the rating of the city in the world crime index form number six 6 in 2014 to 128 in 2022," the CM said and added people of this city know very well which party has served them in true letter and spirit.

To a question, he said the Mayor would be of that party which would be elected by the people of Karachi, and "I am sure they would elect PPP because it has served them, and owned them," he said.

Talking about the drainage system of the city, the CM said that in the past the roads used to remain submerged for many days when it had rained but after the development of the sewerage system and reconstruction of stormwater the rainwater disposed of well in time.

He said that the people of the city have witnessed this progress. Development projects: Malir Expressway: The Chief minister told the media that he has visited three districts of Karachi. He added that the Malir Expressway, a flagship project of his government, was starting from Korangi and ending at Malir-Kathore.

Mr. Shah announced that the Malir Expressway would be opened partially in August 2023 and after Election, his party government would inaugurate it completely.

The CM said that the population of the city as reported has now reached almost 200 million. "Due to the phenomenal population growth, increase in vehicular traffic, congestion and traffic jam issues arise on major roads of the city, hence road users are facing inconvenience/hazards like wastage of time, fuel, environmental pollution, and accidents," the CM said and added Karachi has two sea-ports, from where heavy vehicular traffic generates for the supply of oil, and other imported goods to uncoun-try, thereby adding an extra volume of heavy traffic on city roads up to super highway (Motorway M9) and National Highway N-5.

The CM said that considering the situation in view, his government decided to provide the shortest alternate route to connect the Motorway with the city center. He added that after a thorough study it was decided that the best option was the Construction of a 6-Lane Dualized Expressway along the left bank of Malir River, starting from KPT Interchange near Qayoomabad and ending at Motorway (M9) at 50km, at Kathore. The CM visited the ongoing earthwork and construction of the EBM and Shah Faisal interchanges and at RD-15 of the expressway, he was given a presentation by Minister Local Government Nasir Shah and the concerned engineers.

The Chief Minister said that he has visited the ongoing development work of BRT Red Line infrastructure at Checkpost-6, Malir Cantt. Transport Minister Sharjeel Memon and the concerned engineer briefed the chief minister about the project and its ongoing work.

The CM said that BRT Red Line was being developed at a cost of over Rs28 billion. He said that it would start from Numasih Chowrangi to Malir Halt. He said that it was a Gold standard third generation BRT project of the country which would be started at zero subsidies. The project would have 208 off-corridor bus shelters. It would have a 22.5 km at-grade corridor, 0.8 km elevated structure, 1.9 km underground structures, five turn-around facilities, 25 BRT stations-23 at grade and one under and other one elevated, two bus depots, pedestrian access bridges, stormwater drain, and its expected daily ridership is 350,000.

Imran Khan wants an NRO, claims Ayaz Sadiq

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Federal Minister Sardar Ayaz Sadiq said Sunday while addressing a public rally in Lahore that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan wanted an NRO.

He castigated that Imran Khan hurt the hand that fed him, adding that Imran Khan's performance was not hidden from anyone.

"Imran Khan also subjected women to political revenge. In the past, we were implicated in false cases on political grounds," he lambasted. "Imran Khan's lies have been exposed. People have known the real face of the person who claimed to be the exponent of establishing a society on the principles of the State of

Madinah," he added.

"Imran Khan bought a watch on low price and sold it for crores. He brought disgrace to the country by selling the gifts of Toshakhana," he deplored. "Imran Khan created a farce of foreign conspiracy to destabilise the country. He wants an NRO. He fooled the people. He should [now] be ready to face the cases," he stated. "The noose around Imran Khan is tightening. He sold a watch worth Rs2.5 billion for Rs50 crores. He used his authority to detain people," he loathed.

Ayaz Sadiq also came down hard on former chief justice Saqib Nisar and said that he would have a terrible end in the world and the Hereafter.

"Imran Khan will not have crutches in the upcoming elections. Now is the time for Imran Khan to be held accountable," he asserted.

"Imran Khan cannot dissolve the provincial assemblies. He must be ready to save his position in Punjab. There will be no early elections," he maintained.

"Imran Khan has always hurt the hand that feeds him. He will have to answer for Toshakhana and Foreign Funding cases," he emphasised.

"We will pull the people out of the swamp of inflation. The PDM government came into power due to the hatred of Imran Khan. General elections will be held on the appointed time," he added.

China's Xi says 'light of hope in front of us' on Covid

BEIJING (AFP/APP): President Xi Jinping said Saturday the "light of hope is right in front of us" as China faces an explosion of Covid-19 cases after an abrupt lifting of restrictions.

Three years after the coronavirus first emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan, Beijing this month began ditching its hardline containment policy known as "zero-Covid".

Chinese hospitals have since been hit by a flood of mostly elderly patients, crematoriums have been overloaded and many pharmacies have run out of fever medications. "Epidemic prevention and control is entering a new phase... Everyone is working resolutely, and the light of hope is right in front of us," Xi said in a televised address for the New Year.

It was the Chinese president's second time commenting on the outbreak this week. On Monday, he called for measures to "effectively protect people's lives". China on Saturday reported more than 7,000



new infections and one death linked to Covid out of its population of 1.4 billion -- but the figures appear to be out of step with the reality on the ground.

Authorities have announced they will end mandatory quarantine on arrival for travellers entering China from January 8 and allow Chinese people to travel abroad, after three years of frustration.

In response, several European countries including France and Italy, as well as the United States and Japan, have announced they will require negative tests from passengers arriv-

ing from China, mostly over fears of new variants.

Canada said on Saturday that it was joining the list of countries requiring negative tests, citing "the limited epidemiological and viral genomic sequence data available" on recent Covid cases in China. Morocco, meanwhile, went a step further, announcing it was banning all incoming travellers from China, regardless of nationality, "in order to avoid a new wave of contaminations in Morocco and all its consequences".

The precautionary measures taken by several states are "understandable" in view of a lack of information pro-

vided on the outbreak by Beijing. World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has said. "In the absence of comprehensive information from China, it is understandable that countries around the world are acting in ways that they believe may protect their populations," he said. However, the European branch of the International Airports Council -- which represents more than 500 airports in 55 European countries -- denounced the new Covid checks on Saturday.

"These unilateral actions are at odds with all the experience and evidence gained over the past three years," it said in a statement. Imposing other restrictions for travellers from this country is neither scientifically justified nor risk based." European countries will meet next week to discuss a joint response to the issue, with incoming EU presidency holder Sweden saying it was "seeking a common policy for the entire EU when it comes to the introduction of possible entry restrictions".